Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I am conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Michael McGregor. The date is 16th of December 2003. I am in the Special Collections Building on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. McGregor is in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Is that right sir?

Michael McGregor: Yes.

LC: Okay. Let’s begin Mike, if we can, just by discussing some general background information. Can you tell me when and where you were born and maybe a little about your childhood?

MM: Okay. Well, I was born in South Bend, Indiana on February 5th, 1943. I was the youngest of two children. My father was in the Army when I was born. Basically, he was a career soldier. He was in for, kind of hard to figure out, but when I was born, he was in about 18, 19 years and then he was subsequently killed on D-Day on Omaha Beach in 1944. So, I basically grew up with kind of an extended family. There was my brother and I, my widowed mother, and she lived with a widowed sister and they both lived with their parents. So, I had a grandmother, two mothers really, and a grandfather, and my brother. I lived in South Bend and grew up in South Bend kind of uneventful childhood; lived there, went to parochial Catholic school through 9 grades and then went to a public high school. I played some football and baseball; went to college. I
did my first two years at the Indiana University Extension Center in South Bend and my
last two years at IU Bloomington graduating in ’65 with a degree in History.

LC: Okay Mike, can I ask you a couple of questions about that?
MM: Sure.

LC: Did your mom work outside the house after she was widowed?
MM: Yes. She did part time until we were; well basically part time most of the
time.

LC: What’d she do?
MM: Well, she worked in a meat market for a while and then she was a
policewoman.

LC: She was a policewoman?
MM: Yes.

LC: Really? How did that come about? Do you know?
MM: Other than the ten thousand dollar GI insurance, she didn’t get any VA
benefits or anything. They didn’t have that then and most of the cops were Veterans and
I think they just looked after people like that, you know. She never really said. It was
like a part time job as basically dealing with schools; with traffic safety, the schools
weren’t like they were today. You didn’t have to worry about guns and stuff. I think she
got involved in some truancy kinds of issues, but basically traffic safety for the kids.
Every school had their patrol boys, like crossing guards at intersections and that, worked
with those kids and trained them and that kind of stuff.

LC: Do you think she enjoyed that work?
MM: Oh yes. She loved it. She did until we were way gone; she retired out of
that.

LC: Is that right? So, was that like a 20-year extent or something that she did?
MM: Probably more than that. I think she started probably in the real early 50’s
doing that and then she had a couple of other part time jobs with that as well. I’m not
sure if she was still doing when I was; I think she was doing it into the mid-60’s and then
she retired.

LC: What was her name?
MM: Alice McGregor.
LC: Okay. And your aunt that you lived with, did she also have jobs outside the
house?
MM: Yes, she had a full time job outside the house.
LC: What’d she do?
MM: She worked in the office at what used to be Ball Band which was part of, I
think it became part of US Rubber which became part of Uniroyal, but they had a big
factory complex in Mishawaka, Indiana where they made basically rain boots and rain
footwear and then they also did some military work. I think they rubberized fuel cells
and stuff like that.
LC: She was working in the office?
MM: Yes. I think she was doing order processing or something.
LC: Did she have children?
MM: No she didn’t. She was widowed. Her husband was a Veteran of the First
World War who was accidentally killed in the, I think, the early 30’s, I’m not sure.
LC: Was it a car accident?
MM: No, in fact, he was at an amusement park watching fireworks and he and a
bunch of other guys were sitting on the roof of a building and the roof collapsed and he
was killed in that.
LC: Oh no. Can we talk about your father for a minute?
MM: Sure.
LC: You said that he was career Army?
MM: Yes.
LC: What was his rank when the World War II began?
MM: He was either a 2nd or a 1st Lieutenant; I’m not sure. I’d have to go back on
that. I don’t know much about my father because his real name was Wilson, and I pieced
this together; well my mom told me some of this. He grew up in Delaware. He was the
middle of three children. He idolized his older brother. His mother died, his father
remarried and his older brother was complaining of a stomachache and how I guess my
dad portrayed it to my mom. The cruel stepmother wouldn’t do anything and probably
just thought the kid had a stomachache, go to bed you’ll feel better in the morning and
then he died of a ruptured appendix. So, my father got very upset about that and he just
ran away from home. He changed his name from Wilson to McGregor and poked around
the country; was out west for a while; fell in love, I guess with horses. He worked on
some ranches and then ended up joining the Army so he could get into the Calvary. This
was probably, as I can piece it together, this is maybe, because he was born in 1903, so
this is probably in the early 20’s that he joined the Army. I tried to get his records, but
they were in a part of the building in St. Louis got all burned up a few years ago. So,
then he was an enlisted man in the Calvary for many years and I think he was
commissioned. He got a regular Army commission in I believe it was ’37 or ’38. I have
that, that’s at home, the document commissioning him.

LC: What unit was he with?

MM: Well, when?

LC: Well, which units was he ever with that you knew?

MM: He was in the 7th Calvary for a while. He was in the 3rd Brigade of the 2nd
Calvary Division which was formed just really pre-2nd World War, maybe ’41 before
Pearl Harbor and then got out of that and then I guess they decided they didn’t need
Horse Calvary because they mechanized and then that was disbanded and he went, I
forget to where he went, and then later the 2nd Calvary was reactivated but he didn’t go
over there because it was reactivated as a black unit. I think they shipped overseas and
then it was disbanded. He left the 2nd Cav. when it was being, I guess, disbanded the first
time and he ended up; I don’t really know what he did. He cycled around the states for a
while and then he was a company commander; he was made Company Commander of
the 461st Amphibious Truck Company.

LC: Okay.

MM: That was a unit that he was with when he shipped over to England. It
shipped around Christmas time of ’43 I understand and then they were attached to the 6th
Special Engineering Brigade and they were scheduled to go to shore on D-plus 90
minutes on Omaha Beach. That’s where he was killed.

LC: Okay. How long had he and your mom been married before he left for
England?

MM: Okay. Let’s see, he left December of ’43. I have to kind of backtrack. My
mother was born in 1910 and she got married when she was 26, so that would’ve been in
1936 they got married and my brother was born in ’41 and then I was born in ’43. They were married, what, maybe 9 years when he shipped out?

LC: Right. Did your father write letters to your mom when he was over there?

MM: Yes.

LC: Do you have any of those?

MM: Yes, I have a bunch of them.

LC: Oh really?

MM: Well, I haven’t gone through all of them. She saved a bunch and when my mother passed away, I got them. My wife got them out of her place and I have them here. It was going to be one of my retirement jobs, I think I’m going to catalog those to see what’s there, but a lot of them were when he was in the states. I’m not sure how much he wrote when he was in overseas.

LC: Right, but you have a goodly collection of letters?

MM: Yes, there’s probably 50, 60 of them.

LC: And your mom never remarried?

MM: No she didn’t.

LC: Do you know where your father was buried?


LC: Have you been over there?

MM: Yes, I went there. I took my son there, oh when was that? It was probably three or four years ago when we went.

LC: How was that? Was it very emotional for you?

MM: Yes, a little bit. I never really knew him, so just one of my goals in life was to see his grave and researching the thing, I really feel sorry for my mother because she was a Polish lady and they really liked to honor their dead and go to cemeteries and that kind of thing because she had the option of bringing him back after the war and she chose not to because she said she didn’t want to disturb his grave. In my research, I found out that he was interred in a temporary cemetery and then when she declined that, he was permanently interred in Cambridge.

LC: And of course that wasn’t explained to her.
MM: No, it wasn’t. It was kind of sad; kind of bitter sweet, but the thing that got me the most was it really put in perspective. The cemetery’s beautifully maintained and we were treated like kings when we went there. There’s two US people, you know the cemetery managers or whatever and they bent over backwards to help us and that. They have a reflecting pond, on one hand there’s a nice chapel and on the other end is the colors and on the one side they have a Wall; and on the Wall there’s probably 50,000 names. These are people who were killed, but they didn’t recover their body. I said, “Gee, here on our wall for Vietnam, we got total 55,000 names and here’s just one little bitty cemetery.” Well, it just like hit me in the stomach. I said, “Wow.” Yes, and Glenn Miller’s name was on there, I found his name.

LC: Oh, is that right?

MM: Yes, and that kind of stuff. It really kind of put everything in perspective. Then we went over to France and looked toward the beaches and that kind of thing. All I have to say is I take my hat off to those guys; they had guts. I don’t think I could’ve done what they did. It was amazing. Literally, these guys had to hump the beach, you know, maybe a quarter to half a mile before you can get to the hills and they got these huge bunkers and I can just imagine how they just, you know, wow.

LC: It’s horrific.

MM: Yes, it was terrible.

LC: Did your mom ever make it over to Cambridge?

MM: No she didn’t. I wanted to take her. My brother and I were going to take her, instead of standing time; she did not want to go, so I had to respect her wishes.

LC: Absolutely. So, you were in parochial school?

MM: Yes.

LC: Was that kind of a good experience or how did it come about that you were sent there?

