Garth Davis: This is Garth Davis, it is 1:36 P.M. on February 3, 1990. I am interviewing for the first time Marshall Paul. The interview is taking place at the home of Mr. Paul. This is part of the Vietnam Oral History Project at Texas Tech University.

Marshall, why don't you just tell me a little bit about what high school was like for you and in particular, let's talk about the particular events that brought you to join the Army and go to Vietnam.

MP: I went to high school at Coronado here in Lubbock, and didn't like high school at all. It was easy, and I was bored with it, so my grades were mediocre. And I didn't have a whole lot of friends. I wasn't popular and that bothered me; I wanted to be popular, I wanted to belong to the elite set, we called them the studs. Which consisted mostly of the Student Council, the cheerleaders, the football players. And I couldn't get anywhere near them. And I had some problems with a lot of those people; for some reason they didn't like me and that bothered me because I, everybody wanted to be liked and I wanted to be liked. And I was extremely naive when one of the studs, a guy by the name of Steve Daniels, joined the National Guard, I was so naive I thought; I've misjudged this guy all this time, he's really patriotic, he's doing this for his country. Because it was a time of crisis, and, we were at war and I thought; the guy's all right, I really I've really been wrong about him being a jerk. And even after I went into the military, it was years before I figured out that the National Guard was the way you got
out a going to Vietnam and this guy's parents had figured out while we were still in high school; join the National Guard while you're in high school and you won't have to go to Vietnam. And that's what Steve did. I never figured that out, I just assumed that everybody wanted to do their duty, and all of the protesting we saw in the news was something that was happening somewhere else; some other part of the country, that, in this part of the country we took care of our responsibilities.

GD: So, was there a lot of that in the high school? Was there a lot of talk about the war in high school and how did the other people react to it, if at all?

MP: People talked about it, but it seemed like it was someplace else. It wasn't really around here, it was like one of those disasters on another coast. And nobody was connected to it. Among my peer group there was no pressure to go into the military and, in fact, I'm only in the years hence have only learned of people in my class that went to Vietnam or went into the military; very few of us went out of my class. There were a couple of guys that got drafted, but, in my class, it was, you know, it was a fairly upper white middle class school and people went to college or they went to the deferments and they, most of them managed to stay out of the military completely. And the ones that did go into the military, most of them managed to stay out of Vietnam.

GD: How do you feel about that?

MP: Used to piss me off. It was like, that, somebody telling a joke and you're the only one that didn't get it. But on the other hand, I can feel they missed out on an opportunity that I took advantage of, so it doesn't piss me off like it used to.

GD: Was, I guess the Flower Child movement and all that business was in full swing and, what was this, about 1967?

MP: Yea, I graduated in '67. And that, and that movement, the hippie movement was not visible in Lubbock. If you occasionally saw somebody that looked like a hippie, it was probably a college kid and so they weren't; they were suspect, they weren't real hippies because the real hippies, a lot of them weren't in college, they were out. And you just didn't see that much in Lubbock.

GD: So what did the people dress like?

MP: Button down collars with the fruit-loops on the back of the shirt and, looks the way we dress now, as a matter of fact, gone full swing; short haircuts, crew cuts, and
flat tops and sideburns were just beginning to creep downward. And, in fact in the Army,
if you came into the reception station with sideburns somewhere near the bottom of your
ear they just, they would start calling you 'Elvis' [laughter]. But you asked something that
I was going to get to about what triggered me going into the Army. In '67, I competed for
a Navy ROTC scholarship. And everybody assumed I was going to college in my family
and so I competed and I got this scholarship to UT, and I was going to go fly jets. And an
Army recruiter came to the school and did his thing up on stage and he was a sergeant,
and everybody just kind of joked about it afterwards; they thought it was a bunch of
bullshit and they weren't going to fall for that. And along about that same time, late on the
radio one night, and I don't, I don't remember what this was, but it was a recording made
by a, a grunt in Vietnam. And it was made during the night, during a night firefight. And
I don't know what the occasion for this guy making this recording was, maybe he was just
making it for himself on a cassette and sending it home. But I listened to this recording. Is
it going to be all right if I get a little emotional?

GD: Sure.

MP: Okay. I thought this guy sounded like he was stuck out there [MP is choking
back tears]. And nobody else wanted to help. And I thought; why should all of us stay
here? Uh, I'm not in a position to judge national policy; I could give a shit less about
national prerogatives. What I was concerned about was that people [becoming emotional
again] being sent places and nobody helping them. So, basically I think that recording
had a significant impact on, you know, I looked at the way my life was and not having a
lot a support among people I wanted to belong to. And I was beginning at that time to see
how superficial they were. And I looked at the war and I thought the war could be a
source of comradeship. And, so, anyway, I enlisted, I joined the Army before I even
graduated from high school. And I was seventeen at the time.

GD: Sounds like there was a lot of emotion, and a lot of different feelings that
went into joining the war -the comradeship, the patriotism and a lot of things. Sounds like
something you gave a lot of thought to.

MP: I don't know how long I thought about it because too many years have gone
by for me to remember all the particulars. And I'm not really sure what patriotism is. Part
of me just flat out wanted an adventure. Part of me wanted to prove to myself that I was a
man. I had backed down from some fights in high school, and it really bothered me. You
know because people call you a wimp and they call you a pussy and that really bothered
me. And I guess part of me wanted to go to Vietnam and show the world or show myself
that I wasn't a coward after all.

GD: So, has your idea of patriotism changed since before you went?

MP: I've gotten a lot more cynical. I recognize, not just my own country, but all
countries set policies and pursue goals totally unrelated to the will of the people.
However, recognizing that, I can accept that if you're going to live in a country you
still have a responsibility to fight for it. I can respect the guys that absolutely refused to
fight and protested in the streets on moral grounds maybe better than I can accept the
ones who just kind of pretended to fight and joined the National Guard. I don't condemn
anybody for the stance they took. It probably took a lot of balls to stand up against the
system. I'm not sure that took as much in the way of balls as going up against a North
Vietnamese battalion, but I played it the way I had to play it and I'm sure other people
had to play it the way they saw it.

GD: You're feelings toward people like that, what were they like during the war,
after the war, and now?

MP: The feelings?

GD: The feelings. How have they changed?

MP: Well, I'm not, it's hard to tell if they've changed much. When I came back
from Vietnam in 1970, I went straight to Austin. And during the summer of '70, there was
a tremendous amount of a protesting going on on campus. And since I was twenty years
old and this was my peer group now, my new social see, I started going to protests. And it
seemed like a big party, and it was fun. But at the same time, I didn't agree with what we
were protesting for, I was just kind of out there just to be running around in the streets
with a bunch of people, and I suspect that most of the other kids were doing the same
thing. And you could see what a circus it had become with a; I remember this street
nigger who I'm certain had nothing to do with the university, would get up in front of the
microphone and start talking about 'What about big Bobby?'; Bobby Seale. 'We gotta do
somethin about big Bobby'; and he had this big felt hat, and he would start passing this
hat around and fill it up with money.
GD: Okay, you're talking about Bobby Seale. So, was this guy a Black Panther, or was he just...

MP: He was just some street nigger with a scam filling up his hat full of money supposedly going to go help Bobby Seale pay his legal bills or buy him guns or break him out of prison or whatever. And I’d watched this and I’d think; are these little white shits falling for this? [laughing] The guys walking away with a hat full of money using the Bobby Seale thing as a platform. So it had a circus atmosphere, and I was really asking myself a lot of questions along that point of; how could so many thousands of people who are educated or at least getting educations have such radical opinions, or opinions radically different from my own, could they all be wrong? Is there really something I should be questioning about my role in Vietnam and the country's role? And while I asked myself those questions, I never decided that I had been wrong, but I never developed any animosity against them for differing with me on that issue. I attributed then a lot of their actions to cowardice, and I don't do that quite so much now. But I do think there's a significant; you know, I know a whole lot about what it's like to feel afraid. And I know that we all feel it, and I still believe that a lot of them let those subconscious fears direct their movements. It's real convenient to protest against something on moral grounds, but on the other hand I've seen a lot of morality thrown out the window on countless occasions whenever it was convenient. And I know about that fear, that unknown fear of dying, of being killed by something that you can't imagine in sort of a monolithic, dark, shadowy danger that I suspected affected all of those young people at the time. [long pause] I don't know how I feel about them now. I still don't like Jane Fonda movies, and I won't buy her video tapes.

GD: What specifically, specifics, did Jane Fonda do that makes you feel the way you do about her?

MP: When she went to North Vietnam, she betrayed a lot of people. And, she allowed herself to be used for propaganda. And a lot of the POWs that have come back have indicated that they didn't do, she didn't do their treatment any good, that it hurt things for them. And, more on behalf of the POWs than for myself, I think Jane really fucked up royally. And it's not that we can't forgive her for it or that she can't be sorry, it's just that there's some things in life when you fuck up real bad you gotta pay the price, and
I don't think Jane's ever paid the price. And never will and maybe she'll punish herself. And I'm not vindictive about it, it's just that I'm never going to buy her movies [laugh]

GD: There was a picture taken of her looking through a sight on an anti-aircraft gun in Northern Vietnam.

MP: Wearing a North Vietnamese helmet.

GD: When did you see that, or did you see that?

MP: Oh, I probably saw it when everybody else did in the newspapers years ago, I don't remember the first time I saw it. I remember being real surprised at what I heard about her, because Barbarella was one of my favorite movies at the time. I think if we were going shoot her, we should've done it twenty years ago, it's too late now. Twenty years ago, it wouldn't have bothered anybody to have her stood up against a wall and shot.

GD: Was there a lot of protest over that? When Jane was protesting against the war and she made her trip to North Vietnam, what was it like? You were in the states at the time, is that correct?

MP: I don't know, when was her visit exactly?

GD: I don't recall.

MP: See, I was in Vietnam from January of '68 till April of '70. And, to be honest, I don't remember exactly when her visit was. I want to say it was in '70, but I don't recall.

GD: Let's talk about when you got inducted into the Army. You said you signed up before you got out of high school?

MP: Yeh.

GD: What did you do? Did you just walk down to the induction center and walk in?

MP: Well, I had to take my Dad with me, because I was seventeen he had to sign for me. Pissed my mother off and she hadn't forgiven me for that yet. And, you had to go to Amarillo to actually get enlisted; they didn't do it in Lubbock; they put me on a bus and sent me up there. And put you in a grimy hotel where you spend the night and the next day you go through your physical and get inducted. I met a bunch of other guys who were either being drafted or had volunteered; all real young. And five or six of us,
somebody got a bottle of whiskey somewhere. And we sat around and passed a bottle of whiskey around and got real drunk.

GD: This was afterwards?

MP: No, this was the night before. And, then after I enlisted, I came back and finished high school. I didn't actually go in until June.

GD: I assume there were a lot of other people... when you sat around and got drunk with these guys, what did you talk about?

MP: I don't remember. I assume we talked about our military careers in Vietnam, but I don't remember.

GD: What was the induction like? How did you feel?

MP: I was real excited about it, it didn't bother me. It was like, this was really going to be an adventure and, at that point in my life, I hadn't had very many adventures. So, I was real excited and none of it bothered me. None of it was scary to me, it was all just new and exciting. In fact, I don't remember a whole lot about when I finally left, I know that I ended up at Ft. Bliss. And I have this impression of these old, they're kind of adobe barracks, with hard tile floors. They reminded me of something you find in Spanish Morocco or something, it was kind of like; gee, I'm really in the Foreign Legion now.

GD: Now, Ft. Bliss was your basic training, or what?

MP: Yeh, and I think it was about eight weeks long?

GD: And you just had one drill instructor there?

MP: There were two drill instructors that were in charge of my platoon. Neither of those made much of an impression on me. I've learned a lot about drill instructors since then, and oftentimes they're not the best soldiers you could find. I liked one of them, he was a pretty nice guy, but he didn't impress me much. I was starting to figure out pretty early that being a sergeant and being older didn't necessarily make you worthy of esteem. And boot camp didn't really make that big of an impression on me, I enjoyed it. Physically it was good for me.

GD: Wake up early, go to bed la te, what did they make you do?

MP: Got up at 5:30, and had fifteen minutes before we had to be in formation, and then we'd go for our morning run. It wasn't a long run, I think the most we ever ran was
like 22 miles. And did P.T., which was, in those days, some real boring by the numbers
calisthenics. And then we'd go eat breakfast, and clean the building, and then we'd start
classes around 8:00. And the classes were drill and ceremony, marching, first aid, not
near as much of the stuff that I thought would be interesting like rifles and all that. There
was a component of that but there was a lot of just real boring shit—Boot camp was
probably more important in terms of socialization in the military life than it is in giving
you real hard information.

GD: So, could you relate to these guys you were going through boot camp with?

MP: Well, I went through boot camp with a whole bunch of reservists, who joined
the reserves or were going back to their reserve units. And most of them were older than I
was, I was the baby of the company. I don't know how they make up these companies
but I some of them seem to be more reservists and some companies would be more
draftees. But my particular company, and my platoon at least was probably 75%
reservists and a lot of them had college, a lot of them had degrees. And most of them
were blatant about the fact that they wanted to stay the hell out of Vietnam, and my
whole goal was in going. So, I know, I figured out early on that I wasn't typical. And part
of me kept asking, maybe I wasn't asking enough questions, why come everybody else is
smarter than I am. Nobody else wants to go and I do?

GD: How did they react when you told them what you wanted to do?

MP: Oh, they teased me in a good natured fashion. They told me that I was crazy,
and they accused me of being naive, which I've already admitted that I was [laughing].

GD: How do you feel that they felt about you?

MP: Well, I had some personal friends, and I think the personal friends liked me,
and didn't want to see me do something stupid and get hurt. There may have been some
admiration there, but I don't know, that may have just been my perception. Or, maybe
they felt like; well, I'm glad somebody's going, that'll be one slot that I don't have to fill.

GD: Do you feel like this war was different for a lot of people? It's kind of
hard to relate that to another war since I know we've never been through one, but, did
they view the Vietnam War differently than say Korea, or World war II; were people that
much afraid of going over there for some reason?
MP: I don't know. I mean like you said, we weren't around for those other conflicts, and I don't know what the public reaction to them was. I can assume that the average person never wants to go to war. But see, I always did want to be a soldier, I always wanted to experience that. So, it was like Vietnam was just, it was just made for me. It came along at the time in my life when men go to war. If the Vietnam war come along and I was forty years old, I don't know if I'd do it.

GD: So you'd always wanted to be a soldier. You tried to join the Navy, and then you got into the Army. Why the Army, what were you looking forward to being in the Army?

MP: I wanted to; you saw the movie *Platoon*? It was ironic how similar the character [Charlie] Sheen played in that movie to what I was going through, because I wanted to be a private. I wanted to be at the bottom of the heap. And I wanted to experience war at the lowest, at the grittiest level. And, after boot camp they sent me to infantry AIT, and I got some pictures I pulled out if you want to see them later.

GD: Sure.

MP: And then I went from there to jump school, and the Army figured out that I was real smart. Had real high test scores, and they kept trying to send me toward electronics and all that other shit and I kept saying, no, you guaranteed me Airborne infantry, that's what I'm going to get. So, they decided that after jump school they were going to make me a sergeant. And they sent me to, we called it shake and bake; it was an instant NCO school. You go there to Ft. Benning for six months as a private and you came out as a sergeant, and the top graduates came out as staff sergeants. And they sent me to this school, and I said; I ain't going to that school, you can't make me go, and they said; we got orders, here are the orders, you're going. So I went, and I went three weeks before the class started, and I said; you can send me there, but you can't make me go to this school. And I became sort of the center of a small rebellion of about five other people that also didn't want to go to school, and didn't want to be sergeants. And we thought, our attitude was; if we're going to go to Vietnam, let's go learn how to do this right. The last thing any of us wanted to do was show up in Vietnam as a sergeant and take over leading men that had already been there. And see at that point, see I was still only seventeen years old. And I was acutely aware that I was just a kid, and they wanted to make me a
sergeant? Scared the shit out of me. And they tried to punish us into to going to the
school. Pushups and running, and that was kind of funny cause we'd just come out of
jump school and we were in really good physical shape. And I remember sergeant
dropping me and making me do fifty pushups because I didn't want to go to the school.
And I thought [laughing] this is great. I'll do all the pushups in the world I but he can't
make me go to this school. And he has me in a front leaning rest and he's screaming at me
, and he says; boy, I don't understand you, he says, you want to go to Vietnam and end up
being an ammo bearer for some fucking machine gun instead of being a sergeant? And
sure enough, after they finally relented and sent me to Vietnam, the first job [laughing]I
ever got was an ammo bearer for a machine gun.

GD: So you won out. You didn't become a sergeant.

MP: Well, I became a sergeant in the same amount of time. Six months later I was
a sergeant. But I did it in Vietnam. And, in my opinion, that's the only way to do it. Now,
there were some good sergeants that came out of that program, I don't want to do them
discredit. None of us believed they would be worth a shit, but the fact is, a lot of them
came out of that program, landed in Vietnam as sergeants, took over their squads, and did
good jobs. But a lot of them fucked up real bad too. They were put in the same position as
second lieutenants. No experience, but a lot of responsibility. The system takes
into account for second lieutenants not knowing anything. And the sergeants will take up
the slack, because they're the ones with the experience. That same system wasn't prepared
to take up the slack for sergeants that didn't know what they were doing. And that's what
scared me about that whole program.

GD: Why did they have this system?

MP: Because so many sergeants were getting killed. And they had to replace them
in such, they had to come up with a school that produced them in greater numbers and
inject them into the system. One of the big fuckups of the whole war was that they sent
everybody over there as an individual instead of in units, and having the unit do a tour,
and then bringing the unit back, and feeding replacements into the unit and maintaining
unit integrity, what they did was they sent everybody over there by themselves. I went
over there in a planeload of people in a 707, and you get there and then you're all
dispersed, all different parts of the country. And so, most of us arrive at our units in twos
and threes as strangers and sometimes you don't even see the guys you've been traveling
with again. And then here you're the brand new guy, you're all by yourself, and nobody
trusts you, and nobody knows you. And they have to take time to get used to you, to
warm up to you, to teach you the routine. Why, hell, they wouldn't start teaching you for
a while because they don't want to know you. And they figure, you know, you're probably
going to get killed anyway, and they'd just as soon not know the new guy when he gets
killed. And you have to prove yourself, they're afraid that you're CID at first. There's a lot
of paranoia about the CID.

GD: Who were the CID?

MP: The Criminal Investigation Division. There was so much drug abuse going on, that the CID was
doing a whole lot of, or at least the paranoia was that the CID was
doing a lot of undercover investigation busting people. So anytime there was a new guy
in the unit, we wanted to know; well, is he CID or is he real?

GD: What was your MOS when you went over there? What unit were you attached to?

MP: Well, I was an Airborne infantryman, the Army calls it 11B. My first unit
was the 173rd Airborne Brigade. I went to B Company, 3rd Battalion. At that time, when
I first got over there, I was stationed at An Khe. They called it Palace Guard duty because
An Khe was the headquarters of the 173rd, and our battalion was out patrolling the
boonies around An Khe. And it wasn't bad duty because we'd patrol for about three weeks
and come in out of the field and go back for, oh usually four or five days and then go
back out and patrol for another Three or four weeks. And it was real quiet, there wasn't
anything 'going on, hardly anybody would even shoot at us. No major firefights. It was
just kinda like a long camping trip. It wasn't bad at all.

GD: What was the weather like? I know it was hot, what did it smell like?

MP: Well, smelled just like the jungle anywhere. I mean it wasn't; reminded me of
McAllen.

GD: McAllen, Texas?

MP: Yea, those real hot, hot days when it's real humid and you smell the dust in
the air from all the people walking. I used to wonder why the grass didn't look different,
why the plants didn't look different. Used to have to remind myself I was on the same
planet, I was just on the opposite side of it.
GD: Was it a big shock when you walked off that plane, and looked around?
What did you see? What was different?
MP: Well, the shock was how hot it was. Just incredibly fucking hot. And when I
arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, that's on the ocean, but there's no hint of, at least where the
airport was, there was no hint of moisture. It was like, and Cam Ranh Bay is literally a
sand spit, it's nothing but a sand bar. That one peninsula is just sand. It was like landing in
White Sands, New Mexico, or Saudi Arabia or something, it was like a desert. Wasn't at
all what any of us expected.
GD: What did you see that surprised you? Did it look like a normal Army base?
Anything different about it?
MP: Yea, it was pretty much like a, just a normal, tropical base and hot climate.
They designed the gullies a little differently for ventilation. The screens on the buses I
thought were kind of interesting at first. Yea, they put these heavy metal screens on the
buses so that you can't throw grenades into the bus.
GD: Did you learn about that when you first got there? Did you know about the
screens on the buses?
MP: No. I mean I saw the screens on the buses and I figured out pretty quick, I
mean it didn't take a rocket scientist to realize the screens were on there for a reason.
GD: How did that make you feel?
MP: Well, I thought; gee, there are really people around here that are trying to kill us. It
made the whole situation more real for me. I think I enjoyed that feeling a little bit; hey,
there really is something going on over here. Sandbags everywhere. But, you know, the
rear areas were pretty much like being stateside, except for a little paranoia.
GD: So you're in Vietnam, you got there. Now how do you feel?
MP: Well, I was real anxious to get out of the replacement depot and get sent to
my unit. They stuck us on guard duty for a few days while they processed us.
GD: Did you carry all your gear over there with you or were you issued all your
gear once you got there?
MP: We went over there carrying duffel bags. I think I had one duffel bag, and all it was was just uniforms. And then, when I got to my unit, they had their own little reception station. And you turned your duffel bag in, and you don't see it for twelve months. Because you don't need anything that's in there. They take you in a warehouse, and the warehouse is just filled with duffel bags. And it's all the personal shit that you thought you wanted, they allowed you to get out some things that you wanted to take with you in the field, but basically, you don't see that duffel bag again. All your; the dress uniforms, and that crap, you leave that there, and then you get to your unit, and they issued, I think one or two sets of jungle fatigues and your field gear. And see, once you go to the field, you only have the uniform you're wearing. A helicopter would come in every two weeks and dump uniforms on the ground, in a big pile, and we'd dig through them and try to find something that'll fit. Take the ones, if they were still wearable, take them off and put them in another pile. Usually they were shredded by then, you couldn't wear them anyway. The ones that could be worn again, you put them in a dirty pile and helicopter picked them up. That's how we changed clothes every two weeks.