MM: The neighborhood I grew up in, well, it’s kind of funny because it was fairly integrated. It was when we lived with our grandparents, old Polish working class, you know, housing and neighborhoods and the church had the school and the church was just a block in a half away and that’s where everybody went to school there.

LC: So, your mom was working in the public schools?
MM: Yes, as well as with the private schools.
LC: Oh okay, so she did come around to the parochial schools too.
MM: Oh yes.
LC: Did she come to your school?
MM: Yes.
LC: Did it make it kind of difficult for you; did the guys rib you about that?
MM: Oh no.
LC: No?
MM: No.
LC: Okay.
MM: The kids you went to school with are the kids that lived next door. In my class, there was maybe 2 kids that had to ride the bus to come to school, everybody else walked. You lived close to each other; you played at the same parks or whatever.
LC: And everybody kind of grew up knowing that your mom was in the police service?
MM: Yes.
LC: You said that you played some sports?
MM: Yes.
LC: Can you tell me about that? When did that start?
MM: Well, I guess you call it equivalent of junior high, you know, 6th, 7th, 8th grade played football, basketball, baseball. Then in high school played football and basketball.
LC: Were you any good?
MM: I’m good enough. I was too slow to get a scholarship to a college, but I had fun. I held my own.
LC: What positions did you play, say in football?
MM: I was basically a defensive end and I played tight end on offensive, and back then we went both ways a lot of the times.
LC: What kind of schools did you play? Did you play other parochial schools or schools there in South Bend?
MM: Oh yes. The parochial schools and South Bend and in high school. Yes, they had like a parochial school league for the elementary school that we played there and then in high school we went, in fact, I got a football scholarship to a Catholic high school, but I only did one year there.

LC: Okay, and then you went to…?

MM: I went to public school.

LC: Which high school?

MM: South Bend Central.

LC: South Bend Central, okay. What year did you graduate?


LC: What kind of student were you in high school?

MM: Mediocre. You know, if you look at grade point, I probably had maybe a 2.4, 2.5; something like that in high school. I didn’t study too much.

LC: What subjects were your best ones?

MM: History. I liked History. I had a couple of History teachers that really turned me on and English. Later, not like sophomore English, but later; junior English and then I took some electives in English in my senior year. I really liked that.

LC: Was it the teachers that kind of led you to the subjects that you found you liked or did you find them on your own and then happen to like them?

MM: I just signed up for a class and then the teachers turned me on, I really liked it.

LC: What History did you like? US History or World History?

MM: World History and US History.

LC: When you decided to go to college, was it clear to you that History was what you were going to do?

MM: Yes, because I had no idea; I didn’t really have any very good counseling, career counseling and that kind of thing. Since I just liked History, and said, “Hey, I think I’ll major in History.”

LC: Had your brother gone on to college as well?

MM: No, he graduated from high school in ’57, ’58; he’s like two years behind of me and he joined the Marines right away. He went in the Marine Corps.
LC: Oh, he did?
MM: Yes.
MM: I have no idea why. He took growing up without a father a lot tougher than I did. It bothered him a lot and he had a lot of issues. He was always kind of a quiet guy and I think he had a lot of issues to work out. It was a real surprise. I remember my mother was shocked when he came home and said, “Hey, I’m going in the Marine Corps.”
LC: He hadn’t told her that that was his plan?
MM: No.
LC: And he was already…
MM: He already had enlisted, yes.
LC: How long did he have between the time he told her and the time he needed to report, do you know, do you remember?
MM: Maybe a couple or three weeks.
LC: How did your mom take that?
MM: Well, she was upset. She didn’t want any of her kids in the service. You know, she lost the husband; it took away her husband, so she was upset about it. Because, you know, my dad had a commission in the regular Army, so if we passed the test, we could’ve gotten in any service academy that we wanted and she steered us away from that.
LC: Did that make a difference to you not trying to get the services that [fast]?
MM: I did not want to go to the service.
LC: You were against that idea?
MM: Yes, I didn’t want the military. That was the furthest thing from my mind and I tried everything not to go. (Laughing)
LC: Okay, well I’m going to ask you about that.
MM: Yes.
LC: How long did your brother stay in the Marines?
MM: Four years. Then he came out, then he went to college.
LC: Okay, where did he go?
MM: Indiana.
LC: Was he on campus at Bloomington the same time as you?
MM: No, he got out of the Marines, it would have been in what ’62, ’63; so then
he did a couple of years at the extension in South Bend. Back then, you could only do
two years off campus and then you had to go do your last two years on campus. Now, I
think all these things are stand alone degree granting, so he did his two years there. Yes,
I think he did his two years there and then he went on campus and he spent 12 months on
campus and he compressed the other two years into basically a year and a summer
school. He really took a heavy load and then he graduated.
LC: What was his major?
MM: Finance.
LC: Did he go into some kind of career that was related to that right away?
MM: Yes he did and then he went to work for [Sarah Pasfel] Cross because he
went to work for City Service Oil Company in Tulsa, Oklahoma and then I did my AIT
(Advanced Individual Training) at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, so he’d come over and see me a
few times and give me some hints on how to survive in the military.
LC: Right, because he was an old hand by now.
MM: Yes. He didn’t graduate from a law school, but he attended the University
of Tulsa’s Law School part time for a while.
LC: So, when you went to IU in South Bend, were you living at home?
MM: Yes.
LC: How did that work out?
MM: Great. Wonderful.
LC: So, you were a college man and were most of the people that you were
hanging out with friends and so forth, were they from college or were they people that
you’ve known while you were growing up?
MM: It was basically people from the neighborhood and that because the college,
it was basically just commuter students. They didn’t have any dorms or anything; they
didn’t have any housing.
LC: Was there any kind of social activities around going to IU South Bend?
MM: I’m sure there was; I didn’t really partake into too many of them because I was working part time and then I had a girlfriend I ended up marrying.

LC: Where were you working?

MM: Well, I did a lot of day labor. I was in the Teamsters, so I would get called to help if I was available to help unload trucks. Most of the time with the Teamster guys that drove moving vans, we’d go meet them at the site and work a day and help them unload or load up. Then I also worked on Saturdays and sometimes during the week late if it was light out with a surveyor who would survey houses for closing for mortgage purposes.

LC: Checking lot lines and that kind of thing?

MM: Yes.

LC: How did you get into that surveying work?

MM: Well, I did that even in high school because my brother worked there and then when he worked for the individual and then when he was graduating from high school, “Hey, you got anybody else?” He said, “Sure, hire my little brother.” So, he handed me his paper route, he handed me his jobs.

LC: That was kind of good.

MM: Yes.

LC: When you decided, well, you were forced to transition to IU Bloomington because you had gone through your two years, how did that transition work? Was it smooth for you?

MM: Oh yes, it was great. I had a great time.

LC: Where did you live in Bloomington?

MM: I lived in University Housing in the dorm.

LC: Was it fun to move into the dorms?

MM: Yes. I had a good time.

LC: And at this point, you’re still dating?

MM: Yes.

LC: When did you actually get married?

MM: August of ’65.
LC: Can you tell me something about the campus atmosphere at Bloomington while you were there?

MM: It was a pretty redneck campus. Quite frankly, I was shocked. I grew up in Northern Indiana and as I said, my neighborhood was...it was about 25 percent black and the folks had been there forever. We'd play ball together and at Central High, it was a fully integrated school; had maybe 25, 30 percent of the student body was black or I guess today, the word's African American. In fact, I think my senior prom queen was a black gal. So, there was no racial tensions and that kind of stuff and I get down to Southern Indiana and I found that Indiana if you get maybe 25, 30 miles south of the Michigan border, like the edge of Lake Michigan, it was a really redneck country.

LC: For people who might not know in the future, what do you mean by redneck?

MM: I mean racist. Racist, Anti-Semite. I was just shocked! We had the steam heating and this one guy was in my room one day and he said, the room was kind of cold, so he said, “I’m going to turn the heat on” so he turned the heat on and you hear the “Psst”, you know the steam and he said, “Well, you know, as Adolph would say, there goes another one.” I said, “What are you talking about you idiot?” I couldn’t believe it! I know I went home with this one guy and he lived down in like New Albany, Indiana or something right on the Ohio River and this was the starting of the Civil Rights Movement in the states and I couldn’t understand what the big ado was about, and then I discovered, “Jeez, they won’t even let these people go in and eat some disgusting sandwiches you probably won't want to eat anyway.” I just couldn’t believe it. I was just shocked!

LC: Did you see a place that had segregated seating?

MM: Indiana wasn’t segregated, no. We’re not segregated, but the ideas of the people were.

LC: But you didn’t see a particular place down there in New Albany that was...

MM: No, I didn’t see any. We were just down there real quick. We went down there on a Friday night. I think we came back, I said, “I got to get back. I got to study.” I left on Saturday afternoon and drove back to campus. But just how they talked, it was Nigger this and Nigger that; we never used that word.

LC: You were shocked.
MM: Yes. I said, “Hey!” and they’d say, “Well, you got to see how the rest of
the world lives boy.” I was like, “Forget it.” When was that, that must have been my
senior year, I’m not sure. Presidential primaries, George Wallace was running in the
primary and he came by. He was going to have a big rally on campus and you couldn’t
believe the reception this guy got and there was about four of us on the corner saying,
“Anybody but.” We had signs that said, “Anybody but George.” I thought we were
going to get killed.

LC: It was an outdoor rally I take it?

MM: Yes, it was an outdoor. He had a rally in the, I think he had one, I don’t
know how many people were there, I didn’t go. I think he had one in the old football
stadium, which then they were using. The only thing they used it for to have that little
500-bicycle race. You know, like they made that movie, *Breaking Away* about? I think
they had a rally there and then they had a rally in one of the residence hall’s dining room
or something and he was there.

LC: And he filled them?

MM: Oh yes. There was some waiting in line to get in. He didn’t have my place
gone.

LC: And the students were really enthusiastically involved?

MM: Yes; very, very much so.

LC: Did you have conversations with any of these people and try and figure out
why they were supporting him?

MM: Well, yes.

LC: Did they confront you?

MM: Sure. He can keep black people down. He didn’t use the word black, but
they’re saying, “When are you going to keep these people down? They got an [older
place].”

LC: Did you actually like engage in arguments or were you kind of observing all
this and being involved?

MM: Well, you got to understand; I’m like 6 foot 4 at that time, about 235. I
just didn’t want hear that stuff and they’d just go away.

LC: Yes, I thought they did. (Laughing)
MM: You argued for a while, but you can’t convince them. In fact, a friend of mine, a kid I played high school football with was down there, he was on the football team; he was a black guy on the football team.

LC: On the Indiana University team?

MM: Yes. He and I would maybe comfort each other every now and then.

LC: What was his name?

MM: Ken Ellis.

LC: Were there other black students that you had some kind of friendships with that you talked about this kind of stuff with?

MM: Yes, just a few of them. I basically just concentrated on my studies and interacted with a few people there because, see, now at this time, I’m engaged and my fiancé’s back in South Bend and every minute I’d get, almost every weekend, I’d just drive back and spend some time with her.

LC: Do you have a sense or could you convey a sense of how, for example, Ken Ellis felt about the, say, the Wallace rallies?

MM: Well, he didn’t like it obviously. He knew what he was getting into, but he was a smart guy.

LC: Where was he from, do you know?

MM: South Bend. We played football at South Bend Central together and he went down on a scholarship. He was a very good football player. He went down on a scholarship down to IU and I did my two years in South Bend and we were both then juniors when I went down there.

LC: Right, and you kind of hooked up again?

MM: Yes. So, we would chat, but with football and conditioning and that and he was a very smart guy. He was a shrewd guy. He ended up going to medical school and his deal was, one time I said, “Why in the world did you come down here Kenny?” He said, “I’d snookered these guys.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, I’ll come play football with you if you can guarantee me that if I meet the grade requirements, I can get in your med school” and they said, “Oh yes, sure. We can do that.” A little thinking that he probably wouldn’t. You know, here’s just a dumb jock.

LC: So, he proved them all wrong.
MM: Yes.

LC: Did he stay at IU for med school then?

MM: You know, we kind of lost track of each other. I’m not sure. I think he did, but I’m not sure. Well, because he lived about a block from where my mother lived and he lived in, I think his dad was dead. He just lived with his mother and then his mother moved, so we kind of lost any contact.

LC: Oh, right. When you were studying History, let’s talk about your studies a little bit, were you paying attention and reading the papers and seeing what was going on, for example, and confrontations…?

MM: Oh yes, I stayed on that. In fact, I had a couple of guys that were on the same floor in my dorm; and thinking back, they’d bring out the paper, “Oh yes, we’re working up to it. We’ll be over there.” I said, “Why is that? Look, they’re publicizing all these atrocities and all this kind of stuff.” “Oh okay, hopefully we’ll be over there. Who knows at that time?”

LC: Where had they been, do you know, were they Korean War Vets or were they in the service?

MM: Oh no. You see, back then; a lot of people were getting drafted. As I say, when you got out of high school, you either got married, you went to college and got a student deferment, or you got drafted. So, these were guys that apparently late out of school and they got drafted and they did their two years and said, “Jeez, I better…” The Army can be a wake up call, so, “I better do something with my life kind of thing.”

LC: What did you think after they had kind of pointed out to you the possibility of US Military involvement, what were you thinking about that? Do you remember?

MM: I didn’t really think much about it. Oh well, there’ll be a little war I guess, but I never imagined it would be the breadth and scope that it was as now because we were those scares all the time like, “Hey, they’re going to take over Laos” so then we’d land the Marines over in Thailand and then that kind of cools down for a little while. That kind of stuff was happening, we were playing games I guess with the communists or whatever.

LC: Do you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis?

MM: Oh yes.
LC: What do you remember about it?

MM: I remember everybody was scared. There was a sense of outrage that the Cubans at the Russians had missiles in Cuba and I wasn’t very popular, so I said, “So what, we got missiles in Turkey, just 90 miles away from Russia. Big deal, they’re not going to blow us away.” In retrospect, I guess I should’ve paid more attention to it because I think we came pretty close to something there, but I wasn’t that preoccupied. I was a young man in love trying to get out of college and get on with my life.

LC: Right. Did you have any sense of Kennedy’s performance as president?

MM: He was elected. I wasn’t a big Kennedy fan. My family was pretty much democratic. I applauded what he wanted to do, but he wasn’t able to do much like on the Civil Rights area and that kind of thing. I didn’t really have an opinion one way or another.

LC: How did you feel about President Johnson? You talked about the primary elections developing in 1963, ’64. How did you feel about President Johnson?

MM: Well, the thing I remember. I used to go in this one bar and have a couple of beers at night every now and then. I didn’t have a T.V in my campus housing and they had a T.V there and I saw this Goldwater commercial, or no this Johnson commercial against Goldwater. It showed this little girl playing in this field and I think were a bunch of daisies and she was sitting there picking a daisy and a big mushroom cloud comes up and I thought that you know, “Jeez, maybe Johnson’s pretty cool because it looks like old Goldwater’s a warmonger or something.” That’s the only memory of that election that I have other than that, “Hey, stop Wallace kind of stuff.”

LC: Did you then graduate in 1964?

MM: 1965.

LC: ’65.

MM: I graduated in ’65.

LC: What it in June of ’65?

MM: June of ’65.

LC: What happened after graduation?

MM: Well, I took a job with the US Public Health Service and I was a Syphilis Epidemiologist, believe it or not.
LC: How did you get that job with a History degree?

MM: I just interviewed. They were on campus interviewing. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had taken some Education classes and in fact, I even student taught. I took a bunch of Education electives and I decided that I didn’t want to teach after student teaching. So, I just interviewed and it sounded like fun.

LC: So, what kind of work did you do for the PHS?

MM: Well, there’s myself. I was assigned to Columbus, Ohio and the Southeast quarter of Ohio and we were employed by the US Public Health Service, but we were on a loan to the Ohio Department of Health and there were three of us in Columbus that covered this territory. Two new guys, myself, and this other fellow, and then a guy who’s been there for a while; and our job was to trace the source and spread of reported cases of Syphilis.

LC: So, this was kind of an intelligence work in a way.

MM: Yes. Basically, what we had to do was when somebody was diagnosed it, back then, they had mandatory reporting requirements. You know, if a doctor diagnosed somebody with Syphilis, they had to report it just like they did TB (Tuberculosis) or some other stuff and then we would get on the thing and try to determine where that person got the infection from and who they passed it off to.

LC: And so you had to interview them?

MM: Yes, interview, do some field blood tests, you know, to the people that they named and that kind of stuff.

LC: And you’re interviewing them about very personal stuff?

MM: Yes.

LC: How did that go?

MM: Oh, well sometimes with some people, very difficult and other times, very easy. They gave us some pretty good training in terms of interviewing. I know we had to go down to; we spent about a month down at the CDC (Center for Disease Control) Headquarters in Atlanta getting trained on interviewing techniques and that kind of thing.

LC: Did you have to file reports on everyone meet evaluated?

MM: Basically, I can’t remember, yes we had some paperwork that we had to do, but it was kind of minimal. Like if I interviewed you and you named three people, then
I’d have to fill out a contact report that you named those three people and then hopefully find them and get a disposition on that. If they were then infected, now I knew where their source was and then I’d have to trace their spread.

LC: What was the information used for; the information, which is primarily used to track down?

MM: Yes, track the individuals down and make sure that they were tested and nine times out of ten, even if they tested negative, they were prophylactically treated.

LC: With what?

MM: Penicillin.

LC: Okay.

MM: You know, like 3 million units of Bicillin will do it; will clear it up pretty well.

LC: Who did the blood tests?

MM: Drawing the blood?

LC: Yes.

MM: I did a lot of it. I shouldn’t say I, we did a lot of it in the field. We used a little Shepard vacuum tube and or brought them into a clinic; whatever they were comfortable with.