GD: So how did get to your unit? Take you in by helicopter?

MP: Yea, by helicopter.

GD: And how did they treat you once you got there?

MP: Oh, everybody was polite enough. Little teasing you know, the new guy. Everybody was trying to feel you out. At first they were calling me Sid, you know for CID. And I don’t even know what CID means. Finally, after a couple 'a days somebody explained it to me. I landed in a unit; where there was a lotta dope smokin' going on. And I wouldn't smoke with them. Because I'd never tried it before, and I didn't want to start. I was real curious about it, but what I really didn't like was somebody pressuring me to do something. And so I wouldn't smoke with them. But gradually, after a few weeks, they decided that I was okay, I just didn't want to smoke dope, and so, in that case, I could stay straight and guard them [laughing]. And so, they put me to work watching out for; well, like on ambush sometimes, everybody'd get high, and sometimes I felt like I was the only one on ambush that wasn't high. And that was an awful responsibility. Because I didn't know what in the hell I was doing anyway [smile]. Now, I want to say that the dope smokin' was only real bad when we were around An Khe, because An Khe was safe.
GD: It was a rear area, sort of.

MP: Well, we were outside the base camp, and we were a good number of miles outside the base camp. I shouldn't say safe area, it was a quiet area. There just wasn't, there weren't any enemy units in the area. And everybody knew it, and I suppose they were opening themselves up to get; wasted, but the feeling was; that this area is quiet, it's a quiet sector, and we're going to smoke dope. Now, we went from there to An Khe, or to Kontum, and Kontum was not a quiet area. And the dope smokin' dropped off radically.

GD: You got there after TET?

MP: No, I got there during, actually a little before TET.

GD: How did that change everyone's perspective?

MP: Well, it didn't affect us in the field at all. TET happened in the cities. And out in the boondocks; in fact that's probably why it was so quiet at An Khe. Because the units were concentrating on the cities, in the populated areas. And it was relatively quiet in the boondocks, and certainly where I was.

GD: So, what did you eat out in the boonies, how did you eat?

MP: Well, C-rations. They gave us; I suppose every unit does it differently, but in my unit we had two C-rations a day and one LRP ration a day. And the C-rations are canned, and the LRP rations are dehydrated rations you have to add water to. And we'd eat those for usually six days, maybe seven days. About once a week they'd fly in a hot meal to us, sometimes more often. Which was really not that welcome of a deal, but it was kind of, it was novel, so we went and got into it. But, the food really wasn't any better when they flew it in, it was just hot. I got used to the C-rations, and I liked the LRP rations. So I ate pretty good.

GD: Where'd you go to the bathroom?

MP: Took a dump on the ground, like every... you know.

GD: Just pissed wherever you want to?

MP: Yea. Just scoot down and shit on the ground. Dig a little hole and squat; down. You did it outside the perimeter. You weren't allowed to shit inside the perimeter.

GD: Was there a time when you were over there that you got to smelling different, you got to smelling like the countryside?
MP: Yea, but I didn't know about that until I came back from R&R, I'd been thereabout five or six months, and I got a three day, in-country R&R to Vung Tau, and so for three days I'd been taking showers. And when I got back to my unit, I noticed how badly they all smelled.

GD: So you get to An Khe, and you're the new guy, and they're calling you CID; then what happens?

MP: Well, the days began to turn into a, just day after day of pain. Those rucksacks, they're not poorly designed, but they're not designed to carry as much weight as we were putting into them. And I'm an ammo bearer, and a can of ammo, I think it's a 200 round can, weighs eighteen and a half pounds. And they started me out the first with one can. And the second day they gave me another one, and I had one on my rucksack and one in my hand. And, after about a week of that, they gave me another one. So right there, you know my weight was up to; what's three times eighteen and a half? About fifty-something pounds. And that's not counting my ammunition, for my M-16 that I'm carrying. And most of the guys in my unit were carrying forty magazines.

GD: How many rounds in a magazine?

MP: It'll hold twenty, but we were only putting eighteen rounds in there, to keep from ruining the springs. But since I'm carrying so much machine gun ammo, I had to limit myself to twenty magazines. Which made me, [laughing] it made me feel inadequate. The only good deal I got out of, by carrying the machine gun ammo was the mortar crews wouldn't bother me about carrying rounds for them. See, nobody else was getting off light, either. Because, if you weren't carrying ammo for the machine gun, the mortar people would make you carry their rounds. These C-rations are kind of heavy, and see they'd give us a case of C-rations. And we'd throw away everything that we damn sure weren't going to eat, throw away all the cardboard and everything extra trying to cut down on the weight. But the C-rations alone, all those cans, that weighed considerable, that would fill up your rucksack. I carried five quarts of water, that's heavy. My personal ammo. If you're carrying an entrenching tool, that's real heavy. We threw our. Gas masks away. I let mine float down some river. I can't remember what I did with that entrenching tool. I know damn well I didn't throw it away, because I remember digging with it every
night. But, you know, I can't visualize where I carried it on me. It must have been on my rucksack.

GD: Was anything ever said about the gas masks?

MP: Nobody said a fuckin' word to me about that gas mask [smiling]. That's really strange, isn't it? I mean, I signed for that thing, they made a big deal out of that in the States. But I signed for that, and let it float down a river and nobody ever said a word to me. No one else had their gas masks either, everybody used the carriers for carrying personal shit in. We had one uniform, didn't carry any extra uniforms. We all carried an extra two or three pairs of socks. And usually I'd change socks everyday. And I'd just rotate between two pairs and the pair that I'd worn the day before, I'd just tie them on to my rucksack, and let them just kind of flop and dry out a little bit. Then when one of those wore out so bad I couldn't wear them, I'd go to one of my other pair.

GD: So, you get to your unit, and what happens? You have to sit around and dig a foxhole, you go out on ambush, what do you do?

MP: Well I got there late in the afternoon, the very first time, and the holes were already dug. It started to get dark and; everybody goes to 'bed pretty early in the field. Because you're going to be up real early, and you're going to have to pull guard during the night anyway. So, if you get a chance to sleep, everybody goes to sleep. So, we were going to sleep at dark and somebody would wake me up in the middle of the night and I'd pull about an hour of guard duty and wake up the next guy. And we'd get up about thirty minutes before the sun started to even come up; it was still dark when we'd get up. That's called Stand To, everybody would man the weapons and sit by the holes. The idea being that traditionally, and this was true in Vietnam, attacks often start at that time of day. When there's just enough light for the enemy; he wants to attack in the dark, but he wants there to be just enough light that he can start to make out the positions. And he also wants to catch you while you’re not awake yet. And so we'd get up thirty minutes before the first light. And you're supposed to be real quiet during that time, not be banging anything together, cooking or, but sometimes that fell apart. And it was just like that, for weeks, just walk all fucking day, that rucksack just killin' ya'. At the very beginning of the day, we'd all have to help each other get to our feet, and once you were standing there, you had this incredible fucking weight bearing down on you. And you'd start walking, and
you'd realize that you were really tired. And [laughing] it was six o'clock in the morning, or seven, and we were just starting. And this rucksack is really fucking heavy. And you know you're going to walk until 3:25 or 4:00 in the afternoon.

GD: Where would you go? What would you be doing?

MP: You'd spend most of the time following the guy in front of you, not having any fucking idea where the hell you were. And you're hoping that somebody, the sergeants, somebody with the compass, the point man, somebody would have some idea where we were going.

GD: Would they tell you what you're mission was for that day?

MP: Our mission was to walk around and see if somebody could find us that wanted to shoot at us so we could have a firefight with them. Our mission was just to try to run into something. You know, a lot of times the word didn't get down to the privates. Sergeants would come back and say; well, we're going to go from, we're here and we're going to go over here, and we're going to see if we can run into something along the way. And that's basically what we did was walk around out there try to get into a fight.

GD: Mostly in daytime?

MP: Yea, we didn't patrol at night. At night, we'd put out our ambushes, and in the daytime, they'd put out their ambushes.

GD: So, did you go on ambush?

MP: Yea, they rotated ambush by platoon. There were three platoons, so, we'd get ambush every third night. But you wouldn't have the whole platoon out on ambush. So, usually, at least once a week, go on ambush.

GD: What was that like, the first time?

MP: Well, it was a novel experience. Nothing happened the first time. In fact, nothing happened most of the time I went on ambush. So, you know, it got real boring, you get real complacent.

GD: Did they put you on point the first time?

MP: That was something I didn't understand about the movie *Platoon*, we never had anybody on point unless he was experienced. Remember, in *Platoon* they put people on point that didn't know what the fuck was going on. See, that's how you get your Company wiped out. We only put, really the most experienced, the best people on point.
GD: So, did you look forward to getting on point?

MP: No, in fact, I never wanted to. And never had to, but on a few occasions.
After I went to Special Forces, I pulled point some. But I knew I wasn't as good at the job
as some others, and it was much better to put a Cambodian on point than to have me out
there.

GD: A Cambodian. You had Cambodians with your unit?

MP: Yea, when I went to Special Forces. So, I never did much point. And that
was fine.

GD: What's it like being a grunt? What's it like being out there humping, what do
you think about? You hear news from back home about what's going on with the war, and
you're out there in the middle of Vietnam. What's the difference between what you're
seeing and what they say is going on, and what you're hearing from you're superiors?

MP: Well, I think a grunt basically starts living from day to day. And all lie really
wants to do is get out of the field. That's basically [laughing] a grunt's prime mission in
life, is get the fuck out of the field. You know, get into a village, or go to Sin City, or get
high, or get drunk; the ultimate, of course, would be to get out of the country and go back
to the States. But, basically, a grunt just wants to get out of the field. Get to the rear, get
some sleep, and get fed. You been worrying about gettin' high or gettin' laid. And,
[laughing] I think that feeling was probably universal, from the officers right on down.

GD.: What were the other guys you were with like? Did you have a broad cross-
section of America? Did you have a lot of intelligent people in there? Did you have more
whites in there, more blacks, what?

MP: In the 173rd, at least in my Company, we only had one black. And he ran
during a firefight, and I saw him run. So, consequently, there was a lot of prejudice. The
blacks in the 173rd were all real busy protesting against being in Vietnam at all. They
were all pretty much involved in the black power movement.

GD: In Vietnam?

MP: Yea, in Vietnam. And it didn't help things that the one and only black in my
company ran during a firefight, in Kontum. Disappeared from the field. So, to us, he was
a deserter and deserved to be shot, and, you know, he abandoned us. We didn't care what
color he was, up until that point. After that, he became a nigger. What made an
Airborner different, was he had to volunteer to go Airborne. So, once you volunteered; if you volunteered for Airborne, you volunteered for Vietnam. Those two were concomitant. And not very many blacks volunteered to go Airborne. For that reason. And most of us didn't want them in the field anyway if they didn't want to be there. Sure, you know, like I said, we all wanted to be out of the field, but we all also realized that we'd made certain commitments, and we were going to fulfill them. And if somebody was really going to be a coward, let's get him out of the field before he kills one of us.

GD: So, it was mainly whites?

MP: Yea, especially after that guy left. We had a number of Mexicans. In fact our point man, a guy named Rodriguez. It was mostly white and a few Mexicans. Lower class whites. Lower class and middle class.

GD: Did you talk about that while you were out there?

MP: No, not too much. We all recognized where each other were from. Most of the guys I was around were from the Midwest and the Northeast. For some reason, it's just circumstance; there weren't very many Southerners or Californians.

GD: Not too many Texans in with your unit?

MP: There was one Texan that I knew of, in the platoon. And, there were a few guys with some college education, but not very many. The average age in our Company was only twenty years old.

GD: So you never sat around and discussed about where the rich kids were? Or was that just common knowledge?

MP: I'm sure we did. I just don't remember the conversations. I'm sure we talked about it. There was a; I remember that the unit was a fairly gung ho unit. Which kind of surprised me. Even after we'd get into a pretty good firefight where we got some people killed, the morale was never bad in that Company. You know, the next day everybody still wanted to do the job. And there wasn't a lot of real bitching about going out on patrol, there was bitching about how heavy the damn rucksack was. And what a miserable fucking country this is, and how we needed to kill everybody in the place with slant eyes.

GD: Why?
MP: Well, not really because we wanted to kill everybody but that was just one of the things that was said, was that we ought to turn this place into a parking lot. But people didn't really bitch about the situation. I mean, sounds contradictory; nobody seemed mad at the Army for what we were doing. Most of us felt like there were some reasons, even if we didn't understand them all that well, we believed that there were good reasons for us being there.

GD: Let's talk about the first firefight?

MP: Started out, let me think. We'd been probed the night before, but no shots had been fired, we just had movement.

GD: Where was this at?

MP: This was up in Kontum. And there were signs of enemy troops all over the place.

GD: What signs?

MP: Leaflets; we'd done a lot of air drop of leaflets, and the leaflets had all been collected up and torn up.

GD: Okay, when you say air drop of leaflets...

MP: Our people would drop these propaganda leaflets, designed to support the Chieu Hoi program, to get them to come over to our side, and somebody had collected up all these leaflets and torn them up into little shreds. The trails were heavily used, were footprints over all the trails. Heavy traffic on the trails. Empty bunkers, you know, positions that were already; they were maintained positions, nobody was in them currently, but they could easily be moved into and used. So, let's see, that morning, we pulled out of our logger site. You know, being the lowest ranking private, I just learned to follow people around, I just learned to just follow people around, I didn't really know where we were going or what the fuck we were doing. And it seemed like we spent a lot of time just sitting and waiting, while the higher-ups decided what was going on.

GD: How long had you been there?

MP: You mean in-country?

GD: In-country.

MP: About five or six weeks. And I'd had a couple of shots fired, you know, in our general direction, but had never been in a firefight up until that point. And we're
sitting by the side of this trail, off the trail, resting on our rucksacks like big lawn chairs. And I hear an M-16 fire a real long burst. And, at that time, I couldn't distinguish the difference between an M-16 and an AK. That day I learned, but all I recognized was the sound of an M-16 firing. And what it turned out to be was one of our guys had gone up to take a shit, and he's off the trail in the woods; and these were real open woods, remind me of North Carolina, wasn't like a lot of people think jungles are. The canopy was closed above, but on the ground, you could see through the trees a long way. And so this guy, one of our guys is taking a shit; he's squatted down with his M-16 over his knees, and a North Vietnamese came bopping through the woods, and just walked up to him without; the North Vietnamese didn't see the American squatting down. And he just walked up on him, and about the time he saw the American, the American shot him. What impressed all of us about this event was the North Vietnamese had his rifle in his right hand. And the M-16 round, at least one of them hit him in his right elbow. And we know that because it blew pieces of bone out all over the ground, and the medic identified those pieces of bone as coming from his arm. So, it nearly blew his arm off. Well, as you'd expect the North Vietnamese dropped his weapon. But he had the presence of mind to pick it up with his left hand. And ran. So that was the end of that little event. But, then they selected a patrol to follow the blood trail, and I was still on that patrol. And the patrol turned into a real long patrol. The guy had went for a long, long ways. And he left an incredible amount of blood, it was obvious he was bleeding to death. We had a dog, but we didn't even need the dog, you could see the blood just on the ground and on the leaves. And what I admired about the guy was he led us to a bunker, and then he ambushed us. And you know, when the firing started, he hit one of our guys. And one of the things that I've learned since about the U.S. Army is that we're too careful. We stopped that whole operation so we could Medevac one guy. Instead of what we should have done, which was go in and developed 27 the situation. So, anyway, everything was like; stop the war, get this guy Medevaced. So we call in a helicopter, and the guy shoots at the helicopter. And I'm thinking; boy, this could turn into a real fucking disaster. This one man down here shoots one of our guys, had the possibility of shooting down the helicopter, and he's dying. He's going to stay there and do that? So, I was impressed. Anyway, we got our guy Medevaced, and then we got the thing rolling again. We went and put security on the
bunker and a guy ran up and threw a grenade in there and killed him. Well, apparently
there was somebody else in the bunker at the who had gotten out, because we found
another trail going away from the bunker. But it wasn't enough for us to follow it very far.
I guess the guy had stopped the bleeding or something. But the guy who was initially shot
in the arm was down in the bunker. So we fuck around and fuck around and walk around
the woods for an hour or so, and finally the whole Company catches up to us. And it's
like; well, the day's over now. And the idea at this point was; by this time I think it was
one o'clock in the afternoon or one-thirty, and we were just going to end the day, go find
someplace to spend the night. And so we're walking up not exactly a hill, but just a slight
incline. And everything's just pretty well finished up, as far as we're concerned, I hadn't
even fired my weapon very much at that other little encounter. See, the firefight hasn't
really started yet. And suddenly, all fucking hell breaks loose. And at that point, I'm still
attached to the machine gun, and the machine gun is on the tail. And so we're way back in
the back, and way up in the front; see, a Company column can be, God, hundreds of yards
long. And way up in front it sounds like, you know, it's coming from here and from here,
firing. And I know it's not us. So I know that we're being shot at by a whole lot of folks.
And you can hear the AK's opening up and you can hear the light machine guns firing,
and it doesn't sound like our machine guns. And at this particular point, the brush was
real thick. And the jungle was completely closed up, you know, no sunlight or anything.
And Lindo, who was the gunner, turns to the assistant gunner; I don't remember his name,
but he was called Weasel. They did a routine with each other. Remember the two crows,
cartoon crows, Heckel and Jeckel? They used to do this Heckel and Jeckel routine. And
Lindo turned to him and says; Shall we? And the other one says; Why not? And Lindo
turns to me and says; follow me, no matter where I go. Take off. And I thought that was
interesting because you know, in all the schools you expect some sergeants to be there to
place the machine guns, to tell everybody what to do. But these guys knew what to do.
And so, we went up and ended up on this front line. And to make a long story short, what
had happened was, we walked into this star-shaped perimeter. That's one of the old
classical shapes for a perimeter, in fact it goes back to medieval times, is to have a star-
shape, so that you have your strong points at the apexes of the star, both the internal
apexes and the external, out on the outside points and the inside points. And, if you let
people walk into the arms of the star, then you've got them in a crossfire. And if you lose a position, each of the other positions can mutually support the position that; they can put fire on their own positions. So if they lose a bunker, they haven't lost much. And, so we had walked into this base camp, and it was a big one. And apparently, it was full of folks. And it was so well camouflaged, that it had the same effect as us walking into an ambush. And I followed Lindo up and we ran until we couldn't get any further, we were crawling. And, we finally find ourselves pinned down behind a little berm. And you could feel the muzzle blast from this machine gun up in front of us. But you couldn't even see the flash. I mean it was real close, you could feel it vibrating the ground, but could not see the S, they flash. And I was kind of loath to stick my head up and look too hard because we had guys slide up over that berm to try to get a little further, and everybody that went up over that berm got hit. Anyway, we got pinned down there and we were there for quite a while. The whole Company pulled back and left us there. And we had quite a number of people wounded that afternoon. And then finally my gunner sent me back a little ways to provide security, and we were going to pull back by having one guy come back and fire, and then another guy come back, and kind of leap-frog our way back because there were only three of us up there'. And the machine gun was running out of ammo. [smiling] Which I was real glad of, because I tried to get him to fire up all the ammo. So, we pulled back for a while, and I remember I stumbled and fell, and as I fell, the machine gun that was up in front of us just tore this bamboo to ribbons. It was like, as I fell, the rounds must have gone right over me. Now the strange thing about the firefight was you couldn't hear individual shots, it was a roar. Like a machine, and it was like this awful, grinding roar. And the sound would kind of go up and down. It would waver a little bit, but it never broke, and it just went on and on. And it was hard to believe that they had that much ammunition, or that we did, to maintain that constant sound. And all the leaves, and the wood, and everything from the trees was raining down on us; this fine sawdust just rained down constantly. So that, after a while, the ground was covered with ground up leaves and wood.

GD: And this was from all the rounds being fired?

MP: Yea. I mean it was like, stick your head up if you want to die. And so you started living in this much space [motioning about 12 feet]. I mean, we stayed real close
to the ground. It was like a horizontal chain saw going back and forth. And yet there were
times when somebody would have to get up and run, and you were amazed that he
survived it. Because you could see all this shit just tinkling down from the trees. And not
from way up high, these rounds were coming in right about this height.

GD: About 3k foot.