LC: And did the CDC train you how to be a phlebotomist; how to draw blood?

MM: No, they didn’t. As I said, we were on loan to the Ohio Department of Health. We spent most of our time in the city of Columbus because that was the biggest urban area in our territory and one of the public health nurses kind of talked us through how to do it and then we just did it in her public VD (Venereal Disease) clinics until we got the technique down.

LC: Wow.

MM: It was really pretty easy to do. You know, you just put something tight on the arm and usually, with most people; the veins pop right up and just hit it. You’re going to get treated for free; we got to learn. (Laughing)

LC: Right. Did you enjoy doing this work?

MM: Yes. I thought it was a lot of fun. You weren’t tied to an office or going around a lot. I always liked kind of a challenge to find things. You know like, “Well,
there was this guy by the name of Joe and this is what his car looked like and da da da da
and this is where I think he lived” and then see if you can find him.

LC: Did you ever feel like you were a police officer kind of policing people’s
private lives?

MM: No. Our deal was, “Hey, we don’t want you to die.”

LC: Okay, is that how you presented it to them?

MM: Yes. Quite frankly, that was part of our interviewing technique because
you can show some of the manifestations of late, latent syphilis and it’s not very pretty
and usually people understood. Part of the interviewing thing was just a big education on
the disease and as you’re talking, even before you begin talking to the person about that
kind of thing, we would talk to them about the disease and illustrate the various stages. A
lot of times you’re getting a lot of affirmation, “Oh yes, jeez, I had that, but it went away,
so I wasn’t concerned.” Okay, here you go.

LC: Do you think people were for the most part kind of level and straight up with
you about…?

MM: Everybody was except the people I’d do in jail. They were weird.

LC: How’s that? Can you describe it?

MM: They were very circumspect and play games because they wanted you to
keep coming back and coming back and coming back and okay and okay and
interviewing, “Can I have one of your cigarettes?” “Sure.” You know? You know how
that would go. So, I think they had a little different agenda. A lot of times, the biggest
resistance we got was in the gay community.

LC: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

MM: Because the gays were; back then it was against the law, I mean really
against the law. A lot of vice cops would persecute these poor people and so it was a
very closed community, they’re very circumspect, that kind of thing. We had to build a
lot of bridges there.

LC: Were gay men, say, over time in Columbus, maybe increasingly trustful of
you?

MM: Yes, well part of our thing, I hate to say it, part of our thing was outreach;
that we would go on and put on presentations. Here, I’m going to talk to the PTA (Parent
Teacher’s Association) about communicable disease, but our outreach in the gay
community, even though it was basically in the closet. There were three or four bars that
were known as gay bars and where they seem to congregate.
LC: This was in Columbus?
MM: Yes, so we would just hang out there, you know, part of our job; “Okay,
let’s work a couple of nights.” We’ll just go down to the bar and talk to people and joke
with his hand on your leg. “Hey, no, I’m not interested and this is who I am, but I’d like
to talk to you. Its okay.” and build up a trust that way. Most of the time it was
successful, but some of the time it wasn’t.
LC: Do you remember the names or locations of any of those bars?
MM: There was one place called the Kizmet, I have no idea, I can’t remember
where it was in Columbus and then there was another one, The Purple Pony, or
something like that.
LC: Okay, and you sort of found out that these were gay bars, how? From the
police or from somebody telling you?
MM: Well, from my supervisor. There were two of us; two recent college grads
that were working Columbus and had a fellow who cut his teeth in Detroit and he was
transferred out there and he was like our manager. He had been there so he had identified
those and I’m sure he probably gets some info from the vice squad or from contacts;
people that he’s working with. You know, when he’s working a case, “Hey, where do
you hang out at?” Oh, they hang out here. These folks are grateful. I could remember
one fellow; we ended up finding this guy. He was named by someone and then he had
me and I worked with him for about a week on and off, not full time. We built the trust
and the rapport and, “Hey, would you talk to some of my friends?” “Sure, love to.” You
know, about the disease, and “Hey, well, could you test me just to be sure?” “Okay.”
Then we’d educate him on the symptoms and say, “Hey, if you exhibit any symptom of
[etiology] at the primary stage or secondary, you know, go get treated right away.” So,
once they found, we weren’t there to beat their ass or humiliate them; that we were there
to help them; we didn’t have any problem.
LC: When you say you worked with this guy for a week or so, do you mean you
just kind of had conversations with him off and on?
MM: Yes, to get them to open up and to build a rapport with him so he could
trust me, “Hey, I’m not going to call the cops on you, I’m not going to do anything. I’m
just here to help you. I don’t want to see you or any of your friends die.”

LC: Right, and because there was a lot of suspicion in the gay community about
potential having bars busted up or…

MM: Yes, well, no, what these cops would do is they’d have a lead lined gloves
and have like little pouches sewed where the knuckles were and they’d fill with a little
lead, grains the lead or put things in there and they’d just take them and slap the guys up
side the head with them or other parts [of their bodies].

LC: Yes. Did you ever hear about of that actually happening?

MM: Oh yes. I had a vice cop tell me that and he told me, in fact I was talking to
that guy because they had certain areas where there was a lot of anonymous sex and he
would tell me where those are and then he would tell me what he would do when he’d
pull in there a few times and I just said, “Oh okay.”

LC: And you just kind of sat there listening to this going on, what were you
thinking?

MM: Well, I’d say how disgusting, but I’m not going to get this guy against me,
you know, if you find that works, it works I guess.

LC: But you just wanted the information about where you could go?

MM: Exactly.

LC: Was your supervisor encouraging of you making this kind of outreach to the
gay community?

MM: Oh yes. He and I would do a lot of it together because we knew that was
the biggest obstacle to overcome was the suspicion in the gay community and it got down
to the point that once they got to know us in these bars, they were pretty truthful with us;
the bartenders or whatever and they knew that we were there, treat you anonymously.
All the records were treated very confidentially and it wasn’t; it was never indicated that
you contacted it through the same sex encounter.

LC: Right, you weren’t recording that they were gay.

MM: No, we were just recording the fact that they were named as a contact by
someone. We couldn’t even by law divulge who had named them.
LC: Okay.

MM: I’m not sure if it was by law, but that was our working guideline; that was
treated extremely confidentially. You know, if somebody named you and you say,
“Well, yes, who named me?” I say, “I’m sorry, I can’t tell that, say that. We have to go
from here.”

LC: No one ever had the sense that you were conducting any kind of witch-hunt,
that this was a helpful thing that you were trying to do.

MM: Right.

LC: Were you proud of that work?

MM: I liked it. It was helping people and it was a terrible disease and untreated,
it could have horrible outcomes. A part of the problem though in communicating at the
horrible outcome might be 20 years from now, but it would be there and our goal was to
eradicate it.

LC: How long did you do this?

MM: Well, I did that for about a year.

LC: Okay.

MM: That was my first job out of college and then that wasn’t a deferrable job,
okay.

LC: In regards with to the draft you mean?

MM: Right. So, then and a draft was closing it in. In fact, as I said, I did
everything possible to get out. We were originally going to get married on August 21st of
1965 and I think it was in late June or July, Johnson came out and said, “Anybody who is
married before August 14th, won’t get drafted.” So, we pushed our date up to August 7th.
So, the invitations were printed, so we had to cross that out and change the date. In fact,
my wedding ring has August 7th and my wife’s has August 21st because I bought hers
first. So everybody, “Oh, we know why you’re getting married. She’s pregnant.” “Oh
yeah, sure.” So, we pushed our wedding date up and I always thought if I could sue
Johnson for breach of contract, but I never could.

LC: Never got that far.
MM: Never did. So we did that and it looked like I was going to get drafted and so I said, “Well, we better pull up stakes out of Columbus and move back to South Bend” so at least Madelaine could be by friends and family.

LC: Madeline being your wife?

MM: My wife; yes.

LC: And she was from South Bend?

MM: Yes.

LC: What high school had she gone to?

MM: South Bend Riley, south side of town.

LC: So, your departure from the PHS [stroke] Ohio Department Health was really driven by the eminence of draft?

MM: Right, yes.

LC: So, during 1965, when you were working for PHS, you were also paying a lot of attention to the war?

MM: Well, not necessarily the war, the draft calls. They start changing us and then they said, “Well, hey, now we’re going to take you regardless of your marital status, regardless of when you got married” and I figured it was just a matter of time. Back then; they didn’t even have the lottery.

LC: And you were, what 22 years old?

MM: Well, no, let’s see. I was born in ’43, so I was 22 when I graduated. I was 23 when I got drafted, yes.

LC: Did you ever consider enlisting so that you could avoid the draft because a number of men that I’ve talked to have told me that they enlisted specifically because they thought they were going to be drafted and they wanted to get another placement or something…

MM: Well, I thought about it briefly, but I didn’t want to do four years. I didn’t want to do four years and the reserve units and that stuff were almost impossible to get into unless you had a name of Bush or something, or a Quayle. So, they were pretty hard to get into. Well, I hoped my wife would get pregnant, then I won’t get drafted. We weren’t practicing any kind of birth control anyway; well, she got pregnant, but we found out a month after I went in the Army.
LC: So, you moved back to South Bend?

MM: Yes, and I took a job with Bendix Aerospace Division.

LC: Okay, can you tell me about that job?

MM: Well, I took that job as like in production control and we were making basically carburetors and afterburners for what then was called the TFX, which turned out to be the F-111. That was supposed to be the super duper latest kind of thing around.

LC: Now, when you say; I'm sorry, go ahead.

MM: Well, I figured, “Gee, hey, I’m working for a defense contractor; I’m going to see if I can get a deferment.” So, I called the draft ward, they said, “No way.”

LC: Was that your motivation in seeking out a [job] defending?

MM: No, that was the first people that made an offer to me. You know, I needed a job, so I floated some resumes and started interviewing. They were the first people to call me and made me an offer and “Okay.”

LC: And when you said production control, what exactly did that mean?

MM: Well, basically, what I did was I was in the engineering change control section that whenever the engineers made a change in the design, we would have to integrate that into the production system, make sure all the prints and paperwork were changed and that kind of thing.

LC: If I can ask, how did you kind of transition and talk your way into that?

MM: I didn’t talk my way; I was just there. I think there was some labor shortages then or unemployment was very low, so I just went out and they said, “Why should we hire you?” I said, “Well, I’m a pretty smart guy. I can think.” “Okay.” That was it. I never really had too much of a problem.

LC: Did you like doing that work at Bendix?

MM: No.

LC: Why not?

MM: It was kind of boring. I liked interacting with people and stuff like that.

LC: Yes, and in that way it quite different from the PHS job.

MM: Yes, it was kind of boring. The technical stuff like that never really interested me that well. But it was a job and the money was good at the time. It was about 1200 dollars a year; more than I was making with the government. It was okay.
LC: And you worked there for how long?
MM: Until I got drafted, very brief, probably 6 months. Well, lets see, I probably went there in June and then I got drafted in November.
LC: When did you receive your actual notice?
MM: You know, I was thinking about that this morning. I thought you were going to ask me that and I don’t know. I’m going to say maybe like a month a head of time. So, I got drafted in the first part of November.
LC: Of 1966?
MM: ’66, yes ma’am. So, I think I may have got it in October sometime because they gave us about a month to get our affairs together I think.
LC: How did you feel when you got that notice?
MM: Well, like somebody kicked me in the guts. You know, “Jeez, this is really great. Just what I want.” But then again, it was, “Hey, my county is calling. I don’t like it, but you know, I wish I could get out of it, but you know, this is what I got to do.”
LC: Did you think about both sides of that equation when it happened? You know, “Gee, this is awful, but on the other hand I…”
MM: Well, personally to me, it’s awful. I said, “I hate to leave this.” I was worried about my wife and all that and my mother. I know it would be pretty tough on her. On a personal level, I thought it was awful, but then on I guess an intellectual level it says, “Hey, my country calls, they need me, I’m going to have to go.”
LC: How did your mom react?
MM: She was sad. She was sad because now when my brother went in the Marines, it was peacetime and all that and I have to interject that my brother would write home sometimes and say, “Hey, did you see this guy on the news?” You know, and I was in the service with him, but with then with my mother, I totally remember that, but then while Walter Cronkite after he interviewed the guy would say, “Oh yes, this guy was killed three days later or something.”
LC: That a thing like that can happen.
MM: She knew there was probably going to be eminent harm. She wanted her little baby to be safe, you know.
LC: So, she was very anxious?
MM: Yes, yes, sure.

LC: And what about Madelaine?

MM: She was upset. She was like, “Oh my god. There we go.” But again, her dad and her stepfather were both World War II Vets and they knew that in fact her step dad stayed in for, he got out just before the Korean War began. I guess a right of passage for manhood or something, I don’t know.

LC: So, she was not unfamiliar with the idea of military service?

MM: Well, no because back then, everybody, your uncles, everybody, your cousins, older cousins, uncles, everybody had served in World War II or in Korea. So, they were in. It wasn’t unusual. People knew it.

LC: Was Madelaine going to be working? Did she work?

MM: Well, when she got married, she didn’t work. When I got drafted, then she wrote me about a month later that she was pregnant. She had gotten a job. You got to understand, I see I got drafted and E1 was making 90 dollars a month of which they took, I want to say, 55 dollars out of my pay and they added 40 dollars to it and she got like a 95 dollar a month allotment and then we had a 65 dollar a month car payment.

LC: Car payment?

MM: Yes.

LC: What car did you buy?

MM: Well, I had to buy a car when I graduated from school. Well, I had a real nice car, well, I shouldn’t say nice car, but I had a pretty fast car when I was in college, but with the government, see I’d get paid mileage, so I bought a 1965 Chevy Chevelle; six cylinder stick, I got good mileage and that, so we had the car payment, so she took a job with a company, they sold mimeograph machines. Back then, we didn’t have the Xerox like we do now, but then she was pregnant and that was back when “Oh, until you are pregnant, we’re going to can you.” But fortunately they didn’t, they let her work part time when she start showing.

LC: Why do you think they kept her on when their policy was to?

MM: Well, I’m not sure if that was their policy, but that was pretty much the general practice. They kept her out of sight, but they kept her around because most of the salesmen and I think of the owner of the business, they were all Vets. So, they had a lot
of empathy for her. “Well, jeez, you’re here by yourself and your husband’s in the
service.” You know, that kind of stuff. So, “We’re going to help you out.”

LC: So, you think that you went in about November of 1966?

MM: Yes, it was November because I can remember my first Saturday in the
reception center was the day that Notre Dame and Michigan State were both undefeated
and they played to that notorious 10-10 tie.

LC: Right.

MM: And Ara Parseghian. That was my first Saturday in a reception center
because I was peeling potatoes and complaining because they didn’t have a radio and we
couldn’t listen to the game.

LC: Oh no.

MM: Yes. That’s one of those significant events in life.

LC: Well, that was the game of the century up there.

MM: Yes. That’s where Nick Eddy sprained his foot getting off the train going
into East Lansing, but anyway.

LC: Who did you support?

MM: Notre Dame.

LC: Okay.

MM: I grew up in South Bend.

LC: Well, I was hoping you’d say Michigan State, but okay.

MM: Michigan who?

LC: So, tell me about actually going to Fort Campbell. Did you go on bus or?

MM: Well, no. We had to report at the local armory and the Army does these
things at god awful early morning times. So, we had just cleaned the day before. I think
we put our stuff in storage; we didn’t really have that much and cleaned out the apartment
and we spent that night at my mother’s house.

LC: Was that where Madelaine was going to live then?

MM: No, she then went back with her folks, she lived with her folks, but we
spent that night at my mom’s house and then my mom and aunt and Madelaine drove me
to the armory and we had to be there at like 5:00 in the morning or something. And
there’s a whole bunch of us. There was probably 2,300 people there and they put us all in
buses and they took us over to the Chicago Reception Center; their Induction Center I
guess they call it and then we went through there and we had a cursory physical and I
think we had some tests there too.

LC: Can you describe the physical? What did they actually look for? Did they
just do height and weight or what did they do?

MM: Well, let’s put it this way. About half the guys that they passed on from
there were rejected in the reception center when we got to Fort Campbell, so it was very
cursory. You know, open your mouth, and look in your mouth, look in your ear. “Hey,
can you see the wall chart? You don’t have to read the things, can you see it?” “Yes.”
“Okay.” (Laughing) It was like a meat market and there were all of us from South Bend
and there were these buses coming from all over, so there were thousands of people there.

LC: Yes, it was just huge.

MM: Yes. I remember a lot of waiting, not really much time doing anything.

LC: What was…go ahead.

MM: I’m sorry, no go ahead.

LC: Well, I was just going to ask, was there chatter going on or was it kind of a
nervous quietness or do you remember?

MM: Well, we just talked; everybody’s kind of scared and apprehensive.

You’re kind of talking and you kind of stick with the guys that you sat around on the bus
with and that and laugh at that guy who’s wearing women’s panties thinking he can get
out of it and stuff like that because you’re all stripped to your underwear going through
this thing.

LC: And did that work?

MM: I think the guy got smacked a couple of times and then they gave him some
regular underwear.

LC: Okay.

MM: Yes, they weren’t very nice. Yes, I think they’ve seen it all; they’re
probably kind of cynical you know.

LC: Probably.
MM: I remember we got sworn in and rather than saying, “I do,” had to take the
step forward and then they asked for volunteers for the Marines. I think just for the
Marines, I don’t think they were taking any volunteers for the Navy.

LC: And you did what?
MM: I stayed where I was.
LC: Didn’t want to go in the Marines.
MM: Nope.

LC: Okay. Can you remember why you didn’t want to go in the Marines?
MM: No, it’s just that my brother said, “If you can avoid, don’t.”
LC: Okay.