MP: Yea. I mean, that's the whole purpose of modern warfare is to keep your
rounds going out, keep their heads down, and then you try to kill them with your mortars
and your grenades. And these guys were firing rockets at us, and that was real scary.
Those rockets would go off with such a loud bang. They were usually hitting trees, but it
just scared the shit out of me to have those rockets coming in. And, see we pulled back,
got into a perimeter, and the company commander decided we'd assault. That was neat,
got on the line just like in the fuckin' movies and assaulted this complex. And didn't get
very far before they decided that; the position that I was at in the assault, we weren't
taking much fire. But the other side must have been getting hit real bad because they
stopped the whole thing and pulled back again. And then we went back up a third time,
and by that time, we'd given the NVA all the time they needed to start pulling their
people out. And they abandoned the complex. I think they abandoned it that night, we
didn't actually go in there and occupy it until the next morning. And late that afternoon
about the time the sun's going down, they brought us a resupply of ammo, which I hated
to see. They brought in a sling load as big as this room [app. 15' by 30'] of ammunition
and mortar rounds, and of course we had to divide that shit up and carry it. And that was
a fucking nightmare right there.

GD: So you got to go up and see the machine gun emplacement that everybody
was looking for. The one you could feel.

MP: Yea. And there was blood all over the place and we found; thing was they
only left behind one body. You know, they took all the rest of their bodies out.

GD: Now, how do you know that they did that? That they carried off their dead?

MP: because they didn't leave anybody, there was too much blood for those
people to be alive. I mean, we're talking a lot of blood.

GD: So how did you feel in the first firefight?
MP: I think that the strongest impression that came to me was that my parents could no longer do anything for me. That for the rest of my life, my umbilical cord was cut. That nobody could help me now. You come to that stark realization that you really are alone on this planet, it's you and God, and that's it. And the familial ties are supportive in a sense, but when you get right down to it, there's no help, there's nothing, there's just you. And you're going to die alone. However or whenever, when you die, you're going to die alone. It doesn't matter if you're surrounded by people, who's holding you're hand, what you're mother wants to do for you or what kind of trouble you're in, you're alone. And I think that's what; that stark realization that nobody could help me out of this one. And I've felt like that ever since then, too.

GD: So, it's just you and God. How did that affect you're religious views, if any, that you had before and after the war, and during?

MP: Well, I was raised as an Episcopalian, and during my late high school years and early Army period, I had thought to become an agnostic. I liked the label agnostic. What actually happened, though, was that I started; one nice thing about Vietnam was they supplied us with a lot of books to read. People sent books like you wouldn't believe. And I started picking up on the existentialist authors. And I started reading Herman Hess, and Nietzsche, and Allen Watts, and D.T. Suzuki. I started reading about Buddhism, and I was kind of prepared for Zen Buddhism because I'd been involved in martial arts and I'd read a lot about that in high school. So, I think the war, if anything, assisted me in that kind of existential thinking of there not being a personal, omnipotent God.

GD: How did you relate that when you got back, or did you, to the people you knew?

MP: I'm not sure I did. Maybe I don't understand your question. I'm not sure that I....

GD: Your change in the way that you viewed... your progression in the way that you viewed religion.

MP: Well, about the only person that was interested in that discussion was my mother, and at that point, and my mother's always been a real religious person, at that point I rejected any notion that Christianity represented anything than a mythological argument. And I know that bothered my mother. But, on the other hand, she said she was
glad that she'd had me baptized when I was a baby, that way my soul was saved no matter what [laughing]. And what I appreciated was the fact that her sentiment was that she had such faith in her religion, that she knew I was saved even without me having to do anything. I was saved by her grace, and the grace of God. So, I knew at one point thinking; there couldn't possibly be a God because this is so awful, that no God would allow this to happen. But it didn't take me very long before I figured out that that was a pretty naive argument.

GD: Why do you say that?

MP: Well, it was naïve because, apparently somewhere in my notion of God, that God thought that people dying in war was bad! And dying in a war or being wounded, that notion of it being bad was my notion. And it would be presumptuous of me to think that I know what God considers bad. And gradually I came to discover there are things worse than dying. This is kind of a passion play we're all living, and it's very illusory. So, that notion of God not existing or God punishing us, that was more connected to my Christian upbringing than it was to the way I began to think later on.

GD: Was there a lot of religion with the other men you served with over there?

MP: No. I don't know why I say that so firmly. I know a Roman Catholic, he got hit in the leg, and his nail clippers were open in his pocket. The round hit at the apex of the nail clippers, and he made a big deal out of making sure the Roman Catholic chaplain blessed those nail clippers. But for the most part, people didn't go to services when they were offered the opportunity. In fact they kind of joked about it, sneered about it.

GD: Why is that? Some macho image or what?

MP: I don't know, I can't speak for the rest of them. I didn't go myself because I thought it was a joke. I personally was offended by military chaplains; I still don't feel good about them. To me, that's a contradiction in terms. To have a man who represents holiness and religion to be a man of God, and at the same time wearing a military uniform for one side or the other; and then on top of that they made him a goddamn officer. And we didn't like officers back then, and so they made this guy a member of the officer class? That offended my sensibilities. I thought; if they're going to have chaplains, they ought to be like the... well, even the CID guys, you never knew what rank they were. And when they wore a uniform, they just wore a U.S. on their collars, they had no rank. I
thought that would've made more sense for a chaplain. Pay them whatever you want, but
don't make them officers! The officers represent the ones who were trying to do
everything we didn't want to have done to us. There was a lot of resentments
against officers in that war.

GD: How many men did your company lose in that firefight?
MP: Three.
GD: Lot of wounded?
MP: Not very many wounded, I remember there were three dead and two or three
wounded, which is kind of unusual. Usually it swings the other way. More wounded.
GD: So, everything went back to normal after that?
MP: Yea. Let's see, we stayed; we didn't hit anything else for about eight or nine
days. And then we got into a few little sporadic firefights that were, you know, just
platoon sized units just shooting at each other in the bush, nobody knowing anything or
seeing anything. And then, a few days after that, March 15th, I got wounded when we
were on a hilltop and they assaulted us. They were shooting mortars at us and put sappers
into our perimeter at the same time.

GD: Sappers.
MP: Guys carrying explosives.
GD: Were these guys on a suicide mission?
MP: No, just good recon soldiers. They were just an assault team. I don't know
about that suicide stuff, there may have been some of that. But it strikes me that the other
side was pretty much like everybody else, they wanted to live through this thing and go
home to their families. They were just well prepared assault teams.
GD: So, where did you get wounded?
MP: In the shoulder.
GD: Tell me about that.
MP: I was on guard duty, and it was just about time to wake everybody up for
stand to. And mortar rounds started coming in and an AK-47 opened up somewhere down
to my right. And, believe it or not, a lot of people don't automatically wake up. So I
started shaking guys, waking them up. And I fired a few rounds on the M-60, just to
cover my sector. And the mortar rounds came in, and they marched them around the
perimeter, and you can pretty well judge by seeing the first few what the spacing is going
to be. And so, I could see them coming, you know; one, two, get down. And the other one
bounced, and didn't come anywhere near us, was over on the other side of us. And they
went on around a second time, and we're watching them go off as they come around. And
the second time around somebody said; this time this one's going to be right on us. And
then we had firing out front, and the machine gunner was firing his gun, and it just
seemed more imperative to keep the gun firing. Lindo, I could see the ammunition belt
was about this long [motions 18 inches] and it was running out, it was starting to flap.
No, it wasn't Lindo, it was Weasel. Because Lindo went on R&R. And, so there were just
two of us on the gun, and Weasel's yelling for ammunition. And so that's what I was
doing was reaching for this can of ammo when this mortar round went off right behind
me. And I spent; well, I got Medevaced about 8:00 that morning, along with a whole
mess of people, a whole bunch of people got wounded. A couple got killed. And, actually
I was glad to get wounded because we were planning an assault on this other mountain
that same day, and I was real scared about that. I didn't really want to go on that assault.
And by getting wounded, I had an honorable way out of that. And I really didn't want to
feel that, and certainly didn't want to admit it, but that's how I felt. And, sure enough
when they went on that assault, a whole lot of people got wounded. And so I was there in
the hospital, and that afternoon, the guys just kept coming in all afternoon. Then, by the
end of the day, we had that whole ward filled up with our Company. Two Companies,
there were two Companies in on that deal.

GD: What was it like in a firefight? Is it confusing? Loud?

MP: Well, it's real loud. And, they don't give us earplugs. And it's real confusing,
the first few are. After that, you begin to settle down and get a feel for what's going on. I
mean there are only so many; it's like sparring in Tae kwon do, there are only so many
options available. And you start realizing what your options are and what his options are.
And common sense starts telling you where the troops need to be moved to, and what you
can do. So, it's always scary, but it's not as totally confusing as it seems like at first. And
actually, even the fear starts to fade after the firefight starts. I'm not aware of, even at that
very first one, I was only aware of that crushing tension of fear like after we pulled back.
During the times that you're safe, you start getting really afraid of having to go back. But
while it's actually going on, it's not too bad. And that surprised me. You know, I told you about chickening out of fights when I was in high school, and so I had to ask myself; am I going to be a man when it comes time? And it was easier than I thought it would be.

GD: Did you feel unprotected? Did you wear a helmet? Did you feel like you should have more things?

MP: Yea. I always wore a helmet. Partly because they made us, but partly because I believed the helmets worked. Knowing what I know today about the other day about Kevlar and bullet-proof vests? I would prefer to wear some kind of real body armor, in a modern war. Flak vests were available, but we didn't have them. Those were used in rear areas, there's no way you could carry a flak vest and hump a rucksack through the boonies. It's impossible. Maybe in a cold climate it would be possible. Maybe with the new types of body armor available, it would be possible today. But back then... And, yea, I felt totally unprotected.

GD: So you depended on yourself, your weapon, and your buddies around you?

MP: And luck.

GD: Lots of luck. Did you ever think about the men assigned to the rear areas? When you got wounded that time, got Medevaced; you saw the people in the rear areas. Anything ever cross your mind about all that?

MP: Well, we called them REMFs. For rear echelon mother fuckers. And everybody wanted a job as a REMF. And the longer you were there, the less you cared what anybody thought as long as you could get one of those jobs [laughing]. But, everybody was also proud of having been a grunt. Nobody, nobody ever blamed a grunt for becoming a REMF. But, a REMF who'd never been a grunt was at the bottom of the social ladder, which was interesting because the grunts were in the minority in that war. The support to combat ratio was ten to one. So if you were a grunt, that made you an elite right there. If you were a paratrooper, you were even a much smaller elite. And if you were in Special Forces or SEALS, you were at tip of the elite pinnacle.

GD: So, how many firefights did you get into with that particular platoon... that Company?

MP: Oh, in a course of a year, a little over a year, probably eight or nine. Not very many. And most of them were inconclusive, indefinite.
GD: Get to see the enemy?

MP: Once or twice. Even got to shoot at a guy once, but I don't think I hit him.

GD: NVA or VC?

MP: An NVA. Never saw a VC. All I saw were NVA.

GD: Well did you hit him?

MP: I don't think so. Just saw him for an instant. He was moving from my right to my left. I'm sure I fired too late, I wasn't that good of a shot, and he was a long way off.

GD: So, you got over there in April of '68...

MP: January.

GD: January of '68. And you were assigned to that Company. How long were you with them?

MP: Oh, I don't remember the exact dates. I think until January of '69.

GD: Did you keep a short timer's calendar?

MP: Never did.

GD: Lot of guys over there do that?

MP: Yea, I think quite a few did.

GD: Did you count your days?

MP: No, not very... I knew, but I didn't count them.

GD: So in January of '69, you were ready to go home.

MP: Well, no, because see, I extended my tour before then.

GD: Now why would you do that?

MP: Well, I was putting about 600 a month in my savings account. I mean, that was good money in those days, and I wasn't spending any of it. And they gave me thirty days free leave. You know, extra leave, without even counting off the thirty days they give me. So, you know, it was free paid leave, and didn't even count off on normal leave time. Give you an extra R&R, and I wanted to go to Hong Kong again. And I got one of those jobs in the rear for doing this, too. I'm not ashamed to admit that. And I went to work in the Battalion Headquarters. And I hated it. And I lasted there about... actually, I did a lot of partying there. I had some fun experiences there. I used what I learned in the bush to sneak through our wire and go to the villages all the time. Spent a lot of time in the villages.
GD: What would you do in the villages?

MP: Fuck the women.

GD: Tell me about that. How much... how many times did you do it? Do they speak English?

MP: Same way you do any...Oh yea.

GD: How would you know who to go to?

MP: Well, these were whorehouses. And, I don't know, I've always had this ability to... I like women, basically. And I've always respected them, and I liked the Vietnamese women. And for some reason, I always ended up with a Vietnamese girlfriend, and she might be a whore or she might be a mamason that was running a whorehouse. But I actually ended up with friends with these girls. And there was one in particular that I used to sneak out of the gate and go down there and spend the night with her. And they didn't cost anything, I didn't pay for it. She was a mamason that had a string of girls working for her. And she liked me, and it was fun to go down there and eat rice with her and her family, and sleep with her at night. Drink beer and...hell, it was great. Beat the hell out of living in the barracks in that camp.

GD: Did that cost you any money, or how much? Nothing?

MP: Uh uh. She never charged me.

GD: She just liked you.

MP: She just liked me.

GD: How did that affect her in...was this in a village?

MP: Yea, it was in a little village.

GD: How did that affect her standing, or anything in the village?

MP: Well, I don’t know because I'm not on the inside of that culture. But, you know, she had a string of whores. And, so there were lots of GIs in and out of that house. And she was doing pretty well financially.

GD: So what did you eat when you ate with her?

MP: Rice.

GD: Was there anything that you wouldn't eat that they were eating?

MP: Well, they had this nuc mam, this sauce? And I tasted it a few times, and it doesn't taste as bad as it smells, but the smell is awful.
GD: The fish sauce?

MP: Yea. And, they say you can develop a taste for it, but I just never wanted to.

Well it makes your body smell strange. What I could recognize was like Chinese food here. Rice and noodles and...

GD: What you could recognize?

MP: [laughing] After thinking of some of the vegetables and things, you don't know if you're eating a bug or a vegetable.

GD: Let's talk some more about the partying. You were talking about Sin City.

What is that, near An Khe?

MP: Yea, that's outside of An Khe.

GD: Tell me about that.

MP: Sin City was a walled compound that was obviously built as some sort of an administrative compound for the French Army. And, they turned it over to the prostitutes and the bars. And it was nothing but this little compound full of whorehouses. And the MPs and the medics would keep pretty close track of it and try to treat all the girls for syphilis and clap, probably didn't do them any good at all, but at least they were trying. And you could get laid for five bucks or get a blowjob for... I don't know how much a blowjob was. You could buy pot anywhere you wanted to in the place. You could almost smoke pot openly, but not quite, because the MPs sat on the place pretty hard. And, you could definitely get drunk, with everybody's blessings. You were perfectly free to get as drunk as you wanted to, and the MPs were just basically going to make sure you got back to base in one piece. They had regular trucks driving back and forth delivering people to Sin City and picking them up and taking them back.

GD: Were these women attractive?

MP: Oh, I thought they were beautiful! [laughing] I've always liked Oriental women in the first place. And the Vietnamese... I don't think the Vietnamese are as attractive physically as the Chinese or the Thais, but they're not bad looking. And, you know, I thought they were great looking girls. They had their rock and roll bands in there, in some of these bars, doing their damndest to play pop '60s rock and roll. With their Vietnamese accents, it was real funny, but they tried real hard. Played Beatles songs.

GD: Sounds like a pretty big set-up that they had going.
MP: I'm talking probably, the size of the compound was... let me see, let me think of something comparable to it. You know it was probably 500 yards... it was a square compound, and I bet it was, oh, I'll say three hundred yards on each side. It was a good sized compound.

GD: You'd get a bunch of guys coming in from the field, soldiers, aggressive people by nature, wanting to have fun. You have any problems arise from a bunch of drunken, aggressive folks wandering around? Maybe some of them had weapons, maybe some of them just wanted to get in a fight or something?

MP: You know, I don't remember that as being much of a problem.

GD: Slap any of the whores around or anything?

MP: No. I see more violence here in Lubbock as a cop with these college drunks than I can recall. Now maybe it's just my selective memory, but I don't recall fights in the bars over there. I'm sure there were, that's not one of my memories of what was going on over there. And I'm sure there were girls getting beat up occasionally, but not where I could see it, not out in front of the bar. And certainly there was... I don't think the guys would've approved of somebody slapping a girl around. Yea, the people were aggressive, and it was an aggressive, dangerous line of work, but I think we took our cultural values with us too. We understood the difference between fighting on the battlefield and fighting in a bar. [long pause] In fact I think I saw more compassion than anything else. Lot of guys fell in love with these bar girls, wanted to marry them.

GD: I guess a few of them probably did.

MP: Yea [smiling].

GD: Let's call it quits for today. We'll continue this later on.

MP: Ok.
GD: This is Garth Davis, it is 4:41 P.M. on February 4th, 1990. I am interviewing for the second time Marshall Paul. The interview is taking place at the home of Mr. Paul. This is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas tech University. I think we were talking about last time some of the places you went on R&R, and Sin City, and some of the things like that.

MP: Yeah, I wanted to amplify on something that had to do directly with Sin City that you asked me yesterday. You asked the question if there wasn't a lot of aggression and a lot of violence from the troops. Implicit with your question was since they're out there in the field, supposedly in a violent sort of lifestyle, that when they get a chance to go to the rear and chase women and have a good time, that they're still going to be violent. And that's a mistake, to assume that people are going to be like that. Because that wasn't... you know, I think I told you I couldn't think of any instances of bar fights or of violence or of people doing bad things. I'm sure there were some, but they don't stand out. On the other hand, what I did see in the field, while I occasionally saw acts of violence, I was more struck by seeing acts of bravery and courage from people that were just ordinary people that you didn't expect to see that from. Those struck me as noble qualities. And I don't think the nobility disappeared when they went to town to chase the whores. I don't agree with some of the civilian fears that war produces violence and aggression. I think in certain individuals that are predisposed to that, they can train them and give them some skills that need to have developed. But, I don't think it changes people and divorces them from their value system. It makes us question our value system.
quite a bit. But, anyway, that was just my comment that I'd been thinking about since
yesterday about one question. Now, where were we?

GD: Well, let's get off on a tangent. We've all heard about the horror stories of
war, especially in Vietnam, it's out in the movies and the publications now, and all the
bad things that happened. Let's talk about these acts of bravery, and courage. Why don't
you tell me about some of those.

MP: Well, what was surprising to me about it was that they were everyday
occurrences. When somebody got hit, the medics went forward. I told you yesterday
about being in that first firefight where we were pinned down behind this berm. I don't
think I mentioned that we went up there to try to recover the bodies of our point element
which were still up there. When we went as far as we could, one of the medics decided
that wasn't far enough, and went up there by himself! He must have been crawling about
three inches under the ground, I mean you couldn't get any lower. And we didn't believe
you could go any further, but he went up there further. And he got to a guy and wasn't
able to drag him back; that was a big point of honor, was to bring back our dead. But, he
at least determined that the guy was dead. That struck me as an incredibly brave thing to
do. I never asked him about it. I suspect that, from his point of view, that was just his
duty, his job. I think the medics probably were, to me, the biggest example of personal
courage and bravery. But the platoon leaders, some of the platoon leaders were the same
way about standing up under fire and moving around in order to you can't yell in a
firefight. And you don't have radios, at the platoon level you can't talk to people by radio.
And the only way to move people is to get real close to them and yell, or grab them
physically and point, direct, or shove.

GD: And these were the sergeants?

MP: Yea, the sergeants and some of the officers. That took a lot of courage to
stand up and do that. It took a lot of courage to crawl around and do that, because
obviously you're safer if you just stay down. But, at some point I'm sure logically you
decide that the only way to survive is for the unit to function, for the machine to function.
And the only way it functions is if you get off your ass and do something. And I never
saw myself as brave, I know that I did some of those things. But I always thought it was
brave when I saw other people do them.
GD: What did you do?

MP: The same sorts of things. Having to move around, moving people around, direct their fire. A sergeant's job is usually not to fire his weapon as much as it is to make sure the others are firing their weapons. But, you know, I can't think of anybody... oh, I didn't see anybody jump on a grenade or anything. But I saw a guy slide down a rope onetime without any gloves in order to rescue some guys that were wounded on the ground while a helicopter had gone over. And it burned the flesh off of his fingers and the palms of his hands, right down to the bone. A horrible injury. It was stupid, an officer, really a stupid thing to do. Now, they gave him a pretty big medal for it, too. I think they gave him a ... it was more than a bronze star, they must have given him a DSC or something. He got a pretty good medal out of the deal. The question is, was that brave? Or did he just act precipitously, because he was on board the helicopter, and like any rookie, forgot to put his goddamn gloves on? I don't know.

GD: Do you think the awarding of medals in instances such as that for bravery was haphazard?

MP: No, it's part of the system. It's probably not in any Army regulations anywhere, but I'm convinced that the system has to produce a certain amount of appropriate awards. It's a motivational tool. That's all I see going on. The system doesn't care if you deserved it or not. The only ones that care are down in the lower levels. And, I've seldom met anybody that believed he deserved an award that he got. And none of them are impressed with them.

GD: So, could we summarize to say that you saw, and please correct me if I'm wrong, incredible acts of bravery and heroism going on nearly every day in Vietnam?

MP: It seemed to me that way at the time. Just a simple thing like being sent forward to throw a grenade; I'd watch somebody else do it, and watch other people volunteer to do it, and say to myself, ‘Damn, I'm glad he did that because my legs feel like they're lead right now, I don't think I can push myself up off the ground.’ You know, a couple of times I've gotten on line to assault a bunker complex, and said to myself, ‘I don't believe I'm doing this.’ I don't know if that's incredible bravery or not, it just seemed to me at the time that it was so frightening. Well, you could still function; you wondered why you could function.
GD: When you got ready to do something like that, was there a point where the fright went away? What were the feelings that you felt in stages going into a firefight?