MM: Because he was in the infantry in the Marines for four years, well for three
years, and he was an instructor in hand to hand combat for a year and he said, “No, you
probably don’t want the Marine Corps.” He knew me, he said, “You’re too soft.”

LC: He knew you.
MM: He just said, “You probably don’t want the Marines.”

LC: What tests did they give you there?
MM: I can’t remember. I think they probably gave us the GATB (General
Aptitude Test Battery); I’m not sure.

LC: Okay, can you spell that?
MM: GATB. That was a General Aptitude Test Battery which was very common
in the 50s and 60s and I think they gave us the GATB which looked at hand eye
coordination, fine motor skills and reasoning things and then there were some pen and
paper tests, but I can’t remember it. Like maybe a general IQ test or something. It
wasn’t very significant.

LC: Did you do the best you could on the test or did you just kind of…?
MM: Oh yes. Well, then they processed us through and then we had to take our
step forward and they swore us in and then they herded us down. I can’t remember if we
rode a bus or walked to a railroad station and they put us on railroad cars and took us
down to Fort Campbell.

LC: How long was that ride?
MM: Well, it seems like we got on a train at 4 or 5 that night and they even made sleeping berths for us. Then we got there early the next morning I think, but I remember we were off on a siding for a while waiting for something, maybe for another engine or something, someplace in Indiana, but it was basically an overnight trip.

LC: And you probably didn’t sleep all that well?

MM: Yeah, I slept pretty well.

LC: Did you?

MM: Yes, I slept pretty well. Well, there were a few of us; there were some real characters in a couple of the cars and they were trying to go around robbing people, so a bunch of us, a few of us said, “Okay we’ll sleep and then stay awake.” And they’d come by us because they had some real bad guys from Chicago, or they thought they were bad from Chicago, on there and they’re going to try to maximize something. I was asleep before my turn and that guy said that somebody tried to come in, but they persuaded him not to.

LC: Okay. When you arrived at Ford Campbell, what were the first things that you saw?

MM: Well, we got off the train and there’s people yelling at you. “Get in line, do this, do that.” That kind of stuff and you just kind of went with the herd.

LC: Right. How did that military discipline affect you those first several days that you were at basic?

MM: Well, the first thing we did, we went through the reception center. That’s where they cut your hair off and then we had a real detailed close physical and then a lot more testing. Then in the reception center, as a result of that testing, then you had an interview with somebody where they basically gave you your job.

LC: Oh really?

MM: Yes. That’s where I made mistake number one.

LC: What was your mistake number one?

MM: Well, they said, “Well, man, based on your test results and this and that, we’ll make you a Personnel Specialist.” “Oh, okay, that sounds good.” They said, “Oh yes, by the way, your OCS Preference Test, you got a great score on that, would you like to go OCS (Officer Candidate School)?” I said, “Well, yes, I might think about that.”
They said, “Well, you know, the OCS class is six months and you’re paid as an E5 while you’re in OCS.” Oh, more money, “I’ll go.”

LC: Okay, all that sounded good.

MM: Yes, all that sounded real good and so I had to select a combat arm because I didn’t have the physical profile they called, so I made my selection and then they routed us to a basic training company. In the reception center, you got all your gear, your shoes, your fatigues.

LC: Right.

MM: They measured you for your Class A’s. I can’t remember if we got our Class A at the same time or if that came later and all that stuff. Pretty heavy duffel bag that we had run with to our company; the basic training company.

LC: The company that you were assigned to, did you find out people who had done well in their tests similar to yours?

MM: No, we were all together. A lot of the people going through in our company, see back then, you had a service prefixed to your number. You had US, RA, NG, or ER.

LC: Can you explain what those are?

MM: US: was you were drafted; RA: you enlisted; NG: you were National Guard; and ER: you were an Enlisted Reserve. So, we had a lot of National Guard and Reserve guys. There were maybe 220 people in our company and I think there were 4 platoons. I think our platoon was the only one that was just the US and RA. I don’t think there were any Reservists. There may have been one or two in ours, but they were in all the other platoons.

LC: And how did that kind of change the mix; people who had already had some experience with the war?

MM: Well, they didn’t really have any experience. They just joined the service; they probably weren’t even going to the meetings. They supposedly had to do six months active, but they basically just had to do their basic and AIT and then they go back to their unit.

LC: Back to their reserve unit, right, but their expectations of what they were going to experience after basic…
MM: Yes, they kept a pretty low profile. They weren’t bragging about that
they’re going to go home; I guess they didn’t think they had to. Everybody knew they
were lucky.

LC: Right. Could you remember your DI’s (Drill Instructor)?

MM: Yes.

LC: How did they treat you?

MM: Good. Well, see, I had two sets of DI’s because I got to my basic training
unit and I think we were probably a week or two into the unit, into the cycle and it got
colder than heck and a whole bunch of us got sick. We got the flu so there was a flu
epidemic going by and they had us go on sick call and if you had a temperature above a
certain point, they’d put you in the hospital. I was pretty sick; I had a high temperature,
so they put me in a hospital. That was going to be a couple of days spent, I guess, but
while I was in the hospital, they do all this testing and they found out that I was passing a
lot of sugar in my urine.

LC: Okay.

MM: So, here they thought, “Maybe he’s diabetic.” So, they kept me in the
hospital. So, let’s see, this is from mid-November. They kept me in the hospital through
Christmas. Now, they gave me convalescent leave; I got to go home at Christmas time
for a week or two because basically the whole base shut down at Christmas time.
Everybody got home and then they finally decided I wasn’t diabetic, then by that time,
the group I was with was pretty much done with basic and so then they assigned me to
another. Then they decided I wasn’t diabetic after doing; oh gosh, I think they must’ve
did 8 or 10 glucose tolerance tests over periods of time and this is back where they give
you this, like a quart of real sugar water to drink and they’ll take your blood sample
before you drink it and then they take it like every half hour for three hours or something
like that after you drink it, you know the test. On my arm, I think all my veins were
collapsing. Man, they were hitting me so much and then they finally decided that, they
said I had renal glyceria which just basically means my kidneys don’t retain the sugar
like it should, just passes it, but it’s not life threatening and that’s just the condition and
you’re normal. It probably took them about six weeks to figure it out.
LC: When you were in the hospital, who was taking care of you? Was it Corpsmen or?

MM: Yes, basically I had some Corpsmen and there were some nurse officers, but most of the guys were Medics, Corpsmen, hospital attendants, that kind of thing. We were in a big ward.

LC: Did any of them talk to you about Vietnam, some of the main…?

MM: Well, a few of the guys in the ward were coming back from Vietnam.

LC: Oh, is that right?

MM: Yes and they had been there and then I know this one fellow was there because see, Fort Campbell was the home of the 101st.

LC: The 101st Airborne.

MM: Yes and I think at that time, I’m not sure if there was a brigade at a 101st in ‘Nam or not, I think there were probably was, I’m not sure. We had a couple of guys that were Special Forces that were in the ward. They were having relapses of malaria and that, so they were back. I’m not sure if they were medevaced back or they had already come back and they were airborne qualified, so they’re assigned 101st and they have a relapse and they put them in the hospital. So, they were a couple of those guys around.

LC: Did you talk to any of those guys?

MM: Yes.

LC: Did they tell you some stories?

MM: Yes. It was pretty upbeat. They wouldn’t talk about really hitting the crap as much as some of the funny things that happened and how this guy said, “Hey, yes, I got my two mile run in every damn day over there.” “Oh wow. Two miles, I don’t think I can do a mile, pal.” Then I ran into a cousin of mine there.

LC: Was that right?

MM: Yes. He was a kid from South Bend. He grew up and he was in an Airborne Unit in Germany and he and his family were just getting ready to move back to the states and on his last jump, he landed in a potato field and busted his ankle, so his wife and kids came back by ship and I guess they flew him back and he was going to be stationed at Fort Campbell, so they put him in the hospital there. So, I ran into him.

LC: That was kind of strange.
MM: Yes, I was just going down the hall and I see this guy on crutches and I said, “Gee.” He looks at me, I look at him and I said, “I think I know you” and he says, “I know I know you.” (Laughing) Then we got together, so that was kind of fun.

LC: So the time in the hospital, did it go fairly quickly for you?

MM: No, it drug. It didn’t have any T.V and of course, not too many people had T.V, did read a lot, but it was just kind of boring just laying there and yet you’re feeling good and you’re antsy and you want to get up and get about your life and they won’t let you.

LC: What kinds of thing were you reading, do you remember?

MM: Anything.

LC: Anything.

MM: Yes. They’d come by with a cart a couple of times a week, so I’d take two or three off of there that I hadn’t read, from science fiction to novels. A lot of the stuff was old.

LC: When they let you out for Christmas, how was it to go back and see your wife and the family?

MM: Oh, it was great. See, by that time, now I knew she was pregnant. So, it was great. I was glad I had the opportunity. It really made me feel good.

LC: Were they concerned that you had been in the hospital all this time?

MM: No, they were kind of glad. Hey, I mean, it all counts against two years.

LC: Had you been writing to them and telling them…?

MM: Oh yes, we wrote regularly.

LC: And you told them, “Look, I don’t feel anything wrong, so…”?

MM: Right. I basically explained, “You know, I’m in the hospital because I had the flu and I had a high fever and they found this thing out and they’re just checking it out, but I feel great.”

LC: Was it tough to then report back after Christmas?

MM: Yes, it always was.

LC: Where did you have to go?

MM: What do you mean?
LC: When your Christmas leave was up, did you have to return to Fort Campbell?

MM: Went back to the hospital, I had to report back to the hospital.

LC: The hospital itself, okay.

MM: And then shortly thereafter, then they assigned me to another basic training unit.

LC: And so you basically had to start your training all over again?

MM: Yes.

LC: Can you tell me about how the training went? Was it tough for you?

MM: No, the toughest part was some of the physical stuff because here I had almost two months of sedentary kinds of things and we would run. Get up the morning and run about a mile before breakfast and then eat breakfast and then go out and do the; you probably heard it in your other interviews, do the daily dozen.

LC: Right. Can you just explain what that is though?

MM: The daily dozen, there’s like 12 exercises that you do and that’s how they get the dozen and you do X number of repetitions. You’re all in big rows and they have a drill sergeant up on a podium leading you and we had this one guy lead us in PT (Physical Training) and he’d have this big chopping block up there; big hunk of wood, he’d have a pretty big sword and he would whack that with the sword. He’d say, “You know what that is?” You were trained to say, “Yes, that’s Charlie cutting our balls off because we’re weak.” “Okay. Well, now what do you have to do to be strong?” “Exercise Drill Sergeant.” Then we’d go through and do our daily dozen there. They had like sit ups, what, 8 or 12 count push ups where you start standing and you end standing where you kind of squat and then kick out and do the push ups and then come back up and that kind of stuff. We’d do that and then usually if you’re going out to a class or a range or something, you’d run to where you were going, and then lunch you’d usually run a mile and then you’d run to your classes again and that instead of walking. If it was a long way away and we’d half run, half walk; run part of the way, walk and then at night, you do about a mile before dinner. After a week or so, you get pretty acclimated to it.
LC: Had any of the Drill Instructors or the man with the sword up on the
tower…?

MM: Yes, he was in Vietnam. About half of them were.

LC: Is that right? Okay.

MM: Yes, half of them were.

LC: Were the kind of reinforcing almost all the time the idea that you were going
to Vietnam and you need to be…?

MM: No, not really and I know we had this one guy and in fact, he was a Drill
Instructor, but he didn’t go through Drill Instructor School. See, the guys went through
Drill Instructor School got to wear the, you know, Smokey the Bear hat?

LC: Right.

MM: And he just wore a helmet liner. He was in, what was he in? The 173rd
Airborne Brigade over there. He was a Sergeant 1st class; Sergeant St. Clair. He was
from New York State and he had some physical problems because of Vietnam; some
severe wounds and that. He was a nice guy, great guy. And he’d just say, “Hey, don’t
worry about it. A good soldier is one who is trained and you’re training well and I’ll take
care of it for you.” Really supportive, you know, that kind of thing. The guys that were
really on you were the guys that who weren’t over there.

LC: Is that right?

MM: Yes and some of them were really not some of my favorite people.

LC: Right and given you did not want to be there, how was your attitude during
the training?

MM: “Hey, I got no choice, might as well do it. Just hurry up and wait and I’ll
play their game.” You kind of put your intelligence on hold.

LC: Yes.

MM: You have to say, “Here I am, okay, I’ll do it.” A lot of it was good, a lot of
it was fun training. A lot of it was fun. We spent a lot of time, well, close order drills,
kind of ridiculous, but we spent a lot of time doing that. We spent a lot of time bayonet
practice and it’s kind of funny because I think I lost my bayonet the first, second week in
Vietnam; never got it replaced and a lot of hand to hand combat training, rifle training. It
was kind of interesting.
LC: Yes, what about the weapons training? What weapons did they…?

MM: Well, I went through basic, just the M-14 and that’s what we trained with and that’s we qualified with.

LC: Okay, when basic was coming to its conclusion, did you receive orders for advanced?

MM: Well, yes. Now what happened during basic, remember I said I made the mistake of the OCS deal?

LC: Yes.

MM: Well, okay, then in the hospital I had a lot of time to think and my wife, and the original decision was motivated by money.

LC: Right.

MM: Okay, so when I was in the hospital and you know, through corresponding with Madelaine, we decided that, “Hey, that money’s not the issue; we can make it for two years.” So, I said, “Okay.” So, when I got to my training unit, I thought I had dropped OCS because I went in to the Company Commander and said, “Hey, I signed up for it, but I don’t want to go. I changed my mind, I don’t want to do that” thinking that I would get back to be the personnel clerk. So, then we got out of basic and now I get orders for a pre-OCS AIT in field artillery at Fort Sill and I said, “Well, hey, I don’t want to go to OCS.” They say, “Nothing we can do about it here. You got to do it down there.”

LC: You got to get out of it down at Fort Sill?

MM: Yes. So, I got the orders and I had think we had to stick around Fort Campbell for three, four days before transportation came and they had a plane come in and we flew into Fort Sill. Then, we got there at night and they put us in these barracks and the next morning somebody’s in my face screaming to get up. That was a pre-OCS AIT and these guys are acting like they’re in OCS and harassing you. Right after breakfast I went to Company Commander and said, “Hey, I made a mistake here pal.” Not pal, “sir.” “I dropped it. My intent was to drop it in basic training, but apparently the paperwork wasn’t initiated.” He said, “No problem.”

LC: He said, “No problem”? 
MM: Yes, he said, “No problem. Okay, here you go.” He told, whoever it was, the 1st Sergeant or whoever, “Hey, cut orders for this guy to just go to regular training.”
So, he sent me across the parade ground to a different company, which was training, in the same discipline. You know, Field Artillery Operations and Intelligence.

LC: Were you surprised that it was that easy to kind of circumvent or was that…?
MM: No, I figured if that I didn’t want to be there, they probably didn’t want me. I’m sure they probably looked at me and said, “Hey, here’s a guy, he’s going to milk the system, he’ll probably drop OCS five months into the process, so he has over a year in the Army, so he probably won’t get cut to go to Vietnam.” A lot of people were doing that.

LC: Kind of better now than later for them.
MM: Yes, so “If you don’t want to be there, we don’t want you.” I guess that was the attitude they had.

LC: How did you feel about the artillery assignment?
MM: Well, it ain’t a personnel clerk. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing) That’s right.
MM: Okay. Then that was okay. It was fun, it was academically challenging. I had worked with a surveyor, so I could read compasses and I could read maps. I basically knew where I was. I knew elevations, things like that which was a piece of cake for me.

LC: Can you talk about the training? What kind of academic stuff did they actually want you to master?
MM: Well, basically, how to read a map, how to read a compass. You know, like how to read typographical maps, you know, and contour lines and what they mean. Between working with a surveyor and I had a five hour geology course in college as a science requirement. I knew it; it was neat. Then the whole artillery thing; it was basically mathematic based and math was never my strong suit in school, but I kind of liked it. The MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) that I trained in was you had two roles. You either worked in a forward observer party calling in artillery or you worked in a FDC Center, Fire Direction Control Center, telling the guns, translating the request for a fire mission. You had to locate it geographically, then determine the firing data that’s
needed. Well, basically, to determine the deflection and quadrant that the guns had to
have to shoot to hopefully land on that target.

LC: Right.

MM: So, that was kind of interesting.

LC: So the math was not too difficult for you?

MM: No.

LC: Okay, it just wasn’t your favorite thing?

MM: Well, math was never my favorite thing in college, but this is pretty easy
stuff. About the hardest was how to adjust your data with meteorological data, doing that
because a certain humidity level or wind would effect the fall of shot.

LC: I’m sorry.

MM: I’m sorry.

LC: Okay. I was just going to ask how long did the advanced training program
actually last?

MM: Two months, it was just two months.

LC: Wow, it’s fast.

MM: Yes.

LC: Did they give you any additional weapons training during?

MM: No, we didn’t do anything there.

LC: Okay.

MM: It was basically weapons we had where it’s based on the range, crawling in
fire, and then plotting, doing the exercises, telling the guns what their data was as well as
observing and adjusting fire.

LC: Were the other guys in the artillery AIT also pretty bright guys that you
could kind of relate to?

MM: No, you had a pretty good mix. Most of them, I would say probably in my
training unit, I would say 90 percent of them were Reservists, National Guard guys that
the rest of the other guys, draftees; I don’t think it was “special” kind of training,
although I think maybe…and I got there by chance obviously because if you were pre-
OCS that’s what you trained in before you went to OCS. I don’t know the criteria they
used for the guy coming through, but I would think you would have to have a certain
level of intelligence to do it.

LC: Mike, can you just walk me through a typical day there in AIT?