MP: Well, there was always an initial crippling fear... but it didn't cripple you. And the fear didn't really go away, but the adrenaline felt real good. And you could do anything, you could see more clearly, and function better. You almost had an experience of time slowing down. Jungle that minutes before you'd be picking your way through one step at a time, and getting caught on every little vine and twig and branch and stumbling around and suddenly, during a firefight you could be running through it like a deer, every step being exactly where it needed to be. In my unit, we normally dumped our rucksacks, as soon as the fighting began. These rucksacks had quick releases on them, and we'd pull the quick release and dump our rucksack. But there were times where we moved a good way before we dumped them. And I told you yesterday how heavy they were. And you'd find yourself running with that rucksack on your back, wondering how in the hell you could do that because you knew it was heavy. And then once you'd dumped it, boy, you really felt light. In fact, I hadn't thought about it before, but maybe that's a good reason to make soldiers carry heavy weights, so that they can dump them just before the battle begins and they'll feel lightweight and relieved.

GD: And you told me that you were promoted in the field. How high did you get promoted in the field?

MP: Buck sergeant.

GD: What additional duties did you take on, and how did that affect the way that you looked at the war?

MP: Well, it changed things a little bit. I became a squad leader. But the squads were small. There were only five people in a squad, whereas normally in the States there's ten people, ten or eleven depending on what the TOE is. So, the unit was about half the size of what a full size unit would be. And still I was real young too, I was only eighteen years old. So, we had a democratic process going on there [laugh]. You know, the guys in the squad were my age and older. Some of them had even been in Vietnam longer than I had. So they let me be the sergeant, and everybody knew what to do. It wasn't any real big deal. Maybe the biggest thing about being sergeant was making sure that I checked with the platoon sergeant and got they're food to them and coordinated the delivery of C-
rations and shit like that. Because tactically, everybody knew what to do. The platoon
sergeant might give me the mission, and I'd tell the others, but it was just a very cohesive
group. I never did feel like I was in any real position of leadership; I never felt worthy of
being a leader. And, I knew that I didn't know enough to be a leader. I was only, God, I
was only eighteen. If I had known at the age of forty, and after the experiences I've had
being in business and being a little more of a leader now, I think I could go back to a
military experience like that and probably be a real leader. But at that time, I just had the
stripes. I was almost incapable of giving a real order. About the only time that I think I
really functioned as a sergeant was on patrols. I know a lot about patrolling, I was real
comfortable with doing that. And I just knew how to do that better than most people; and
I didn't like doing it because I didn't like giving orders, I didn't like being responsible. But
I knew I was the one that knew how to patrol. And for that reason I was able to overcome
my personal reticence and take charge a little bit. Otherwise, you got to understand with a
conventional unit, with a big unit, there wasn't a lot of leadership to be done because
you're just following other people around out in the woods. Just a big mob of people.
Patrolling is probably one of the few instances where I got to really be in charge. And it
scared me.

GD: Did it scare you to give orders to those men? Were you afraid of making
somebody mad?

MP: No, I was afraid of telling them to do the wrong thing, getting somebody
killed. Putting people into tactical positions; one of the little duties of a sergeant, for
example is, the platoon leader will tell you where the platoon is going to be, and he'll say,
'Sergeant Paul, your squad goes over there', and he'll point. And he expects you to know
enough about the terrain of the situation to put your people in holes where they'll cover
the sector that he's assigned, and have interlocking fire with the holes next to them and
clear out some of the brush and to do it right, and know what's going on. And that's an
easy thing to do, but I was always doubtful and double checking myself. And hoping that
somebody didn't get killed in that hole that I told him to dig right there. And that's not fair
to myself, you know, it's the other guy that's trying to kill us. It's true at that age I didn't
really like telling people to do things they really didn't want to do. Because at that age I
still wanted to; hell, I should've been socializing with people. Not pretending that I was
any better than them and giving people orders. So, there was some difficulty doing that.

GD: Did you ever hear of any fraggings? Any talk of that?

MP: Heard of one, it happened in my company just before I got there. And
everybody in my platoon told me about it. They fragged a lieutenant. I can't remember
what the lieutenant had done. They weren't trying to kill him, they were just trying to let
him know he'd better get his ass out of the field. They just didn't want him around, and I
have no recall at all of what this lieutenant had done. But I do recall not being surprised;
that he was lucky to have gotten away with just a fragging instead of having somebody
kill him. You know, fragging is really a pretty kind way to treat somebody, they could've,
you know, at least they didn't shoot him. Fragging is not really a bad wound. And then
there was a guy that was a communications sergeant that nobody liked, but definitely
didn't deserve to be fragged. And I was in the area, I heard this one go off. They did it in
a rear area, and they set a Claymore mine up outside this hooch he was sleeping in. And
set it off. And the mine was sitting on top of these sandbags... there were sandbags that
went around every building; sandbags were up about three feet high. And they set the
Claymore on the sandbags and aimed it right toward the wall. And he was sleeping on the
other side of the wall, but the army bunk was only about like this couch thing, so the
army bunk was down here...

GD: A couple of feet.

MP: So it was about a foot below the level of the mine, and the mine went off and
blew the wall straight over him. And except for some deafness, and some concussion, I
don't even think he had any scratches on him. One of those miraculous deals where the
explosion went directly over him and had blew him out of the bed but he wasn't hurt
really.

GD: So what happened to him?

MP: He got transferred pretty quickly after that. He was afraid for his life. And
they caught the two idiots; there was two idiots that had done it. And all I can remember
about the event was that they worked for him and they were potheads and they were real
pissed off at him.

GD: So you were in the field as an Airborne infantryman for how long?
MP: A year.
GD: Anything else we need to talk about that particular experience, or anything you want to relate?
MP: No, I think I pretty much told you the gist of it. You know, it was just kind of a grubby, dirty life. And real painful. And most of it wasn't very exciting. I didn't get in that many firefights. The second year was a lot more dangerous for me than the first year. Which was surprising because you think of being in the... in general, being in the rear was pretty nice over there. And you think of being in the field as being pretty dangerous, but after I went to Special Forces, I got into kind of a deal where; are we going to get into that?
GD: Yea. What I'm doing is making a, kind of a chronological procession along but, anytime you're ready to jump into something, let's do it.
MP: The first year was a real proud year for me because I really liked being; I liked having gotten a CIB (Combat Infantry Badge) the right way, and I liked having paid my dues. And I wanted to stay over there and make some more money, and I really didn't want to get killed. So I extended my tour and got transferred into the Headquarters battalion. This was kind of funny, they made me a company clerk; well, I don't know if they made me a company clerk, or I was banished. There were a lot of people back there that didn't like me for some reason, I was having some personality conflicts.
GD: In the company?
MP: Well, in that whole Headquarters battalion. Some of the officers didn't like me. And I ended up being Company clerk of the Headquarters detachment, and the First sergeant was a First sergeant who had been banished. And he was a crusty old fart. And his solution to dealing with; they'd give me these stacks and stacks of paperwork that had to be done, and they all had suspense dates on them. And the First sergeant would come in and look at my desk and say: ‘What are you doin', Paul?’, and I'd tell him what I'm working on, and he says: ‘Doesn't look like you're ever going to get through’. And he'd look at the paper, and I'd say 'yea', and he'd say: ‘well, let me clear some of this out for ya’. He would literally shove his hand down underneath that pile and carry it to the wastebasket and throw it away! And say: ‘There, that make life easier for ya?’ And I thought: well, let's see if it does make a difference. And, you know, he did that to me two
or three times. And he cleared out days of work for me. And hardly anything would ever come back to me, because it wasn't like... none of that stuff was monumental, none of it was really important. And this crusty old 1st sergeant who'd been in the army since God was a corporal, he understood that if you just throw away some of the bullshit, nobody's going to notice. And when I first went into that job, my only skill was that I had taken typing in high school. So I knew how to type, and they'd laid all this paperwork on me; army regulations, and I can read, so I'd been figuring out that trying to do it and he showed me that the way the bureaucracy works, it doesn't make any difference if you do it or not. So he showed me the ins and outs of how to play that game. And I lasted at that for about four months. And it was just driving me up the wall, my only solace was that practically every other night I was sneaking under the wire and going down to some village to see a girl. Oh, I did get a couple of road trips out of the deal. I got a road trip to Saigon one time, guarding this lieutenant I worked for. And he was carrying about three million piasters. And I don't remember what that was in money, it was somewhere in the; it was money we used to pay the Vietnamese workers. It amounted to like, thirty or forty thousand dollars in cash. So, I went down there to guard him. And we got real drunk, and for a while, for several hours lost the money. [laughing] And he could see his career going down in flames over that because we tried to hide it in this Saigon hotel, and when they came along and told us that we needed to move to another room. I can't remember why they wanted us to move, but anyway we moved to another room, but we were so drunk that we'd forgotten that we'd hid that money in the previous room. And so then, hours later we started wondering where the money was, and couldn't find it in the room. We were in the room that had the money [laughing]. And we were just imagining somebody else checking into the other room and finding that money, because it was just in a leather satchel. Anyway, we did get the money back. But on that trip he wanted me to go to the field grade officer's club with him. And in Saigon that was a really big deal, it was like a country club. He was a captain... let's see, which trip was this? That was a later trip I guess. That I went in the field grade officer's club. I got my accounts mixed up. We lost the money on the first trip, and on the second trip he was a captain. Wanted me to go to the field grade officer's club, so he gave me a lieutenant bar. And I impersonated a lieutenant. And sat there at the bar drinking with a full colonel, drunker than a hoot, and
actually had this full colonel believing I was really a lieutenant [laughing]. I could've
ended up in Leavenworth if that one would've been found out. They were real serious
about those kind of crimes back then.

GD: Wonder how often that happened?

MP: Probably a lot. After a while you just don't give a shit. You know, you figure
you only live once! So, anyway, I lasted, oh, about four months in that job. And I was
going to extend my tour again; see, I never really wanted to get that job in the
Headquarters company, what I wanted to do was got what was called E Company
Provisional. And they guarded the green line at An Khe. And that's all they did was live
in these bunkers out on the green line...

GD: Now, explain the green line to me.

MP: Well, An Khe was a big, big base and it had a armed fence, lights big lights,
wire, and mines and shit all the way around it. And when I say big, I'm talking... the
circumference of that camp was probably ten miles. So, you know, we're talking the size
of a city. And one section of it was guarded by the 173rd, it's a provisional company. And
they were all guys who'd already done they're time in the field and volunteered to stay an
extra tour. But they got to stay basically in the rear, just pulling guard duty was all it was.
And that's basically all I wanted to do, was just hang out. You know, make that money,
and just hang out and party with those guys. Well, I didn't get to do it. And I didn't like
Headquarters Company. And at that time we got a new general who decided that anybody
that wanted to stay in Vietnam more than eighteen months was crazy. And he instituted a
new regulation that nobody could extend they're tour past eighteen months.

GD: Was this... who was the general? General Abrams?

MP: I think the general's name was Barnes. Not certain of that. But he couldn't
prevent you from extending your tour in-country and requesting a transfer. And about the
same time... one of the nice things about working as a clerk was I started seeing the kind
of things that come through the mail. And I saw a notice that Special Forces needed
Airborne volunteers, and they didn't care if you met their minimum age requirements or
had been through their school or not, all they wanted was, if you were airborne, they'd
take you. You had to be a buck sergeant. And so I transferred, extended my tour a second
time. And went there in, when was that... sometime during the summer of '69. And they
sent me to a little school out on an island called Han Tre island. And it wasn't all that exciting of a school. They kind of got you oriented to what Special Forces was doing. But they weren't doing that much different from what I'd done before. Their main headquarters was at Nha Trang, Nha Trang was significant because it was the only city other than Saigon that had street lights. It was a real nice city. And I liked hanging out in Nha Trang. I can't remember, we didn't do very much at Nha Trang. Then they sent me to... where'd they send me? Bien Hoa was where I finally ended up. They got us all in line, we were all people who'd extended our tours from some Airborne unit and none of us were Special Forces qualified. They put us in this line one day, and when you got up to the window they'd say, ‘You want to be assigned to Mike Force or C&C?’ And I didn't know what either one of them were, had never heard, no one had explained it to me, and I said, 'What's C&C?' ‘Command and Control.’ And I thought, ‘Another fucking clerk job, nah,’ I think that’s why they call it that so the sucker dumb asses will volunteer for it that was hoping for a clerk job. It turned out there were three C&Cs. C&C North, C&C Central, and C&C South. The casualty rates in C&C were horrendous. It was like a one way ticket. Nobody lasted very long in C&C. If you survived a 6-month tour there, you were doing pretty good. The C&C teams did anything from five man long range recon to 20 men long range recon all using mercenaries and bandits. And they went to North Vietnam with sterile uniforms and silenced weapons. They went to Laos, they went everywhere. They weren’t even the United States Army. It was real heavy duty shit. If I’d known that, I wouldn’t have volunteered anyway. But the reason I didn’t volunteer was because I thought it was something else. I said, ‘Well, okay. That doesn’t sound very good. What’s Mike Force?’ They said, ‘Mike Force stands for Mobile Strike Force.’ I thought, ‘Yeah, 1st Cav riding around in helicopters.’ So they sent me to the Mike Force and Mike Force was three battalions of Cambodian mercenaries and they had a recon company and a small headquarters unit and they assigned me to the headquarters unit which was really pretty interesting because this Mike Force, three battalions, was actually a brigade. You had one American commanding each company and one American commanding each battalion, but all the rest of the troops were all Cambodians. So it was really a small group of Americans. In the Headquarters element was, Major Mize was the commander of the whole deal. His name was Ola Lee Mize. Here he is a major
commanding a brigade size unit and this man was interesting because he had a Medal of Honor that he got in Korea. I’ve looked up the accounts. I know something about who he was. He was a sergeant in Korea and they gave him a battlefield commission as a second lieutenant and they expected him to get out of the army and just go away. Well, he didn't get out of the army. And so, twenty years later, he's still just a major. But he was the kind of officer that you rarely come across. And at first I didn't want to, at first I felt real negative about being stuck in the headquarters element. But after working with this guy a while, I began to see that I've got a rare opportunity to grow, to broaden my range of experience. You know, anybody can carry a rucksack and a rifle in the field, but this guy sat in a bunker and controlled some pretty major battles with radios. And I'd never seen it done from that end before.

GD: How'd he do that?

MP: Well, we had three radio operators. We lived in a bunker; the headquarters was in a bunker about the size of this room [10' by 30'] with radios at one end and maps at the other, and I was in charge of S2 and S3 which is intelligence and operations. And I had an older sergeant who was really my boss and I just worked for him and he taught me the ropes and taught me how to ... And on a superficial level, I moved pins around on maps and I did overlays of battle plans and tactical situations on clear acetate. And at first, I merely did what I was told. And then gradually... and you asked how did he do that, well, he had maps and overlays and intelligence. So the way he maneuvered was simply by using, you know, the map as a visual aid, and the intelligence he was getting from spotter pilots. And this was one of the areas I got into later on, was he started sending me on the helicopter. When a battle was beginning to open up, or when we were trying to find them; a lot of battalion commanders in Vietnam got into the habit of spending all their time onboard a helicopter. Most of the time, they flew too high. Well, Major Mize, he stayed in the bunker and sent me in the helicopter. And I'd give him first hand information on what I could see; see it's real hard to communicate on a helicopter and have all the maps that you need and talk to three or four different people. He'd have me in the helicopter doing what I could do, communicating with him, and he'd stay on the ground and communicate with the other battalion commanders. And at the same time
make sure the artillery was working. He could coordinate a whole lot better from a
bunker than he could from a helicopter.

GD: What area of the country was this in?

MP: Well, we operated all over War Zone D, and in a place called the Parrot's
Beak which was straight north from Saigon, north of War Zone D, right on the
Cambodian border. During the nine months I was with them, we operated in two main
areas. And see, that really was an eye opener for me. What was also an eye opener for me
was also that the sites we got sent to, even though it was a headquarters type of deal, it
was so far forward that we were under siege the whole time. There was more... you know,
I'd been experienced being mortared and shelled out in the field, and I'd been mortared a
few times when I was in base camps, but in Special Forces I ended up being mortared and
shelled and rocketed daily. Day after day after day. Because we were so far forward. And
I'd never experienced an actual modern siege like that. You think that you're always, as
long as you've got a job in the rear your safe. But these areas were so far forward that,
there's no question that being in the rear was probably more dangerous than being in the
field. That was probably one of the best experiences I could have had. At first it was not
good for my self esteem because, you know, the thing about being a REMF as opposed to
being a grunt. The REMF is lower than whale shit and the grunts are really the ones who
are worthy of esteem in that world. But Major Mize put me to work using my brain. And
he kept pointing out to me, he said, 'If you pay attention here, you'll learn something'.
And I had to look at this guy and say: now here's a guy who's got a Medal of Honor. Who
killed more Chinese with an entrenching tool than most of us ever thought about killing
with bombs. You know, he had done it all, and he didn't have any problem being in that
bunker where it was you know, theoretically nice and safe. Because he knew that that's
where he could function for the best of everybody. You know, it wasn't for himself, that
was the place for him to be. And he sent me on missions because he felt like that's where
I was best able to function. And gradually, we developed a relationship. I took on all
kinds of extra duties. I was responsible for making sure that shit got unloaded from the C-
130s that would come in. They'd come in and unload... I think we called it a hot load.
They wouldn't even stop and park, they'd come in ...our runway wasn't long enough for
them to do a touch and go. If they could've, they would have just come in and dumped
they're shit and taken off again, but our runway was so short that they'd come in, turn
around, and they'd have the ramp doors open, and when they were making their turn
around, just start shoving everything out and just do their take off run dumping pallets
down the runway as they took off. And of course we were getting shelled the whole time;
the gunners would wait for the C-130s to come in and just start shooting. And so, I had to
go out there, and bring all that stuff back. And I'd go out there with a jeep and some
Cambodes and a deuce-and-a-half, a two and a half ton truck, and we'd bring all that shit
back getting shot at the whole time. And that was kind of fun. As long as somebody was
shooting at me, I felt like my status was a little higher than otherwise. And I got in
trouble a few times, and Major Mize always covered for me. The South Vietnamese
province chief one day had a big pallet load of chickens come in at our runway. I thought.
‘Chickens? Our Cambodes eat chickens.’ So I took them. I didn't know whose they were,
I just knew the chickens had been delivered. And those chickens got passed out literally
within five minutes. We're talking hundreds of chickens. They were just passed out, just
disappeared into the Cambode community. I didn't think any more about it. About thirty
minutes later, somebody came looking for me and said: ‘The Major's been looking for
you, and he's hot!’ And I go down there, and he says: ‘What's this about you giving the
province chief's chickens to the Cambodes?’ I said: ‘I didn't know whose chickens they
were. I'm always seeing our guys eating chickens.’ He said, ‘Well, they're not ours, they
belong to the province chief and he's really hot. You need to go get them.’ I'm going yea,
right [laughing]. Well I went up and talked to; I had this guy that worked with me as an
interpreter. And I told him we need to get the chickens back, and he starts laughing, and I
realized what an absurd situation it was. He says, ‘Well, we can go talk to them’. So I go
gather up a bunch of Cambodes and I said, ‘Hey, guys. I need all them chickens back.’
And the Cambodes are really nice people, they're real funny. And they're all smiling and
laughing, because they knew the predicament I was in, and they knew that... you know, I
could smell those chickens cooking [laughing]. No chickens were coming back! And I
went and told the Major, ‘Hey, the Cambodes won't give them back,’ and he knew they
wouldn't give them back. And he didn't make a big deal out of it, he covered for me and
told the province chief, ‘Tough luck on the chickens, pal.’ I mean, that's a real minor
thing, but I felt real supported by the man. Then they gave me an additional job, they kept
getting new, extra jobs. I became like a gofer. And sometimes I'd be sent on errands to go
to Nha Trang. One day I'd be flying supplies out to the battalions. Whenever we had a big
firefight going on, I was out at the helicopter pad reloading rockets into the gunships
because see, our gunships weren't supported by us, they flew in out of Bien Hoa. And
they didn't have their air crews to rearm them, so they'd have to come to us. And guys
like me that knew nothing about helicopters or armament would have to rearm them. And
then, at the same time, I'd have to load up small arms ammunition to take to the
Cambodians'. And, of course, every time you're on the helicopter pad, you know, they'd
start shelling us too. I became sort of a jack of all trades during that period, and one of the
extra jobs they gave me was flying a People Sniffer. And I don't know whatever
happened to the technology. I assume that this kind of thing is still used today, it's
probably much more advanced, but at the time, this was all real secret and I'm sure it's not
anymore because too many years have gone by. But this machine used a spectrographic
analysis of air samples to detect human beings. And we used a helicopter, and the
machine was a big long black box. And there were actually two machines in there, but
you had to get confirmation on both machines for it to be a valid reading. And we had a
hose sticking out like a big old vacuum cleaner hose and it would draw in the air samples.
And we'd fly about sixty knots over the top of the trees, and just follow the trees. And it
was hard to get pilots that wanted to fly that slow because it was so easy to shoot down
helicopters at that speed. If they'd fly at high speed, my readings weren't valid, so I'd try
to keep them at low speed. And when I'd get readings; there were a couple of things that
would screw the machine up. One was deer, I knew that because we'd found herds of deer
at the same time the needles were bouncing. And in fact, later on we started using it to go
deer hunting. But when we were hunting people, I knew we were getting valid readings
because I'd have two gunships following me, one would fly low and the other would fly
up high. And when I got a reading, I'd just press my mike button and the door gunner
would sit there with a smoke grenade in his hand with the pin pulled, and as soon as we
got a reading he would drop the smoke. And since there was a certain amount of delay
because of our forward speed, the gunships would start firing short of the smoke, about
fifty yards... fifty to a hundred yards. And the low gunship would fire his minigun and
make his first pass. And then the high gunship would come in with rockets. And usually,
since we were just in a slick, a Huey with... the only guns we had were just the door guns. We would just pull straight up and turn on the side and just orbit. And that gave the door gunner a chance to shoot his gun which wasn't really doing any good, but, you know, he couldn't pass up an opportunity to shoot. So, it was all fun and games, and most of the time it was thick canopy jungle and you could never see any of it. But I knew that we were finding people down there because occasionally we were getting secondary explosions. And so we knew we were hitting base camps.

GD: Where did all this take place, was it all inside Vietnam?

MP: Yea, all of that was done in Vietnam. I did some cross border incursions on other occasions, but not with the People Sniffer. In fact, most all the People Sniffer missions were done around a place called Rang Rang. And Rang Rang had been the... was a Michelin rubber plantation in the old days. And there had been some fierce battles fought there throughout the history of the Indochina War. And it had been heavily defoliated by Agent Orange by the time we got there, or at least by the time my unit moved in there. And a lot of it had been growing back, the undergrowth had been coming back, so the defoliation didn't really help us that much. And that's where we did almost all the People Sniffers, and in that particular area, there were a lot of South Vietnamese logging operations. And they all had their trucks painted yellow, and they belonged to a General by the name of Tri. As an aside, General Tri was the South Vietnamese general who was killed in that Cambodian invasion in 1970. And his helicopter went down along the border, and Bernard Fall was in the helicopter with him. Which I thought was kind of interesting, but General Tri owned all those logging trucks. So, except that we were in a free fire zone, theoretically. But we had orders not to fire on the yellow logging trucks. Now this was curious to me because, the yellow logging trucks could not operate unless they had permission from the North Vietnamese I mean it was patently obvious that a deal had been worked out. General Tri could haul logs in exchange for which the trucks did something for the North Vietnamese. My assumption is that they hauled supplies and troops. You know, it was a trade out. There's no question in my mind that that was going on. But anyway, we were under strict orders not to fire on them. And one day I go on a People Sniffer mission and I get max reading and I'm not even looking out of the helicopter, I just see the needles bouncing. I punch the mike button, and the smoke
grenade goes out and the rockets start firing. And the ship just turns right on it's side, and
so I'm looking out the left door, straight at the ground. And I could see this yellow
logging truck. And I could see a child running to get underneath the truck. And I could
see other people running away from the truck towards the woods, and I can't tell if they're
women or children or men. I could see one child, but I can't see much of anything else.
And as I'm looking, I see the smoke of the rockets streak in there and then the yellow
flash and then the black smoke. You know, and all this shit just starts happening and were
continuing to orbit. And we blew up, oh, I think three trucks and started a bunch of fires.
I don't know if we killed anybody or not, I would assume that we did. We didn't see
anybody on the ground, but there was a lot of smoke. So we flew off. We went straight
back to the base camp, and when my helicopter landed, Major Mize was waiting for me.
And even though I was the sergeant, and all the pilots of all of this deal were officers, I
was considered the mission commander and it was my baby and I pushed the mike
button. And he cussed a little bit that time, he got pretty mad. And maybe he was just
trying to throw a scare into me. But as he was walking away, he said: 'I don't know if I
can cover for you on this one or not, I'll try.' And I don't know if I was ever in any real
danger of being in some kind of political trouble or not, because he did cover for me. And
for weeks after that, they laughed and teased me about it. But apparently, it did upset a
bunch of people, and some heat came down on him for having done that. But apparently
he took the heat all himself, and nothing ever got on me at all. And I suspect that's why
after all those years, he was still just a major. You know when I saw that movie
Apocalypse Now, and how they talked about Colonel Kurtz and how it was going to ruin
his career to go into Special Forces. And, you know, the army at that time really was a
dead end road for an officer in Special Forces. And when Martin Sheen talks about
'instead of going for his career, he went for himself.' And in Special Forces particularly, I
think that that was operative. That officers, and Major Mize particularly, did what they
knew is best. For soldiers and for the men working for them, didn't worry about their
careers. And we had a tremendous amount of fun, since our unit was relatively small, our
area of operations would sometimes be surrounded. At one time when we were at a place
called Bhu Dop, we were surrounded by an area controlled by the 1st Cav division. And
military commanders are just like feudal lords, they have their area of operation and they
think it's their little kingdom. We had a full bird brigade commander out of 1st Cav
division come and inspect us one day. Because we were in the middle of his AO and he
wanted to see what kind of operations we had going on. Since these might somehow
impinge on something going on in his area. And he was really full of himself, he came in
with an entourage of majors and captains and lieutenants, and briefcases and spitshined
boots and starched uniforms. And he wanted a briefing and he wanted it ... what he
wanted was a dog and pony show and he wanted everybody to jump through hoops for
him. And Major Mize who... it was hard to get him to put a shirt on, he was always
walking around without a shirt on. In Special Forces a lot of times we wore these
multicolored neck scarves, you know, real unmilitary type of unit. Well so Major Mize is
saying, ‘I'll see if I can't get one of my battalion commanders to brief you on this area.’
And it just so happened that one of the battalion commanders had flown in out of the field
that afternoon, and he's a mere captain. We all took great delight... and this captain had
been in the field for three of four weeks. Really smelled terrible, real grubby, his clothes
almost rotting off him, no rank insignia or anything on him. And the captain is briefing
this full colonel, and this captain is a battalion commander. And you could tell it was just
bugging the shit out of these 1st Cav people that in terms of real power, bullets and men,
this captain had as much power as a lieutenant colonel in the regular army. And the story
gets even better, I think. They kept asking questions and at one point the captain says,
‘Well, I'm going to have to get my company commander to brief you on that’, because
one of the companies knew more about it, so he brings in this company commander. Well
the company commander's a Spec 4, that's an E-4. He's not even a goddamn sergeant!
[laughing] And it just so happens it was a friend of mine, and he too was real dirty and
filthy and hadn't shaved in days. He always wore his helmet all the time, because he got a
small head wound, and never quit wearing his helmet after that. And so he's standing
there looking like the perennial boonie rat; now a company commander that's only a Spec
4 is briefing this colonel on something. And normally a company commander's a full
captain. And the more we went on with this, just the more pissed off they got. It became
apparent that they didn't come down there to get briefed on the area, they came down
there to flex their muscles. And it was just pissing them off that these Special Forces
people had just as much guns and bullets and firepower as they did. Without having the
rank... it was like we had usurped their authority. We were their equals in one respect.
And I thought, ‘I wonder if these guys would respect an NVA or a VC commander.’ Who
had the same amount of real power, but without the cultural sophistication or the
education or the money.
GD: This is Garth Davis, it is 2:50 P.M. on February 9, 1990. I am interviewing
for the third time Marshall Paul at Mr. Paul's home. This is part of the Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project at Texas Tech University. Where were we last time? We were
talking about your days in the Special Forces.

MP: Well, I'm not sure where to start on that.

GD: Last time we were talking about Major Mize and some of the... I think the
last thing we were talking about was the People Sniffer missions. A few of them..

MP: Well okay, the People Sniffer, I think I explained all of that, that it was one
of those extra duties. And it was a real pleasant extra duty. You got shot at in the
helicopter but if you didn't get hit, you knew right away that you'd been missed and then
you were gone. So, you know, it was only frightening for a second, and then everybody
could go 'hah, hah, hah' [high pitched laugh]. I liked riding in helicopters. And the
frightening thing is that they scare me now, because I understand how unstable they are
as flying machines. But, in general, I liked that way of going to war. And I think I
would've liked being a door gunner. One of the door gunners traded places with me a
couple of times and let me fly as a door gunner on some missions. And that was fun. It
was a real kick, in fact. The door gunners liked it too, but they said, 'you know, any job
gets old’, and they got a little burned out on it. But Special Forces was perfect for me
because it rounded out my experience in having been a grunt. And then giving me a taste
for seeing how a war or how something is managed; how something is conducted. It gave
me an overall view of things. It also gave me a better view of the political side of things.
GD: How so?

MP: Well, I told you about the yellow logging trucks. That they were owned by a South Vietnamese. How, in fact, the trucks had, absolutely had to be working for the North Vietnamese in order to even exist, because they controlled the ground. Nothing moved on the ground without permission from the North Vietnamese Army. So, there was no question that the trucks were playing both sides. That gave me a lot of insight Special Forces was... a lot of people had this assumption that it was one of these hand and glove relationships between us and the South Vietnamese. Because in Special Forces, you know, you had a South Vietnamese counterpart. Everyone of us had our duplicate from the South Vietnamese Army. In the A teams, they really had to share power when they commanded a camp. In the Mobile Strike Force, which was a much more unconventional type of unit... and people that consider Special Forces as unconventional? Well, Special Forces at one level becomes conventional itself, and the Mobile Strike Forces and the guerrilla forces and some of the other units, the C&C that I mentioned, and those become unconventional. And we were so unconventional, that while we had our Vietnamese counterparts, our Vietnamese counterparts had absolutely no control. No say, and I never met mine. He did not go to the field with us. Our counterparts stayed in our base camp at Long Hi, and I don't know what they did. As far as we were concerned, our counterparts were paperwork appointees. Most of them had no interest in being in the field and we got a little suspicious if they wanted to be in the field. We had some incidents where a South Vietnamese attempted to assassinate one of our officers. And he was foiled in the attempt, and when we tried to make serious charges about it and investigate him, then he was immediately pulled out of the unit and disappeared back to Saigon. And our intelligence sources told us that he was South Vietnamese CIA. And it makes sense, if you look at the fact that we took Cambodians; they were Khmer Serait, which is a free Cambodian movement. In fact it's the same one that today, twenty years later, is still fighting against the Khmer Rouge and, you know, it's still one of those independent Cambodian movements operating today. Well, the southern third of Vietnam used to belong to Cambodia, and culturally is still a great deal Cambodian. And the Cambodians consider that their country and they consider the Vietnamese as usurpers. And the Cambodians are treated as third and fourth class citizens in their own land. The
Vietnamese are extremely racial. You know, if they didn't like white people, Americans, and they showed it, they were more prejudiced against the Cambodians. The Cambodians are their niggers. And so here we are, training their niggers, and giving them automatic weapons. And see, they had their own infrastructure, their own organization. And they hired on with us as mercenaries and that prevented the South Vietnamese Army from incorporating them into their ranks. And so it makes sense that the South Vietnamese CIA would run operations against us. We had an instance where a South Vietnamese agent infiltrated one of our battalions and assassinated one of the Cambodians out in the field. One of my extra jobs... my job as gofer or as jack of all trades was to do whatever I was told. And so, on that occasion I was given the job of guarding this prisoner. And this is when we were at Rang Rang. And so, I take the South Vietnamese down into the command post bunker. And outside the bunker I'm surrounded by about two hundred and fifty Cambodians, everyone of them armed to the teeth, and they want to kill this sun of a bitch. Because this was family to them.

GD: Who did he kill?

MP: I never knew the name of the guy he killed, but he was the brother of Tra Khooe, and Tra Khooe was... he was a friend of mine, and in our organization, the Mike Force, Tra Khooe had the rank of PFC, let's say. Within his own organization, the Khmer Serait, Tra Khooe was a sergeant major. Tra Khooe was fairly high ranking. And anyway, it was his brother that was killed, and I was given the mission of guarding this guy. And I really had mixed emotions about this because we're out there in the boondocks, surrounded by our own people, and our people are getting ready to mutiny on us. And Major Mize tells me, ‘If this guy even tries to get out of that chair, shoot him, and that'll solve our problem.’ And so he goes outside and he's trying to calm these guys down, and he wants to shoot him too, but he's got a real political situation on his hands. Because everybody knows that this guy, the assassin, is some kind of South Vietnamese agent. And I guess I came as close to looking a man eye to eye and shooting him as any time in my life. And I don't know why the guy would even think about getting up and going out the door, because he knew what was waiting out there. But he did shift his weight on the chair like he was going to lean, and shift his weight as if he were going to stand up and go for the bunker door. And I was, oh, further away than you and I are, I'd say we were...
about fifteen feet away. I was sitting on a folding chair with my M-16 on my knee, and I just flicked the safety off as he shifted his weight. And if he'd done just any more shifting at all, I would've just shot him. I remember, similar to the conversation we had earlier before you turned the tape on, I remember wishing he would go ahead and take that step. [Note: the aforementioned conversation was about present employment situation that the interviewer and MP both encounter. Both are in law enforcement and the conversation was not related to the interview.] I wanted to shoot somebody at close range. But he settled back down into the chair. And, as it happened, Major Mize cooled the Cambodians off, or at least convinced them that justice would be done. Which was a lie. And we put the guy on a helicopter and flew him to Saigon. And like most intelligence agents, he went back to where ever he came from. Maybe somebody assassinated him, but as far as we were concerned, the story ended and I never heard another word about it.

GD: Why did he kill this man?

MP: I'll never know. Something was going on. You know, they ran their missions against us, they ran their missions against the Cambodians. Like I said, the Cambodians had their own infrastructure. And they had their own intelligence network. Sometimes their intelligence network would pass information to us. And generally the Cambodians were supportive of the U.S. effort. The Khmer Serait at least were, there were other Cambodian factions, too, that were not favorable to us. There was one called KKK. That's what we called it because we couldn't pronounce what it really stood for. I'm sure the word Khmer was in there somewhere. But the KKK were just pretty much outlaw bandits as far as we were concerned, they were mercenaries who would work for either side. The Khmer Serait preferred to kill Vietnamese over anybody else. They didn't want to kill Americans, they would not operate against Americans. They would operate against the South Vietnamese or North Vietnamese, didn't make any difference, as long as they were operating against the Vietnamese, period. They were happy with that. The Cambodians were real reliable. And I liked them a lot. I think that we were more compatible, closer, for some reason, culturally than ourselves and the South Vietnamese.

GD: Let me get off center a little bit here and talk about Cambodia. There's been talk and conjecture that U.S. bombing raids into Cambodia and also troop incursions into Cambodia pushed the North Vietnamese that were around the Ho Chi Minh trail
further into Cambodia and thereby hastened the demise of Cambodia and helped the
Khmer Rouge. What do you think about that?

MP: Well, I don't know, and I don't have all the facts. And that scenario sounds
plausible on the surface, but by itself I don't think it hastened the demise because we
signaled the demise of Cambodia when we told the world we were pulling out of Vietnam
anyway. You know, we pulled the plug on that little bathtub, and everything just went
down the drain. So, I don't think the bombing made any difference. I really can't respond
intelligently to that. Speaking of the Ho Chi Minh trail, though, I remember when I was at
Bhu Dop. On the map here it shows Bhu Dop as being... well, an eighth of an inch, a
sixteenth of an inch from the border? It was less than a mile from Bhu Dop to the Ho Chi
Minh trail. And at night you could see the headlights from the trucks. Before I went to
Vietnam, I thought the Ho Chi Minh trail was like a path. And these guys would be
carrying rucksacks and walking down the trail. It was a fucking freeway. Convoys
coming down there with two and a half ton trucks, and the headlights shining. And we're
sitting there within artillery range? And so naturally, we started doing our own
interdiction operations.

GD: Was that okay? Or was...

MP: Shit no! No, you could not shoot across the border, you couldn't fly across
the border, you couldn't walk across the border. And we did it all the time. Because,, you
know, you just go, ‘Fuck them! This is a war! We're going to do our job here.’ See these
trucks bringing supplies down? Now, of course we couldn't do enough to really make a
difference. But we felt better about it. See, they'd run all night, and in the daytime, they
seemed to pretty well shut down. At least in that area where we were. And at Bhu Dop
particularly, since we were under siege, they kept us pretty well bottled up. It's probably
not fair to cast dispersions toward the A team that was at Bhu Dop. See, the A teams were
given singular sights. And they operated out of those sights, and the idea was that they'd
go in there and convert all the villagers and convert all the people and get everybody to
fight for their own territory. Well, by '68 and '69, it had come down to America had to
start hiring mercenaries to fight the war because there weren't any people left. I mean, the
poor villagers at Bhu Dop were not soldiers, these were people that had just been living
underground for twenty five years. Bhu Dop had been a French fort before we moved in there.

GD: Now, explain the A team to me.

MP: Well, the A team was a concept. The A team was the twelve man Special Forces team that was glorified in that John Wayne movie *The Green Berets*. And everybody was a specialist and they were... one of the primary roles was a teacher and trainer. And the A team would go to an area, theoretically, and recruit and train soldiers and be advisors to the indigenous population. They'd have their own leaders. Well, Americans aren't just real good at being advisors. We want to take over and take control, and so that's why we had the South Vietnamese counterparts who would be the leaders. But the people out there didn't trust them South Vietnamese bastards [laugh]. So the Americans had to take control. And after a period of years, you know, shit, even in the Special Forces it was an American war. And some of the sights Americans had more control and some sights the Americans had less control. And the conflict generally, I think, operated against efficiency. Now the Mobile Strike Force which was out and out mercenaries hired from the beginning, no games played, everybody knew what the story was. We payed them, they fought. And we let them. And the Mike Force would go into an area and support the A teams. Generally because the A teams had gotten so ineffective, they had to have some large conventional force type units to come clear the area. And so that's what we were doing at Bhu Dop was the A site there had gotten so weak on patrolling that they managed to get themselves surrounded, and were just getting shelled. I think I told you about all this, right?

GD: Um, I'm not sure that you did.

MP: We were getting shelled. Some days we'd get shelled all day and some days we'd get shelled all night. And we were taking a hundred to a hundred and fifty rounds a day.

GD: Now where were the rounds coming from? In Cambodia, or in Vietnam?

MP: No, Vietnam. They're using mortars and recoilless rifles, and so we're only talking two or three thousand meters away. They didn't even need to go to Cambodia., and they would move all around us and shoot at us from different directions.

GD: Now, when you say they...
The North Vietnamese. So the Mike Force went to Bhu Dop to bolster the camp and start the war going again, to get that area cleared and give the A team a chance to start their patrolling operations. Consequently, we did some incursions into Cambodia. And at that particular time, you know, I was still that jack of all trades job. And so, my part as far as going across the border there... the only time I ever did it was on a helicopter to resupply some people or looking for LZs. I did some planning operations and one time we lost two of our gunships went across to Cambodia and one of them was flying too low and hit a tree and went down. And so I flew over there to help rescue the pilots who did not survive. But that was a real interesting deal because we got to the crash site and I think we decided we were there within three minutes from crash time. And that helicopter just burned like it was made out of cardboard. And the rockets started cooking off out of the pods. And the rockets were firing up into the air and the machine guns were firing. And we were in Cambodia now, for sure. And we were pretty nervous because we didn't have anybody on the ground to secure the area. And, in fact, I didn't even have an M-16 with me, I was standing on the helicopter pad getting ready to ...I don't know where I was going, but I was on the pad. And the chopper I was going to ride on was already running; we were getting ready to lift off, and the pilot just started screaming for me to get on board, and I jumped on. And they told me on the way where we were going. And I didn't have a rifle with me, I remember that. I thought. 'Oh, God, this is going to be shitty' [laugh]. Because I knew we were flying to Cambodia and I didn't have a rifle and 'Oh, fuck' [laugh]. But you know, it was fun. Even uh... I'd never smelled burning flesh before. And we pulled those pilots out of the helicopter. And you know, the rockets were just firing out of the tubes right next to a guy that was trying to pull a pilot out of a helicopter that was burning. I remember squatting down on my knees on that corrugated floor and grabbing this guy's flight suit and that smell, you know, as the flight suit was tearing his flesh and breaking him in different parts. The way a human smells when it's burned is different from any other animal that's been burned or cooked. Gives a very pungent smell. And it was so strange because it was such a dangerous place to be. Everything was burning and all these explosions. And we figured the North Vietnamese were coming because, you know, they knew a rescue operation was going on and that we wouldn't have anybody on the ground. And it'd be a great chance to shoot.
down some more helicopters. And they could see we only had one gunship. But at the
same time all of this was going on, I remember thinking, ‘God, this is such high drama!
And I'm actually getting to be here!’ [laugh]. And I also remember thinking, ‘I hope I get
out of here!’ [laugh].

GD: Weren't you worried about the fire getting to the fuel tanks?

MP: The fire did get to the fuel tanks. Fucking thing exploded and it just... I guess
that was one of those examples of incredible bravery because, I mean, we hovered just
right there... we couldn't land the chopper. Because there was real thick brush, oh, six to
eight feet high. And, so, he just pushed the brush down with the skids. And then he has to
watch out for the limbs hitting the blades, so he pushed it down as far as he could. And I
don't even remember who the other guy with me was, but I hung on to the skids, and we
just drifted right up next to the helicopter while the thing is burning. And you could see
the rocket pods just going off, and fortunately, the fire was firing the rockets out of the
pod, instead of detonating them. It was like this platform was just launching these rockets
up into the sky; the way it crashed, the pods were aimed up. I don't know how long it
takes them to arm, but I assume if they'd been aimed down, they might have been
exploding into the ground and then going off. But we got both of the pilots out of there
before the fuel tanks went off. And I don't know why we had time to do it.

GD: No one was ever put in for a commendation for that?

MP: Not to my knowledge. You see, to me that was one of those funny things
about commendations was; you just do what you got to do, it's just part of the job. And
every now and then it comes time to pass out medals; usually when it comes time for that
they write up some phony bullshit and medals get passed out. I did get a Vietnamese
Cross of Gallantry. But I don't know what it was for because the order's in Vietnamese
and I still haven't read it. But we got those because we gave those Vietnamese
counterparts that we never saw, we put all them in for Bronze Stars. And so they put all
of us in for their equivalent [laugh].

GD: Just for the hell of it.

MP: Oh, yea. It was just trade.

GD: I guess they got their Bronze Stars?

MP: Oh, yea. We got a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry and they got a Bronze Star.
GD: Was it tough to figure out who your Vietnamese counterpart was? Did you have to go somewhere and look up a name?

MP: At one point I knew what his name was and I knew where he stayed. We had a base camp at Long Hi which was across the bay from Vung Tau. And they had a little part of their compound that was separate from ours. I hardly ever went over there. We didn't have any real interaction with them.

GD: Tell me about the incursions into Cambodia.

MP: Well, most of them were illegal. Even when that helicopter crashed, we reported... and I was directly involved with the paperwork on that one, since at that time I was doing operations and intelligence stuff. And so we checked the maps real carefully, and moved the crash sight just inside the border [laugh].

GD: So that helicopter was not supposed to be over there, and they crashed. And you were not supposed to be over to retrieve the bodies?

MP: Right. Basically. And I don't suppose we did any good by crossing the border, but Major Mize just didn't feel like it was right to sit there and let those son of bitches go by. You know, he wasn't going to have people thumb his nose. Thumb their noses at him. And he was prepared to take the heat. He didn't want to, and we did a pretty good job of getting out of it. And I guess that's another one of those things that makes you start seeing the world for what it really is. How can you have a war, and then have these rules? Now some rules certainly I'll abide by. Treatment of prisoners and you maintain certain ethical standards. In war, we're still human. But an imaginary border in a jungle? Can't see that.

GD: What was the purpose of your incursions into Cambodia?

MP: To interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail.

GD: Were they successful?

MP: Well, like I say, I doubt it. It was more of a morale booster for ourselves. We just weren't big enough of an operation. At the most we only had four gunships at a time. And Major Mize wasn't putting whole battalions over there. You know, he had three battalions working for him, and he'd let one of his company commanders slip over with a company at a time. But he wasn't putting any big units over there, he wasn't letting himself hang out that far. And we let the artillery shoot over there all they wanted to.
because they were well within our artillery range. You know, artillery is ... we had a battery of 155s and... no, they were 105s. And I think maybe they had one 155. That's not a considerable amount of artillery.

GD: Did you ever catch any heat over shelling the Ho Chi Minh trail?

MP: I don't remember.

GD: You said something a minute ago that interested me about prisoners. What about prisoners?

MP: What about them?

GD: Did y'all ever take any prisoners?

MP: Yea. And when I was with the Americans, when we took prisoners, they got treated pretty well. When I was with Special Forces and we took prisoners, some of those prisoners got executed before we could even get an American to them. The Cambodians would just plain shoot these guys because they didn't see the intelligence value of them. See, for them it was a blood feud. One time one of our company commanders had a North Vietnamese prisoner. And apparently the guy was a sergeant. A sergeant or a low ranking officer, the prisoner I mean. The American had just told us over the radio that he had a North Vietnamese prisoner and the guy had some papers and seemed to have some rank and while he was talking you heard this 'pop' in the background. And the American says, you know the jargon on the radio is, 'Wait, over'. There's this pause. He comes back on, oh, several seconds later and says, 'Prisoner dead'. Major Mize, he just comes unglued! And he goes and grabs the radio, or the microphone from the radio operator, and wants to know what the hell happened to the prisoner! And the American comes back on and says, 'One of the 'Bodes shot him'. Well, Major Maize, he doesn't say any more on the radio, he'd get the story when he talked to him. Well, it turned out that the story was they had the prisoner sitting there on the ground, and the firefight was all over, they had the area pretty well secured. The 'Bodes had started sitting down to eat their rations, you know, the fights over. Well one of the Cambodges is walking along, and then walks past this North Vietnamese, and then stops and looks as if he hadn't seen him sitting there before. And says to himself, 'Oh, here's one we forgot to shoot!', and he turns and shoots this Vietnamese. And then walks on off about his business. And that was pretty much their attitude about Vietnamese.
GD: Was it easy to distinguish physically between Vietnamese and Cambodians?

MP: Yea, the Cambodians are a little shorter and a little darker. Noses are a little flatter. Yea, there's some racial differences. When we would pull out of our operations and go to Long Hi, which was our base camp, we usually had two weeks stand down period. And the first week, we did anything we'd want. We could take a jeep or a truck; we could go to Saigon, we could go to Vung Tau. They didn't care what we did. Come back in a week. No papers, no passes to be anywhere, you're just on your own. And that was easy to do in Special Forces. People would let us get away with things. I wondered then how many deserters pretended they were in Special Forces because you're supposed to have passes to be in certain areas. And we'd just ignore all that shit, and did what we wanted for a week. And most of us just went to Vung Tau and moved into the Grand Hotel for a week, which was this big, French type of hotel on the bay. And just partied. And drink, played with the whores. Well, initially, when we'd go, we'd have these Cambodians going with us because they liked to hang around [laugh], and they'd go with us to guard us from the goddamn Vietnamese. And [laugh] we didn't want them around, and after we'd get to Vung Tau we'd have to finally tell them to leave us alone and get out of here. But one of these trips to Vung Tau, I had a jeep and three Cambodians with me. And I wanted to go see this girl at a bar, and so I parked the jeep out front and it was like the Cambodges were on the clock and didn't seem to mind. And so, one of them was going to guard the jeep and the others were going to be somewhere in the neighborhood, and I could just go do what I wanted. Well, I go in to see this girl, and she's real glad to see me, but she's real irritated that I hang out with these Cambodges. And she wants to know, ‘How come I spend so much time with those people? Don't I understand that those are low class people? And that they're unclean, they're untouchable, there's something wrong with them people.’ And that was the first time that I'd heard there were problems, differences between these two cultures. But that was the first time it really struck home to me that this girl was beginning to see me differently because I was spending time with the Cambodges. You know, and from an American point of view, the two cultures were so similar compared to the culture I came from. I mean, there was no difference between those two peoples. But to her, the Cambodges were just an untouchable race.

GD: There was something I was going to ask you and I forgot what it was.
MP: Did you think of it? Well let me tell you about Long Hi, then. The Mike Force got sent to Long Hi because they got kicked out of Binh Hoa. It happened before I joined the Mike Force, but apparently the Cambodes in the Mike Force got into a firefight with some of the South Vietnamese Special Forces at Bien Hoa. And the Americans in the Mike Force were a pretty rowdy crew too, so they just generally banished them.

GD: Who won the firefight?

MP: I don't know. It was probably one of those inconclusive type of deals. So, by the time I joined the Mike Force, they sent me to Long Hi, and it's a peninsula across the bay from Vung Tau. And there is nothing there except a little village and a hotel. It's a pretty nice hotel. And it's a VC controlled area. And this is real far south, at least it's south to me, south of Saigon. And the area's totally controlled by the VC. And we had this weird little camp here in the middle of it. And you get the feeling that the VC tolerate the camp, that they could take us out in a heartbeat. The camp was not particularly well finished, well designed or ... our bunker system was rudimentary. Each of us felt that, you know, with fifty Cambodes we could take the camp. And the only combat operations we ran in that area were just strictly for training; we had some new Cambodian recruits, and we'd do those during the second week of our stand down. And generally, we didn't do any operations at Long Hi at all, it was just a place for us to rearm and rest and we could our girlfriends from Vung Tau in there, too [laugh]. And Long Hi was heavily mined. And that was my only experience with clearing a minefield, was I had to go do that one time. Digging up these mines that they'd buried, and I hated that. I'd just rather never do that again.

GD: Why?

MP: Because I didn't want to get blown up that way, I thought that was really a stupid thing to do. Why couldn't we use machine guns [laughing] and fire at the ground as we go or something. But this business of probing the ground with a bayonet did not turn me on. And for the most part, that was the only thing the VC did to us, was put mines and booby traps all over the place. And so, we stayed inside the compound and they mined the road a few times, but I was lucky and never ran over anything, and we seldom had a truck really blown up. They usually ended up getting one of the civilian cars, and I think there was a limit to how much the VC were willing to mine the road in terms of
destroying their communication with the civilians. Anyway, there was this little village
and this hotel. Now, the hotel was the interesting thing about Long Hi, because the hotel
was owned by an American who lived down there, and had a Vietnamese wife and a
sixteen year old daughter and both of them beautiful. And this guy was like somebody
out of *Casablanca*, the movie. He wore that kind of clothing. Khaki shirts with epaulets
and white pants... I wish I could remember his name. And he worked for a company that
had an office in San Francisco, supposedly. And the name of it was Southeast Asian
Laboratories. And if that's not a CIA front, I don't know what is. And supposedly, he was
in the oil drilling business. And I don't know how an American can live alone in that area,
which was VC controlled without being in some kind of real shady business. He had to be
paying the VC or something. His name was Robert something or another. And sometimes
we'd go to parties at the hotel. And it was incredible, this hotel was nearly empty, almost
no guests, and a huge ballroom, just like something the French probably had huge parties
at years and years ago. And it was like, so surreal; what are we doing here in this big
hotel with this ballroom in military uniforms, and there's no people? And what is this
American doing here, and who is he really? And later on when we were at, one time
when we were at Rang Rang, this guy flies in on a black helicopter. You know, one of
those helicopters with no markings on it. And I don't know where he was going but he
flew in, he came to talk to Major Mize and then left in a few minutes, carrying around, I
think it was some kind of French submachine gun slung over his shoulder. Real exotic, I'd
give anything to know who he really was, and what was really going on there. But the
whole thing just gave me a sense of the surreal, like nothing is what it seems to be here.
You know, one side is not really one side. One side is several sides. It just wasn't what an
eighteen year old expected when he went to war. I mean, hiring mercenaries and one of
the Americans took me with him when he went to Vung Tau because he didn't trust his
Cambodian to guard him, so I went along as bodyguard. And we went to, it was like a
drug deal, except it wasn't a drug deal, it was money. In Vietnam, the military issued
Military Payment Certificates. And it was like... it was money. You couldn't have
greenbacks over there, it was against the law, because greenbacks were convertible on the
international market. And, we called them MPC, couldn't be used outside of Vietnam. But
you could get three to one exchange for... one greenback dollar was worth three MPC
dollars. And I had a friend who would have friends of his mail him greenbacks. And so I went with him one time to make a cash exchange with a VC agent. And so we go to this nice hotel, sit down on the patio, and wait for a signal from a guy, like a spy movie [laugh]. Sounds silly telling this story. And we go sit at a certain table, and I'm carrying a pistol. I guess the other guy was too. And we make sure there aren't any MPs or CID-looking people around. And the American I'm with gives this guy a thousand dollars in greenbacks, and he gets three thousand dollars in MPC from the VC agent. Now the trick is, he's got all this money in MPC, but what's he going to do with it? So he goes to the Army Postal Service, buys money orders, mails the money orders back to the States.

  GD: Pretty smart.

  MP: Used to do it on a regular basis.

  GD: How did you communicate with the Cambodians?

  MP: In English. I tried learning Vietnamese. And that was just not a language I was having any luck with. And some Americans seemed to be able to pick it up, but I had a tough time with it. And I just pretty much gave up. And it wouldn't work with the Cambodians anyway, because they'd refuse to speak Vietnamese. Most of them knew it, but they wouldn't speak it. And I thought, 'Hey, I'm only going to be here...', I was in that unit for nine months and I knew I wasn't going to stay another tour. And I thought, 'Few more months, I don't need to learn this language.' Almost all of them spoke enough English to get along. One of the things that I discovered in Vietnam was that this entire planet speaks English. Or pidgin English, at least. And so I already spoke the most important language on the planet. With Pidgin English and some gestures, and a few words of this and that... French works real well over there. A lot of the Cambodians spoke French. I didn't speak... I've learned some French since then, but then I had a lot of Spanish, and I could figure out some of the French words that they used. But English generally was all you'd need.

  GD: Did you get more respect from other American personnel over there when you were in the Special Forces? Was there a hierarchy?

  MP: Well, theoretically, it was more neat to be in Special Forces, but there was also a lot of resentment because if they think you’re elite, they resent the hell out of you being there. And you pointed out in those pictures I looked like I was seventeen? Well,
what do you think when you see somebody who looks too young to be where he is? You know, you resent that. It just didn't fair. I caught some flack from a bunch of guys who were legs from an infantry unit one time.

GD: Legs.

MP: Non-airborne people. We called them legs. Because of the fact that I was in Special Forces, I don't even remember what they were saying to me, but they were generally giving me a hard time. And I think it was just that kind of jealousy, envy. They felt like Special Forces got a lot of the credit and got to have all this glory and got to wear that stupid green beret. And I understand their resentment. I think the glorification of Special Forces was one of the worst things that the Army did. I was never comfortable wearing that stupid beret. And I knew that there was nothing special about me. And even the people I knew that were highly trained, unlike myself, people who really deserved some sort of accolades for being specialists, didn't need the green beret. I think that kind of worked against the Special Forces. One of the things that I liked that I read once about the French Foreign Legion is that the French Foreign Legion doesn't give marksmanship awards because that would be divisive, that would show one soldier is better than another soldier. Rather what they do, they insist on the kind of camaraderie that the best marksman devotes his time to bringing the worst ones up. So that nobody is better than the others. Now, I'm certain that the French Foreign Legion has elite things too; berets and badges and things for some of their units. But that attitude made an impression on me. I was always uncomfortable with that kind of elitism when I was in Special Forces. I got to meet Martha Raye, though.

GD: You did?

MP: Yea.

GD: Martha Raye, the big mouth?

MP: Yea. One of those times we were on stand down, Sergeant Major told me to go out to the helicopter pad, an important person was coming in. And so I took a jeep and went down to the pad, and I was sitting there thinking, ‘Oh, shit. I wonder who this is going to be.’ And this helicopter lands, and a fat woman gets off of it wearing green army fatigues or jungle fatigues. And I didn't know who she was. But I knew she couldn't be anybody real important because she didn't have an entourage with her, she was by herself.
It was just a standard Huey with the two door gunners, and she was by herself. And I think she had a suitcase, and I threw that in the back of the jeep. I don't remember if she introduced herself at that time or not, but I remember she was real jovial and happy-go-lucky and talking to me. And I drove her down to the club, and that's when I got introduced to her, and found out that I had just met a famous personality. Because I don't believe I recognized her. I think she was doing cartoon shows or something on Saturday mornings, wearing a witch’s outfit in those days. So I didn't really know who she was. But we had our own little bar on the camp, and she stayed there and drank all goddamn day. And she got drunk, but she must have been an alcoholic because she didn't get near as drunk as we did. And for a long time after that visit, we wondered what she and Major Mize did. Major Mize had this mobile home, and I don't know where he found one. But he had a trailer on this camp, and she spent the night in that trailer. Now maybe she spent the night on the couch, I don't know. But, of course, there was all sorts of conjecture about what went on between Major Mize and Martha Raye. And she was a character, she really seemed to like Special Forces for some reason. And she went to all the camps, and she went to some of the really forward camps. She even came to Bhu Dop, you know, which was being shelled all the time. She used to go around nailing St. Christopher's on the walls. Writing her name on the wall. And while I wasn't highly entertained, it wasn't like you're just thrilled to meet this person, I thought, ‘That's damn nice.’ Because these are dangerous places she was going. John Wayne, Bob Hope, some of the other biggies didn't go anyplace dangerous. And they never went anywhere without an entourage. Probably armed to the teeth, and Martha Raye just had her helicopter. And I liked that. I tried to spend some time over the past few days trying to think of what it is that somebody a hundred years from now might want to glean from all of this. Because I've read some of those Civil War diaries. And I don't know, I'm trying to think, ‘Should I get into more of the gore?’ But that's not the big impression I came away from the war with.

GD: Let me ask you this. All the movies that I personally have seen and, quite frankly, all of the accounts that I've read of the war tell of the bad treatment of prisoners. And you just stated that y'all took a lot of prisoners. What happened to them?

MP: Well, in the field, they were generally treated pretty good. Because soldiers respect other soldiers. And a soldier can appreciate very quickly what it might be like if
the position were otherwise. And in fact, I believe that even the American POWs have
recounted that when they were initially captured, they were not treated too badly. Harsh,
perhaps, but not horrible. It's when you start getting to the rear that the treatment gets bad,
And so I have very little information about what happened to the prisoners that we took,
because they were turned over to the MPs or the intelligence sections. And I have no
doubt that they did things like take them up in helicopters and throw one out and see if
the other one would talk, I know that happened. And I don't like that kind of thinking. I
guess that's one of those ethical rules that, I would insist that we couldn't do that. I think
we can cross borders, but I don't go for throwing soldiers out of helicopters. But
intelligence people start thinking about the end rather than the means. And I approached
the war, and still do, more from a samurai ethic. I think that one man should go out there
and fight another man, and make it a fair fight, and if one's killed, that's okay, that's fair.
But throwing people out of helicopters and torturing, to me doesn't make it worth winning
the game. When I got wounded, initially I was in a hospital at Pleiku. And on that same
ward were two North Vietnamese soldiers who'd been wounded just a few days before in
firefights with other companies of my battalion. Our whole battalion was involved in this
series of fights in that area. And so, here's two North Vietnamese soldiers on my ward,
and they had two MPs to guard them. And the MPs were legs, so the MPs didn't have as
much status with the grunts... we didn't call ourselves grunts, by the way. I've picked up
the term since the war from other people who knew what a grunt was, and the Marines
tended to call their people grunts. In my unit, we were boonie rats. And we never used the
term grunt. It was always boonie rat. But so, here was a ward full of paratroopers and
these leg MPs, who hadn't been to the field, guarding these guys so that the North
Vietnamese soldiers had higher status than the MPs. And we also, [laugh] we had kind of
a cult about carrying knives. We all carried our knives, and we hid them when we got
wounded and tried to get them into the hospital with us. Most of us succeeded. And we
probably didn't fool anybody, but the nurses let us get away with it. And one of the MPs
was a cruel bastard. And one of the North Vietnamese was wounded real bad, and looked
like he was going to die. And the other one wasn't wounded too badly, and was fairly
friendly. And the one who was going to die wouldn't accept cigarettes and no
communication at all. He was being a hard core prisoner. The other was being fairly
communicative and was taking cigarettes and candy and shit from us. Well, one of the
MPs was using his nightstick to harass these two North Vietnamese. Poking him in his
wounds and shit. This one guy, his entrails were all wrapped up in a bundle, taped on the
outside of his body. And this MP was poking them with his nightstick. Well, some of the
paratroops that could get out of bed went down there and surrounded this guy with
knives, and promised to cut his fucking head off if he touched this guy again. And they
must have scared him, because he backed off, and he didn't mess with him anymore. And
I thought that was interesting. But after you get away from the front line troops, I don't
imagine those POWs got treated very well. But I suspect they were treated better than
ours were. I think, in general, we're not a cruel people. I think we have the capacity to be
cruel. I've seen MPs keep these guys in little pens, little cages like pens you'd keep
chickens in. With a top on it about the same height as this ledge here.

GD: About three and a half feet?

MP: About three and a half feet high. Well, I guess that's okay for the
Vietnamese, because they all squat all the time, anyway. They're real comfortable in a
squatting position. But it seemed strange to see these human beings penned up in these
cages, squatting down like that. I don't know if that answers your question or not. We
certainly weren't shooting them. Not the Americans, anyway. The South Vietnamese are a
pretty cruel people, or can be, I guess. But, you know, I think it is interesting that while I
saw a fair amount of the violent things, the shooting and getting shot at, I saw a little
baby one time get the top of his head blown off by a recoilless rifle. And the baby was
still alive, and the mother grabbed it up and came running into this camp we were at in
Bhu Dop. And wanted us to save the kid's life. There wasn't anything... our medics
were... the Special Forces medics were highly trained. Couldn't do anything. You know,
but they tried, they really did. Tried to piece the head back together. But those type of
things, I didn't feel like I was connected to anything, it was like this is all surreal. Maybe
it was like if I were to acknowledge that this is too real, I might get sucked into this and
really be horrified. But I managed to maintain a detachment. And that detachment
started... well, I'll tell you when it started. You asked me about that very first firefight.
Our point element was killed and the next day, we were involved in a continuing firefight
and I remember somebody had drug three bodies, laid them down side by side, and
covered them with ponchos. Well, what I remember is that their boots, these three pairs of feet sticking out from underneath the ponchos. And all of our boots were white because all the polish had wore off of them. In fact, I've got a picture here. The boots were how you could tell the boonie rats from the... see in that picture? [MP shows picture of white toed boots] That's my foot right there, and I was sitting next to my gunner. And you could tell a boonie rat from a REMF by his boots. And I remember this image of these guys, of just their boots. And I had a hard time thinking that those boots used to have living people moving in them. It was like they're not real anymore. And I sure didn't want to be like them. So maybe that's how I got through, is by maintaining some detachment. I've had an awful lot of people tell me that I'm the only person they know that didn't seem changed by it. And when I hear that, I'm thinking, ‘Are you fucking kidding?’ It was the momentous thing that ever happened to me. And nothing since then has come near it. Perhaps I detached myself a lot, and maybe that means I wasn't as alive, I wasn't as connected to reality as I should've been. On the other hand, there's been a lot of times that I haven't felt that I have been as alive as I was then. A lot of times since then, existences seemed mundane and meaningless. Making a living.

GD: Does that mean that you miss it?

MP: Yea, in a way it does. And I wasn't the only one. I think that I mentioned to you already the quote that was painted on one of the walls at Bien Hoa about, ‘For those who've almost died, life has a flavor the protected will never know.’ And I don't know if that's a quote from somebody famous, or if that was just some army artist that thought that up. But anyway, had been painted on the wall of a building at Bien Hoa. And I thought, ‘Yea, that pretty well says it.’ Because you really did feel alive when you realized that you were alive.

GD: How did you get wounded?

MP: I think I already told you this, too. I was reaching for a can of ammunition to reload the machine gun, when a mortar round went off behind me. And I've got a bunch of shrapnel in my shoulder.

GD: Did this happen with Special Forces?

MP: Nah, it was when I was with the 173rd, during my first tour.
GD: Tell me about that. What's it like to be, I guess seriously, to me that is seriously injured?

MP: Well, my first thought was to check out the machine, you know, my body, and decide if this was going to be life threatening or not. And I decided right away that it wasn't going to be life threatening unless a major vessel had been cut and I was bleeding inside and didn't know it. What was strange was it was hard to tell where I was hit. See I was hit back here on the back side of my shoulder but it bled all over the place and the whole shoulder and back was numb. I mean, it burned, it burned real bad, but the pain was so intense, it was kind of a numb effect where I couldn't tell which part of my shoulder was hurt. And a guy named Parks was trying to raise my arm up to see if I was hit in the armpit, he couldn't tell where I was hit either. And there was just too much blood, and he would try to clean the blood off so he could see, and he says, 'Man, I can't tell where you're hit.' And so he just took these compress bandages we had, and just packed a bunch of them all around that area and just tied them across my shoulder and my neck to hold them up there. And that was about five o'clock in the morning and we were still being assaulted while that happened. And so, Parks took care of me; we had these little holes we had dug and put sandbags over them. So he drug me down into this hole and bandaged me up. And as soon as we figured out that I wasn't going to bleed to death, I got claustrophobic in that hole. I gave my M-16 to, I don't know who I gave it to. But I gave my M-16 to somebody. And Weasel had a .45, so Weasel was using the machine gun anyway so he gave me his .45. And I didn't get a chance to shoot it at all, but I climbed out of that hole because I was so claustrophobic down there. And the assault pretty well tapered off at that point, anyway. And so, then we had to wait for a helicopter, and that didn't happen until about 7:00. And when it came in, they shot at it. And there were people that were wounded a whole lot worse than I was. It seems we almost didn't get everybody on that helicopter, we managed to get all the wounded off in one lift. We put nine people on that helicopter. And at first I didn't want to take any morphine because I was so anti-drug plus I was being pretty macho. I was going to tough this out, by God. But after about an hour, it was getting to hurt like a son-of-a-bitch. And I thought, 'You know, maybe this morphine wouldn't be such a bad idea'. So, the medic came, and came back around. And he asked me again. And I was so glad he asked me...
again, because I wasn't going to ask him. But he asked me again if I didn't want to try the
morphine, and I said, 'Well, guess I will. So he gives me, the morphine came in, I don't
know if you've ever seen the military; they're these serrates. It's a little tube, it's like the
same size tube that Blistex comes in, a little squeeze tube with a needle on the end of it.
And it's I don't know how many milligrams of morphine. Anyway, he sticks it in my leg
and injects me and it didn't quit hurting, but I didn't care. I didn't get real high, it just
helped me control the pain. And we managed to get everybody on the helicopter. And by
the time the helicopter landed... let's see, did we go to Pleiku or ... we stopped at an aid
station at Kontum at a helicopter pad. And the aid station made sure that nobody
was bleeding to death, that there wasn't anybody seriously wounded right there. And we
were all relatively okay. And then the helicopter took off again and flew us to Pleiku.
And that was kind of neat because the medical people really bent over backwards. They
came running out there with jeeps; the kind of jeeps that carry the stretchers. It was
just like in M.A.S.H., they were waiting for us. Putting everybody on stretchers, and I
could walk, and it seemed like there were a lot of people that couldn't walk, and so I
wouldn't let them put me on a stretcher and I just walked up to the deal.

GD: Did they have triage?

MP: Oh, yea. Yea, they were very careful about figuring out who's what and
figuring out what your mental status is. Some guys could be hurt real bad but still
walking, like me, for example. And I wasn't really hurt that bad, but they weren't going to
let me get away with just saying, 'I'm okay, I'm okay.' And they evaluated us, triaged us
just right there at the edge of the helicopter pad. Took x-rays. With me they decided there
was no point in trying to get the shrapnel out of there, it was too deep, and surgery would
cause more problems. And so they left the wound open, packed it with antibiotics, and
sent me off to the ward. And gave me instructions not to take a shower. Well, I'm in a
ward, and there's a shower outside? That night I started feeling pretty good. Goddamn
right I went out and took a shower. And I tried real hard not to get the wound wet, but I
couldn't help myself. I remember thinking, 'Well, what the fuck. How dirty could this
water be, I mean, I've already been out in the jungle.' And I got the wound wet and
everything. But, it didn't get infected. I healed up so fucking fast I couldn't believe it.

GD: Too fast?
MP: Well, you had to be wounded for thirty days in order to get a trip to Japan.
And I was released back to my unit after twenty-eight days [laugh].
GD: Kind of upsetting?
MP: No, I was anxious to get back. And I didn't have to do anything anyway,
when I got back. I went back to An Khe and hung around the base camp and generally
fucked around. I still couldn't lift my arm very well. I was having a lot of problems with
that. And even now... I'm not sure there's any connection with the wound and the
problems I have in my right arm, but it's funny that I do have problems with this shoulder
[indicates right shoulder] and not with this one [left shoulder]. So there may be some
problem there, because raising it is still a problem.
GD: Did they have a nickname for you in your unit? What'd they call you?
MP: Paul. No, no nicknames. Now, when I went to Special Forces, we all had call
signs, because we were always on the radio a lot. And that's the closest I came to a
nickname, was that everybody became their call sign. And I don't know why I chose
Dallas, but I used Dallas as a call sign. We had a really funny guy come into the unit, and
he wanted to be ‘Ina gada davida’ [laugh]. And Major Mize, it wasn't so much Major
Mize as the Sergeant Major. Sergeant Major says: ‘Ina what?’ And he told him, ‘Ina gada
davida’. And he said, ‘You're not going to be any goddamn ina-whatever you said.’
[laugh]. So, he became Iron Butterfly [laugh]. And I think I remember now why I chose
Dallas, because a good friend of mine was from Berkley. And he became Berkley.
Several people just used places where they were from or where they were near.
GD: Why not Lubbock?
MP: For some reason I wanted to disassociate myself with Lubbock. When I left
Lubbock, I hated it, I didn't ever want to come back. I didn't think I'd ever be back here.
And I was using Dallas as my mailing address because my parents lived in Dallas. There
was a guy named, one of the call signs of a good friend of mine, a medic, he was Tracks.
Can't remember any of the others at the moment.
GD: What was the significance of tracks?
MP: I'm not sure. He may have possibly been in a mechanized unit at one point on
a track. It may have had something to do with needles. Giving people shots and leaving
them tracks. I'm not sure why he was called Tracks. It's too bad we didn't do this
eighteen, nineteen years ago because there's so much I can't remember anymore.
GD: Has this whole process, so far, brought back some things you thought you'd
forgotten?
MP: Well, yea, as a matter of fact, I'd forgotten Berkley. I mean, I hadn't forgotten
the person, but I'd forgotten his name. And I know now the reason that I forgot his name
is because he wasn't a person, his name was Berkley to me. And for years I've tried to
remember what his real name was. I probably would've barely knew his real name. And if
I'd realized that, you know, he was using a pseudonym. I'm not sure which of these events
it's helped me recall. But, yea, certainly some of them. I've probably thought more about
this the past week than I have in years. I hope that's a good thing. See, I thought about
Vietnam for years and years. I mean, every day. And it's only been the past few years that
I've quit thinking about it, so we might be taking a step backwards by doing this.
GD: I hope not. Were you politically active before you went?
MP: No. I was vaguely supportive of the Republicans. But I didn't really give a
shit. And I was vaguely supportive of Kissinger's Domino Theory.
GD: Did you have a chance to vote while you were in Vietnam?
MP: I was too young.
GD: What about the soldiers that weren't. Did they have a chance to vote?
MP: Yea.
GD: How did they do it?
MP: Absentee.
GD: Any of them participate in the voting process?
MP: I know some did, because I remember. I don't remember if we had a
Presidential election during that period or not, but I do remember something about an
election at one point where it was mentioned, somebody was mentioning how to do the
voting process. And of course, you know, I didn't care, because I was too young.
GD: Do you think Vietnam has affected your political views?
MP: I'm sure it has, but I don't know how, I'm more a Libertarian now than I am a
Republican. But I know they don't have a chance in the world of getting anything done,
so when I vote, I tend to support Republican candidates. So, in that respect, I'm not sure
my politics have changed that much. I'm not a very political person. And my studies since
Vietnam have made me less political than I was before. Especially as I've read Plato and
the Greeks, I'm not all that in favor of democracy. Which is something else that I thought
about during the week that I wanted to bring up, that for me, at least, those two years in
Vietnam were an education that I couldn't have gotten anywhere else. And I'm talking
about the reading. Because they sent so many books over there. Whether you were in the
infantry, or no matter where you were, there was a lot of the time when there was nothing
to do. Hours and hours. And they shipped us tons of books on every subject you could
imagine. Paperbacks and hardbacks, especially paperbacks because they knew we wanted
to be able to carry them around with us. And people would send us old books and used
books, but what would surprise me was that we got tons of brand new books.
Straight from the publishers. And it was in Vietnam when I started reading all these
existentialists. And I read things that I've read over since then, and I can't understand it
now, so I know I didn't understand it then. I was reading English philosophers like Locke
and Hume. I started reading Decarte. Got real heavy into Herman Hesse. I read Nietzsche.
I also read a lot of science fiction over there. Robert Heinlen was big then for me. So it
was like I had this literary education going on at the same time. Most of it fairly
subversive literature [laugh].

GD: Was this a by-product of the war?

MP: You mean the reading I was doing? I don't know, it'd been interesting if you
could look at what an alternate life might have been. Say there hadn't been a war, and the
same person had this alternate life. Would the alternate person have read the same books?
I don't know, I don't know what triggered it. Maybe it just so happened I picked up a
particular book and got interested in it. But I started reading Herman Hesse, and I read
almost everything I could get my hands on by Herman Hesse. And the books I was
reading would usually seem to be left over. I could be real junior in the unit, and get last
pick, and still find the books I wanted to read, because I was reading shit people didn't
want to read. And even though I didn't learn very much from some of that stuff, in terms
of understanding it. Here I am, forty years old, and I still have to go back and read those
things again and have a tough time understanding them. But it showed me that there was
an intellectual life, a mental world far beyond anything available to me then. And during
the last part of my second year in Vietnam, where I was getting ready to come home, and part of me wanted to stay over there. And part of me was saying, ‘This is way too limited. Regardless of what happens over here, we're not going to win this war. This is going to be over, and you might as well be one of the ones that walks away from it and experiences some of that other world. The world of ideas and concepts. And not to limit yourself to a cause that's going to fail for innumerable reasons, and none of them you can do anything about.’ I think I read more books in Vietnam than I might have read if I had stayed home and gone to college. Because I always had a paperback book in my pocket. And I still read, well, nowadays I tend to read three or four books at a time. But I don't read near at all at the rate I use to. I'm a fast reader, and then see, I can sit down for six hours at a time, and read straight through all that time.

GD: Do you think as a whole that this experience that you went through in Vietnam, did it change you for the better?

MP: Yea. I think that's the only way you can ever look at experience. If we are the sum total of our experiences it would be hard to imagine a situation where you said, ‘Well, I'm not as good a person as I would've been.’ I think experiences must take you in different directions, but all experience... I might be on the verge of something profound here about philosophy, that all experience has to make changes for the better, regardless of what that experience is. At any rate, I don't regret any of it. And there's some material advantages to having been a Vietnam veteran. It's been real handy, maybe not in terms of financial reward, but certainly in recent years. You get all sorts of psychological pats on the back nowadays for having done it, which is kind of funny, because you think, ‘Gee, why didn't you do this twenty years ago? Now we're all too old to give a shit.’ But it's still kind of nice. It's probably not fair, but probably some people will give a Vietnam veteran a break because of being a vet. He doesn't deserve one, but somebody feels guilty because they didn't go, and they're willing to give somebody a break because of it. You know, I've had a little bit of the same experience myself, as I mentioned to you once, about the guy I arrested who'd done three tours in Vietnam? And I gave him a little bit of a break. One time when I came home on leave, came home and bought a motorcycle the next day. I was only going to be here thirty days, but by god, I bought that motorcycle so I could ride it for thirty days [laughing]. And I went out on the Clovis Highway, at three
o'clock in the morning. And I was wrapped real tight then. It was just really strange being 
back in the States during that period. And I was driving that motorcycle about eighty or 
ninety miles an hour down the Clovis highway and a Lubbock cop pulls me over. You 
know, it's pretty strange, an eighteen or nineteen year old guy on a motorcycle at three 
o'clock in the morning driving real fast. And I could see a whole lot of reasons for him to 
give me a hard time. But he asked me where I worked and what I was doing, and I told 
him that I was on leave from Vietnam. I don't remember the whole conversation, but I 
just remember that he just said, ‘Have a good night.’ Turned me loose. I thought that was 
pretty nice. On the other hand, I was caught parking with my girlfriend at the time. And 
we were just making out, we weren't trying to screw in the car or anything. And two cops 
in a car came up and shined their lights on us, made me get out, put me in the back seat of 
the car. Asking me all kinds of questions, giving me a real hard time like I'm some kind 
of fucking criminal. And wanted to know who I was and where I worked. I gave them my 
driver's license and my military I.D., and again, I don't remember all the conversation, but 
I remember at one point I said, ‘Look, man, I'm a sergeant in the army. I'm just home 
from Vietnam, I'm going back.’ You know, he wanted to know what unit I was in and I 
told him. And at one point I reiterated that I was a sergeant. One of the officers got real 
pissed off. I mean pissed. And he says, ‘I don't give a goddamn what rank you are.’ And I 
couldn't figure out why was this guy's reaction, why was he so hostile? Apparently my 
remark about my rank had pissed him off. And I'd already been treated nice by a cop 
because I was a veteran. Now was I seeing the other side, where I was being treated 
harshly for some reason. And now I have to wonder what the reasons are there. Is he 
resentful because I'm a sergeant and I'm real young, and look like a baby, I was real baby- 
faced? Or is he resentful because I went and he stayed home? Because he wasn't much 
older than me, he was certainly of age to go to Vietnam. Is he nervous about that? You 
know, there's been a whole lot of work done on a lot of the people that didn't go suffered 
years of self-doubt, self-incrimination and some mental trauma because they thought they 
chickened out, they should've gone. I wonder if that's what was going on with that guy. 
Sure gave me a bad impression of cops [laugh].
GD: This is Garth Davis. It is 2:30 p.m. on February 23rd, 1990. I am interviewing for the fourth time Marshall Paul. This interview is taking place at the home of Mr. Paul. This is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas Tech University. Well Marshall, final thoughts on Special Forces.

MP: Final thoughts, huh?

GD: Anything we've left out so far?

MP: Yea, we've left out a whole lot of stuff. But I don't think that's really that important because, you know, it was naïve of us to think we could cover the Vietnam War in thirty minutes, anyway. And, when you get down to it, I don't know what we've done here, four or five or six hours. You know, we can't cover any one person's experience in that length of time. I've given it a whole lot of thought, thinking, ‘Gee, should I think of more war stories? Should I talk more about the girls I had over there?’ because that was a big part of my life, you know, I lost my virginity in Vietnam. And, I'd never gotten laid until I got over there. And I loved the Vietnamese girls, and I thought, ‘Well, should I talk more about my girlfriends?’ I talked a lot about my education and pursuits, the reading of books. That I thought that might be a surprise to some people. I'm not sure what's important at this point. I don't know how you feel about it, but maybe it's significant to talk about coming home. You had this experience, and then it's supposed to end when you ETS, but it doesn't really end. And at the time we all thought it did.

GD: Where did you arrive at the States at?
MP: Ft. Bliss, Washington was the place I was discharged from. We arrived at SeaTac airport, Seattle-Tacoma. You'd come in on a 727. Flying Tiger airlines. No, it wasn't a 727, it was a 707, yea. It was big jets. And that was so strange, because you know, you go from that hot, muggy climate, which I really, really liked, to Seattle/Tacoma. And even in May... let's see, it was April when I got out. And it was a considerably cooler climate, everything was different. And within less than twenty-four hours, I was discharged from the army. And, so I had all this cash on me, they used to pay us in cash those days. I had over two thousand dollars in cash in my pocket, which, you know, 1970, was probably a lot more money than it is now, and I consider two thousand dollars a lot of money now to be carrying on me. So I had a lot of cash, and suddenly I'm a civilian. And that was really strange. You know, we all got a cab and went from Ft. Lewis. And when they discharged us, I don't even remember the event. It happened so fast, it was just a blur of being processed out and then you're gone. Because that place ran twenty-four hours a day. It was sometime during the night. And like every hour, hour and a half they'd have a formation, and call out names. So, you were processed out in the middle of the night, you didn't know or care if you'd been sleeping, you were just wired, because you were getting out now. And it was like, it's all over now. And we would just go back to being who we were before. And everybody had all these plans, and everybody was all excited. I got to Seattle/Tacoma airport and I'm wearing... still in uniform, because in those days you could fly half fare if you were in uniform. And I'm walking down this long causeway, or this long hallway at the airport, and a really, really cute looking girl comes up to me. She has kind of a schoolgirl kind of a look with a cute little skirt that comes out at an angle like that, and it's short above the knee, and she looks like she's maybe seventeen, eighteen years old, really pretty. And she comes up to me and smiles, and I don't remember her exact words, but she was real friendly, and I was real surprised that this girl, an absolute stranger was so friendly toward a GI because I'd had just the opposite experiences with a lot of civilians during my other leaves. And when she asked me if I wanted to go with her, and I said, ‘Where to?’ And she said, ‘Up to my hotel room.’ And I shook my head and I went, ‘Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute. Are you a prostitute?’ And she smiles and says, ‘Why yes, of course.’ And I went, ‘Oh, my god, I can't believe you're a prostitute!’ [laughing]. I was only used to Vietnamese prostitutes,
and they have a different approach. I wasn't used to the idea of this cute little American
schoolgirl being a prostitute. Anyway, I thanked her, and it's funny, I felt flattered. Even
though she was a prostitute, I was flattered that this girl had approached me. And I
thought, ‘Boy, it's different here in the States.’ And walking around I had this... I'd never
been to Disneyland at that point in my life. But it was like being in the United States is
like being in Disneyland. This is so unreal. And that feeling lasted for a few days, the
Disneyland feeling. But the unreal feeling, that went on for I think, years. And the
unreality, the etherealness, it was like this world could dissolve at any moment with
mortar rounds coming in. See, that was in April of ’70, when I was discharged. And I only
stayed a civilian about nine months. And I ran back to get into the Army, I was so
uncomfortable with civilian life. But during that nine months, I went to Austin. And I
tried to enroll... Well, I did enroll at the University of Texas and was going to summer
school. And during that summer, there were these heavy anti-war demonstrations going
on. That’s what all the young kids were doing, was going to demonstrations. And so I
would go to demonstrations. And that was very frustrating for me because I had this
feeling of this unreal world I was living in. It didn't seem permanent, it seemed like it
could dissolve at any moment into, well, like I said, mortar rounds coming in I think
was... I had this expectancy of mortar rounds coming in. I was walking around waiting
for that initial whiz... bang. Just when you get a mortar attack. And, at the same time,
these people that I was running around with going to demonstrations were all anti-war.
Were anti-Vietnam war. And they were particularly critical of Special Forces.

GD: Did they know that you were in Special Forces?

MP: Yea. Yea, because the group of friends I joined when I got to Austin, some of
them had been friends of mine in Lubbock when I was in high school. So everybody
knew. And I really don't know what they thought of me. You know, I tried to fit in, but I
know I didn't. I got a peace sign and I put it on my car. It was an American flag peace
sign, which upset the hell out of my dad. And I remember defending it to my dad saying,
‘Look, if anybody ought to be able to put a peace sign on his car, it ought to be me.’ But,
I went to one demonstration and they were talking about Special Forces going into
Cambodia. And my stomach... well I had gotten a letter from one of my friends that my
unit had gone to Cambodia, the Mike Force had. And my stomach just dropped, because
I'm standing at a demonstration, demonstrating against the invasion of Cambodia, and I'm feeling guiltier than shit because I'm not with them. And I remember thinking, ‘Am I right? Am I smarter than the twenty thousand people in this demonstration? Or are they all... you know, who's fucked up here, who's wrong? Or is it just two points of view, and neither one of them makes a difference?’ I didn't come to any conclusion then, and I'm not sure I have now. But I was so uncomfortable with civilian life, that within nine months I was back in the army again. And in fact, I tried to go back to Vietnam. But by late '70, things were winding down, or they had started to wind down, as far as sending troops. And since I enlisted as an Airborne volunteer again, I got sent to Ft. Bragg in the 82nd Airborne. And I never got a chance to go over there again. And being in the 82nd gave me a chance to decompress somewhat. But in '73, I got out of the Airborne. And being a civilian, went back to college. And that's when I really started having, it was funny. It was like I'd delayed some things by staying in the Army for three more years. But I didn't get rid of them, because in '73, I was going to college at Southwestern, or it was Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. And I won't call them hallucinations, and I'm not sure if they're what people would call flashbacks, but, you know I mentioned before waiting for the mortar rounds to come in? I could almost hear them coming in. And I didn't have that experience when I was in the 82nd. At Ft. Bragg, I really played the soldiers life up to the max those years I was in the 82nd. And I told myself and everybody else I wanted to get back into it. But it was a real comfortable period of life for me, I think. But after I got out of the Army again, it started up, the thoughts about getting into combat. And at that point I was... all the things were getting weird for me. I left my first wife at that point. And, like I say, I was having as close to a flashback as I can imagine. I started trying to get a job as a mercenary. I started writing letters to people that I knew of then that had mercenary connections. And I got a job as an ambulance driver. And I really, really liked that job. The pay was lousy, but it was like being on the front lines again. We were out there on the leading edge of people being shot and people getting stabbed and car wrecks. Driving real fast, a lot of craziness. And I think I was still just trying to come down from Vietnam, really. Even though it was, at that point, four years after the term. And I have since reacquainted myself, and I know I've talked to you about this personally, reacquainted myself with my first wife. Over the
past few months, we've done a lot of talking and a lot of letter writing. And she's told me
that when she found out about, in '83 or '84 when she started finding out about this post-
traumatic stress syndrome, she got real interested in it and started reading about it. And
she immediately thought, 'This is Marshall. These things all point to everything that was
going on with him.' That I exhibited that all through that period when I was in the 82nd,
and while I thought everything was fine, she's told me recently that everything was not
fine. That I was exhibiting a lot of those symptoms of so called stress syndrome then. I
just didn't know it. So I think that the point to all of this was that you thought that when
you ETSed, it was over. But it wasn't. And I know I dreamt about Vietnam for years. And
then I quit gradually and didn't dream about it for probably ten years, until we started
these interviews. And I've only dreamt about it once since we started this, about three
days ago. I dreamt I was in Vietnam again. And it was like watching a movie that you've
seen a long time ago? A movie you're real familiar with? And that's what the dream was
like. I knew I was dreaming, and I was in this familiar dream again. I think that was kind
of interesting. It wasn't a bad dream by any means it was just the fact that; wow, rice
paddies, helicopters. Dinks with conical hats.

GD: Let me get your thoughts on some things. I'll just throw these out, see if you
have any thoughts on them. A minute ago, you said that when you ETSed, you thought
you could get back to the business of 'being who we were before'. Did you?

MP: No.

GD: Could you?

MP: No. It was like going through a door and the door changed you. And part of
that is probably just the process of maturing, because we were so young. I joined the
army at seventeen and by the time I'm twenty, in those three years, you're doing a lot of
maturing and going through a lot of formative stages. And if you start pressurizing that
period, there's no way you're going to be who you were before. Before I joined the army,
I had a scholarship to go to the University of Texas. The Navy ROTC scholarship. And I
had grown up thinking that I was going to be some kind of a military person, but I was
thinking I wanted to be a pilot. And I even had a pilot's license that I'd gotten while I was
in high school. I was so gung ho, I was going to prepare myself early, and I had worked
and gotten myself a private pilot's license. And I came back from Vietnam, and hell, I
couldn't stay in school. School was really stranger than shit that summer at the University of Texas. The college girls, I tried to go out with some of the college girls. And there wasn't anything wrong with them, but we weren't having conversations. And I thought, ‘What is wrong with these girls here?’ I don't remember having any trouble at all talking to a Vietnamese whore. I wanted to have a talk with a Vietnamese whore, I missed them. It was like, the Vietnamese prostitutes were better grounded in the real world than these college girls that I was meeting. No, I don't think anybody can go back again. And maybe they should have told us that, maybe they should've said, ‘You're going to be different now. Now let's make some adjustments and let's change our expectations about who we are and what we want to be, what we want to do with our lives.’ The Army puts out a lot of propaganda about learning how to be a leader and taking control. And the Army is democratic in the sense that they don't give a shit if you're eighteen years old, nineteen, twenty, or what. If you can do the job, they'll let you do it. And so a lot of us were squad leaders and commanded men in battle, and did things that you'd expect a really mature adult to do. And then you come back from that, you're twenty years old, and you've had tremendous responsibility in terms of people's lives, money, equipment. You're somebody that can take some risks and carry responsibility. And you can do that, there's no question about it. And the job that I ended up with in Austin, during that period I was trying to figure out how to go to school and how to be a civilian. The best I could come up with was delivering newspapers for the fucking newspaper! And having trouble collecting money because I was letting my hair grow long, and people didn't want to pay me because they thought I was a hippie. And, you know, I thought, ‘You know, I'd deserve to get paid, even if I were a hippie. What the hell difference does it make how long my hair is?’ And so, the process of coming home was changing me as much as being over there, I think.

GD: Loss of innocence.

MP: Loss of innocence. Explain that a little bit, I'm not sure what you're asking.

GD: What were your expectations going to Vietnam, and are there any things about yourself that you miss that you may have lost, or that were changed significantly while you were over there?
MP: If I lost my innocence over there, I think it was a good thing. I think if I lost something in terms of... if there is such a thing as people being innocent, I think that was a positive thing. I don't regret it. If you're asking if I regret. It seems like this phrase of losing of one's innocence, the question presupposes that one would regret losing that, whatever it is. And I don't regret any of that change. I knew that I was young and inexperienced when I went over there, and I wanted to be something more than that. My naivety kept me from realizing how much I would change, but I don't regret the change at all. Not at all. I would recommend it for anybody. That's probably a pretty controversial point. I think one of the reasons we have wars is because not everybody realizes what goes into one. But you don't have very many combat veterans trying to start wars. Maybe if we could take the entire population, all at once, and put them into a war. I'm trying to think about that before I get myself too deep into this. The Soviet Union put their entire population into a war and although the United States has been paranoid about them for forty years, I haven't seen the Soviet Union trying to start another war lately. I think rite of passage is a better word, at least for my experience, than loss of innocence. And maybe I'm fortunate that what I went through was a limited war, it wasn't total war. While there was some barbarity to it, and certainly some hazards, there was still ethical conduct. We still knew who we were and what we were doing. A total war, I'm sure, is a different thing. I didn't experience the kind of thing that happened in Cambodia with the Khmer Rouge. That sort of thing is so horrific that I can barely imagine it or what happened with the Nazi extermination camps. You know, my experience was nothing like that. So, in the limited extent that I experienced war, I'm glad I did.

GD: Did you run into any protesters at Seattle?

MP: No, I ran into them at ... well, I have two glaring memories of people. One was at O'Hare field in Chicago. I came home on leave; since I kept extending my tour over there, for a six month extension, they'd give you thirty days special leave. And so, one of those thirty day leaves I came home and went to a friend of mine's wedding in Connecticut. Richard Beuw and I'd been in the 173rd together. He'd come home earlier. And so, I went up there to be in his wedding. And walking down the concourse at O'Hare, I was walking toward one of these waiting areas. And the waiting area was full of people, and it was a group of some kind. A fairly homogeneous group of people, they were
connected to each other somehow. I don't know what their relationship was, but they
were all what we characterized as hippies at the time. And I was walking down the
concourse by myself; a pretty girl with long brown hair had turned around and looked,
and saw me, and then she stood up and pointed and said, ‘Look, there's a Green Beret.’
Very loudly, and then the entire group which had been having conversation and talking in
little groups, stopped, and then everybody, and I'm talking maybe eighty people, turned
around and then stared at me. And I'm walking down this long concourse coming toward
them, and the concourse started getting longer and longer [laugh]. And it curved and I
had to walk by them. And as I walked by, there were catcalls. And I don't remember any
of them. You know, by that time, there was like this roaring going on in my head. I was
so self-conscious, and I was so fucking angry that they were doing this to me. You know,
I thought, ‘What do I do? March past them at attention? Flip them off? Do I appear
nonchalant? How do I deal with this?’ I've got eighty people staring at me. And all I'm
trying to do is go to my friend's wedding. And I'm traveling in uniform because it's half
fare, and because I'm fairly proud of the deal, but you know, that's not a big crime, to be
proud of your uniform. It's a little naive. But it's no crime, and I met these people yelling
things at me that I don't want to hear. And while I don't remember any of them
specifically, I know there was... I have this vague recollection of people saying... one of
the popular catch phrases was, ‘How many babies have you killed?’ There was some of
that kind of stuff coming through. And I thought, ‘God, I've never killed a baby, I've
never even seen a baby killed. All I've seen were professional North Vietnamese soldiers
who were armed as well as I was armed, equipped as well as I was equipped.’ The war I
was involved in was against a professional Army in the field. It wasn't like we were over
there against peasants using hoes and axes, I mean, this was a modern war, as far as I
was concerned. And it was fair, what's wrong with that? We were taking our casualties
and they were taking theirs. And I was with a bunch of volunteers, I didn't have to
experience that; being in a unit full of draftees. And whose business was it of this group
of people if I volunteered to go do this? So, the experience at O'Hare was indelibly
stamped. The next big one occurred a couple of years later, after I came back from
Vietnam, but the war was still cranking pretty good. Although for most of us... I was in
the 82nd, and I was in a battalion that was chosen to be at President Nixon's inauguration
as part of the honor guard outside the White House. And my whole battalion didn't go. I was in the recon platoon, and they selected people from the recon platoon, and a couple of guys from the line companies. And so we were an honor cordon right there on Pennsylvania Avenue. And we were not designed to actually hold the crowds back, the crowds were up on the curbs and the sidewalks, and there were ropes. And we were six feet away from the curb standing in the street, and the troops were in a cordon standing at parade rest twenty yards apart. So there's a good distance between soldiers, I mean, we were obviously there strictly for ceremonial reasons. There was no other function, didn't have any weapons, we were in our dress uniforms and our spit-shined boots. And my job was simply to watch the guys who were standing at parade rest, and I'd walk up and down between my guys, who were part of the cordon, and the crowd. And if the crowd were to start coming across the ropes, I would gently remind them to stay back. We weren't there to control the crowd, there wasn't expected to be any kind of hassle. Now, most of my troops had not been in Vietnam. But most of the sergeants that were like myself, that had little groups, we had been. And there was one place in the crowd where the crowd was real unruly. And they were throwing things and hitting my guys and calling them names. And hell, these are young kids. They've joined up since the Vietnam War started winding down, they hadn't gone and weren't going to get to go. And so, I would go over there to kind of intercede, in fact, redirect their ire toward me and take the heat off of these young kids. Young kids; I was only twenty-one at the time. But I had all the ribbons and I had all the stripes. And that was one instance where I remember specifically people saying things, ‘Well, sergeant, how many babies did you kill in Vietnam?’ Well, I know that they were really not mad at me, they were mad at Nixon. But it made me very angry. And my job there required that I be diplomatic and that I not respond to any of those kind of questions. Pretty hard for a twenty-one year old kid to deal with that. At that point, I was afraid our country was on the verge of some kind of a major revolution. Hell, we'd come here to see the President become inaugurated. And the audiences are hostile! So, those were my two major memories of that kind of thing happening. If there were some others, they weren't major enough to really make that big of an impression. I probably blanked some of them out.
GD: Do you note any contrasts between what you do now, as a policeman, and the war, as being a soldier?

MP: Lot of comparisons. You know that I patrol east Lubbock a lot, and a lot of times I feel like an occupation soldier patrolling occupied territory. And I don't like feeling that way because I feel like I serve the people. Regardless of whether they're black or white or yellow, but there are some obvious feelings that are very similar. But, yea, there's a lot of comparison between patrolling in a police car and patrolling in the jungle. And particularly in the summer times when we do a lot of this... I like to do it anyway, even in cold weather. Park my car, get out and go patrol on foot, sneak around in the dark. This summer we were doing shotguns and sneaking up and down alleys, and then those of us that were doing it had all been in the Army. And we were using the same tactics with keeping our distance and keeping ourselves staggered and using hand and arm signals. So, yea, there's a lot of similarity there. You asked about political thoughts. I don't vote anymore because I feel like by not voting, I'm making a choice. It's not that I don't care who gets elected to a particular job, but I trust the ones that are interested enough to vote to make the decisions for me, and I'm just willing to let them go along. The thing is, I don't think it makes any difference. I think we could take all the candidates and mix their names up in a hat, and pick one at random, and it wouldn't really make any qualitative difference in the world. I don't trust the kinds of personalities, the people that want the offices. You know, I know a lot about the history of Vietnam, and I know you do, and how the war got started, and how we kind of slipped into it. And initially I trusted why we were over there, to protect these people from the communists. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that kind of thinking. I think that our motives were noble, our intentions were good. But in the end, it hasn't really made any difference. Not if you look at the communist world today, it's dissolving, everything's falling down all around their ears. In the light of that, one wonders, why fight the war at all? But at the time, we didn't know what we know now. And I always felt sorry for Johnson. Johnson took a lot of shit, and yet, I think he was trying to do what he felt was best for those of us who were already over there. I think he inherited a bad job, and found that there were a lot of American soldiers that needed to be supported. You know, sometimes you just have to take sides. And he took a side, and he chose his own country, and he chose to bomb the ever living
shit out of the North Vietnamese. And maybe from a world perspective, he needs to be
condemned. But, hey, he made his choices, and he's prepared to live with them. And I
guess the same thing could be said of Jane Fonda. But I can condone Johnson's actions a
lot easier than I can condone Jane Fonda's, because I've made choices too. And I'm not
necessarily feeling right about myself in condemning Jane Fonda. I don't feel like I'm
evolved enough to forgive her. But I've made some choices here, and she's just going to
have to live with how I feel about it. I think the war taught me not to trust political
systems. And not maybe for the reasons that you'd suspect. It's not that the political
system got me into a situation that I felt was so bad, but the political system, it didn't
follow through because of a vocal minority of protesters, who may or may not have been
right, the war was turned aside, and we never got to finish it like I really believed we
should've. And even in the light of saying, ‘Well, suppose we never fought the war, and
the communist world came to the same conclusion it's come to in recent years,’ I think
that bloodbath in Cambodia was inexcusable. And the Vietnamese communists didn't put
their people through that. But they were closely related to Khmer Rouge, and we knew
what was going to happen. And even as it happened, it was in the back pages of the
newspapers. And the protesters and the peace mongers in this country turned a blind eye
to that whole event. As long as they got the American troops out of Vietnam... what, at
the height of the war there were 500,000 troops. Ten percent of those were combat
troops. All the rest were support, so really, except for a few being killed by incoming
mortar rounds, you're high risk troops were a small percentage. The American people are
so gutless, that we can't risk a few thousand people, a few thousand lives? We've got to
back off, and let the Khmer Rouge kill three million? Four million? I mean, that was on
the same order of the Nazi holocaust! I grew up going to school in the fifties and sixties
where everybody said, ‘Oh, the world will never let the holocaust happen again, we're
enlightened now. The Nazis were an aberration, it can't happen again.’ Shit, we turned
right around and let it happen this time. Just fucking let it happen. And the political
system let us down there because, I mean, hell, if you're going to have a war, let's have a
war. Well, we had a war, we had the machinery in place to do something. And the
political system, which is supposed to be democratic, was swayed by protesters in the
streets! Hell, they weren't even voting! But, you know, the political system began to not
work so much on democracy as by emotion, the media, things that we saw and read. So,
from my perspective, that was very enlightening. What difference would it have made if I
voted for Nixon? I did vote for Nixon, by the way, because he promised to give the
military a raise, and he gave us one. And Nixon bombed the shit out of the North too,
mined Haiphong. But what good did it do us to elect a man that was doing what I wanted
him to do, if the machinery that he had in place couldn't fulfill it's promise to do that? I
feel like I'm kind of rambling on. I don't know if that really made any sense. I've lost a lot
of faith with the whole democratic process, but not just because of Vietnam, part of it is
from reading Greek philosophy, and becoming disillusioned with the democratic
processes in general. All the time that I was growing up, my mother would preach to me
that the best government was one led by a benevolent dictator. The only problem that you
have there is changing power when your dictator dies. But I think that fits right in with
the Aristotelian model of philosopher King's. You know, look at who the people are. If
you're going to have your country nor your governments led by the lowest common
denominator, that's what you've got with democracy. Take what the average thinks,
nothing sensational, something that just fits what everybody's mold is to the ideal, and
that's what you get with democracy. And look how much better the North Vietnamese did
with their leadership. Ho Chi Minh and General Giap. Those two guys went right on
through for thirty or forty years, and they beat a country like us? I think that says
something about... and I think their economic theory about Marxism is beside the point.
He could have had that kind of a political system in any kind of a dictatorship or inherited
kingship. Look how much better it functioned against us. Does that address the political
side of things [laugh]?

GD: I think so.

MP: One idea that I came up with; this was a brilliant idea, was the idea of the
American Foreign Legion. I didn't really know who to get this idea to to make it fly... I
never generated a lot of interest with it. But when you had all the Vietnamese coming
over here, I thought that if all the Vietnam veterans that wanted to be in the military but
weren't fitting in too good with the traditional military because, the traditional military
was pretty fucked after the war. What we needed was the American Foreign Legion,
where we took in all comers. If you were just willing to go find a war somewhere.
Wouldn't worry about dress uniforms and living at Ft. Bragg and spit-shined boots, it would be like the French Foreign Legion. It would be a place for all those Vietnamese veterans to go and the American misfits, and take in a few Europeans every now and then for some flavor, and some South Americans. And then when we had our little wars, the American people wouldn't be upset about it. The Frenchmen used the French Foreign Legion for a long time to avoid that very problem. Nobody ever complained in France when a legionnaire was killed. That was a hot idea. It also pissed me off that we didn't take all of our old Cambodians and Laotians and our Montagnards out of there. We hired those guys as mercenaries, paid them, made friends with them. I mean real friends. I think they liked us. And then we leave them over there for the North Vietnamese, abandon them, and we'd always promised we'd take care of them. Of course, in those days, we promised we were going to win the war, too. So, we lost the war, we just pulled out. and left them. That's left a real, real bad taste in my mouth. Special Forces and the CIA, particularly, left a whole bunch of people in Laos. And I occasionally send money to the... there's a Lutheran church group in North Carolina that was started up. They collect money to resettle members of those various ethnic tribes that were working for Special Forces. It's in Raleigh, North Carolina. And I occasionally send money to them to try to help the few that did make it out. I don't see why with all the millions of... all the money we've got, and all of our concerns about social problems, we couldn't resettle every one of those Southeast Asian boat people that are sitting in camps all over the world. There can't be that many people we can't absorb into our population. We've got the money to do it, and we have the resources. And every time one of those groups comes into this country, they turn out to be the best citizens we've ever had. They really make it; they do a whole lot better than our Blacks and our Mexicans that have been here for generations. And that's left a real bad taste in my mouth. You know, it's one thing to pull out of a war, but it's really something else to leave your comrades behind. I told you about that first firefight, I don't know if I mentioned how many got these... the point element was killed and we went back up there not so much to capture the bunker complex, but to get our dead back. In fact, I don't think we got them all back. And we went back the next day to make sure that we got the bodies. And I've seen that happen so many times. If somebody was wounded; you certainly didn't break contact until you got them. And if
somebody was killed, even! I've heard all kinds of stories about horrible combats fought
over retrieving the body of a dead American. Getting more people killed in the process.
And if that's such a point of honor with us, why haven't we done something about
bringing live refugees out of there that were working for us and risking their lives for us,
fighting our war for us? And that doesn't even address the MIA question at all. What
about those guys? History tells us that the communists have been known to keep
prisoners for forty years or more. There have been people that have escaped out of
Siberia in the seventies who were captured at Stalingrad. These are old guys, and they
managed to walk out of there. There's just no question in my mind that, however few,
there are Americans still in North Vietnam. And I don't think our country's done shit
about getting those guys out of there. And I don't care if the North Vietnamese want
money; I've heard stories that what they really want is war reparations. Okay, let's buy
them back, we've got the money. Who cares about loss of face at this point? If we've lost
all the face we're going to lose over that deal; if we're not going to Rambo them out of
there, why don't we give them whatever they want? Economic trade, money, cash,
citizenship. Let's undermine their whole fucking system. Send them cassette tapes of
Bruce Springsteen and tape recorders. The Vietnamese people love us. On a one to one
basis they love Americans. It's just that their governments fucked. And I understand
there's been groups of Americans going back over there in recent years. And I've heard
one account where this American had a cassette tape of 'Born in the U.S.A.' In every little
bar in Vietnam, they have a cassette deck. And he asked to play this, and he said word
really got around. They'd get real excited and play this 'Born in the U.S.A.', and sing it
along with the cassette. He said at one bar there were some Russians in there, and the
Vietnamese refer to the Russians as poor Americans because they're just like us in a lot of
respects, they just don't have the money to spend. And he said when the lyrics.. when the
chorus where they're singing, ‘born in the U.S.A.’, the Vietnamese would turn their faces
so they were projecting that refrain towards the Russians [laughing]. I would like to
go back over there, as a matter of fact. If I could get somebody to go with me. And I hear
it's a pretty cheap trip, in fact, my first wife, Carol, sent me a newspaper clipping recently
that the Vietnamese are trying to encourage tourism. And it's one of the cheapest
countries you can visit right now. You can live like a king for ten dollars a day. And I
don't know what air fare would be, but, hey, for ten bucks a day, it'd make the air fare pretty reasonable. I just may think about that, seriously.