MM: Okay. Yes, we would get up in the morning and do our daily dozen. These
barracks were around like a square. You had a square bounded on four sides by roads
and we’d run around the square, probably equal a mile. We’d run and do our exercises
and then eat breakfast and then we were either out at the range adjusting fire or
computing the thing, well later. Beginning, we were in class learning all that stuff. Then
we were applying it and we’d get it and then come back for lunch, go back to class or the
range, come back about, I don’t know, 4 or 4:30. We’d run around, we’d do our mile,
and then eat dinner and then we were done. We didn’t have homework and we’d go
down to a little beer hall down the street. We’d go there and drink beer and get blasted
and stagger back about 11, 12:00 and get up again the next morning at 5 and do it again.

LC: So, there was no problem with getting access to beer?

MM: No, they had little, we call them beer halls, but they were little like, as you
call them C stores here in the states now, but it’s just a little hut, they had big coolers of
beer and you could buy shaving cream and razor blades. A few of the sundries like that
and then they had coolers of beer. If it was right after payday, we’d drink Coors where I
think it was 25 cents a quart.

LC: Wow.

MM: If it was close to payday and we were stretching it, I think we’d drink Bush
or Old Milwaukee for 10 cents a quart. We drank a lot of quarts.

LC: A lot of quarts. (Laughing)

MM: Yes, and they had picnic tables outside, so we’d sit around picnic table and
drink beer and talk.

LC: Were the other guys primarily younger than you were?

MM: Yes, pretty much.

LC: Were you like the old married man in the group or were there other guys
who were married?

MM: I’m not sure if I was. Well, see, a lot of the guys were, as I said in the unit,
were Reserve and National Guard and a lot of those guys were married, but of the
enlisted or drafted guys, I think I was the only guy that was married. There may have
been one other person married.

LC: Did you find yourself kind of out of a treating experience a little bit
differently because you were married, because you had a child on the way?

MM: Yes, it was just a big game to me.

LC: Right, that you needed to survive.

MM: Yes, exactly.

LC: Go ahead.

MM: You developed a pretty good camaraderie with the guys. There, I wasn’t
pop like in the old World War II movies. In Vietnam, I think I was, but not there.

LC: I think that you mentioned in the question here that before you actually left
for Vietnam, you also had some culture training about…

MM: Oh yes, I’ll continue the story.

LC: Sure.

MM: I got out of AIT and there was only one guy that had orders for Vietnam out
of AIT and he had volunteered for it.

LC: I see.

MM: This is of the non-National Guard Reserve guys. I had orders for Germany,
but I didn’t want to go to Germany because and I know I sound like I was a very picky
soldier, but Madelaine here is pregnant and I wanted to stay stateside until she had the
baby because I think at that time, I was an E3 now. I think I made Private 1st Class in
AIT. They wouldn’t pay to move Madelaine. She couldn’t go with me. You had to be
an E4 with over I think, four years or two years of service or an E5, so I requested the
delay in orders until she had the baby.

LC: Where were you supposed to go in Germany? Do you remember?

MM: I have no idea. I just had some orders to report to some replacement depot
in Germany.

LC: Okay.

MM: I would presume it was to an artillery unit, but I don’t know. They said,
“Oh, hey, no problem. But bring in a doctor’s statement.” So, I had Madelaine send me
a note from her doctor and then we graduated from AIT; everybody went on their merry
way and then I was assigned to a holding company at Fort Sill.

LC: Okay. When did you actually graduate from the AIT? Do you remember
the month?

MM: I could say May or June.

LC: So you went to a holding company?

MM: Yes.

LC: Can you just describe what that is?

MM: It’s just people like me who have reasons. I think there was a couple of us
there waiting for our wives to have babies. There were a few people; they didn’t know
what to do with them. They had maybe a couple of months left in the army and they just
came back from someplace. Nobody came back from Vietnam, but people may have
been, their tour in Germany was over or something so they came back or they were on a
medical hold. Usually, a lot of these medical holds were guys that thought they shouldn’t
be in the service and the Army said they should be, but their daddy wrote the
congressman and they have a congressional inquiry pending and all that kind of thing.
So, it was just kind of miscellaneous riffraff. That’s what we called ourselves.

LC: Did you actually know of a couple guys there who were trying to pull…?

MM: Yes, I never knew what happened to them, but they were there.

LC: But that was going on.

MM: Yes.

LC: So, what did you do while you’re in the holding company?

MM: I guarded a Laundromat.

LC: (Laughing)

MM: Well, they had various jobs to do around and there was this Laundromat
was prime duty because it was open 18 hours a day and you had a 6-hour shift, but it was
right across the street from the base library. So I said, “Man, here I’m going to get paid
to read books.” And all we had to do was just sit in the Laundromat and make sure
nobody, you know, if they felt the washer wasn’t working and they couldn’t get their
money back, that they wouldn’t be kicking on it or whatever. I never had any incident
there, so I would just perform my tour at the Laundromat. I would go into the library, get
a good book, and come back and sit there and read the book and turn it back in when I’m
done, go get something to eat, and then do the same thing the next day. The only thing
was our shift rotated. Like I might be 1st shift today, then 2nd shift tomorrow, then 3rd
shift the following day and I think I had a day off, and then just started over again.
LC: So, what were you reading?
MM: Everything. I read a lot of Hemmingway, Fitzgerald; histories. I think I
read the decline and fall of the Roman Empire; just everything.
LC: Did you pick up anything on Asia or Southeast Asia?
MM: Nope.
LC: Was that kind of by, “I’m not there, so I don’t have to…”
MM: No, I was going to Germany, remember?
LC: Right.
MM: Yes.
LC: You still thought while you were in the holding company that the orders for
Germany were still being shelved?
MM: Oh you bet, I thought they were just suspended, yes.
LC: Okay. So, did you read some German history or anything about the 3rd
Reich?
MM: No, I think I read a biography on, well, no, what is it, Shires, The Rise and
Fall of the 3rd Reich and I think I read a biography of Fredrick Barbarosa and I think I
read something on who the Iron Chancellor of Bismarck and I read, I can’t remember if it
was out then or not, I don’t know, just a bunch of stuff. I wasn’t picking any particular
thing; just trying to pass the time.
LC: When was your child born then?
MM: July 20th of 1967.
LC: And did all that go okay?
MM: Yes. In fact, I came back from the Laundromat one day and there was a
note on my bunk that said, call your brother. So I called my brother and he said, “Hey,
congratulations, you’re a daddy!” “Oh great! So, I’m going to come home.” So, I
requested leave and went home. I think I got there, can’t remember what day he was
born on. I think I got there two days later.
LC: So this is your son?
MM: Yes.
LC: And how long were you able to stay?
MM: I want to say it was about two weeks, maybe a little longer, maybe 18 days.
LC: And when you returned, so this would be sometime maybe the first or second week of August when you returned, you had to go back to Fort Sill?
MM: Yes, I went back to the holding company, that was my unit and I signed in. You know, in the Army, your leave is up at midnight. So, everybody waits till like 5 minutes before midnight they come in and sign in, so it was about 5 minutes to midnight, I signed in and Charge of Quarters said, “Hey, 1st Sergeant wants to see you in the morning.” “Oh, okay, great.” At this time I say, “I hope I get the Laundromat back.”
(Laughing)
LC: Sure, yes.
MM: It was good duty and so I go see him in the morning and he said, “Guess what McGregor?” I said, “What’s that?” He said, “We put you on a levy.” I said, “Oh shit.” Okay, that was a levy to Vietnam. Basically what would happen is the guys getting out of training I guess would get their orders to Vietnam and then if they needed anything more, then they’d levy the various Army bases around the country by MOS (Military Occupational Specialty). They’d say, “Okay, we need so many people with this specialty and okay Fort Sill, you got to fill 25 percent of the thing” and they’d look around for available people. I was perfect to get because I didn’t have a permanent unit and that saved somebody who was in a regular unit from their having to ship them off.
LC: Right, going short.
MM: Yes.
LC: So you were sitting there in a holding company and you were just right picking specifically?
MM: Yes I was. So I said, “How about Germany?” They said, “How about it?” I said, “Okay.”
LC: They weren’t persuaded by your appeal that you should be going to Germany?
MM: Oh no, and I knew it, I figured. Once he said, “Levy” I mean, that’s fate.
LC: You had learned about this levying system kind of…?

MM: Yes. They had people talk about levies and through this. At the Laundromat; I got to know a bunch of guys. They’d come in, do their laundry and that kind of stuff and they would talk about a levy or, “Hey, you know Joe’s got levied? He won; he’s on a levy. He’s going.”

LC: What was that like Mike to come back from just having been with your wife and your child and seeing the child for the first time and all that excitement and probably euphoria, and then you come back and the first morning that you’re back in, you not only get shipped out, but ship out news to Vietnam?

MM: It was one of those, “Oh shit” moments of life. What else can you say? I was disappointed, shocked, a little worried; that whole kind of thing. And then, see, before you went, then you had to do what you referred to earlier, we had to do the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) training, the Vietnam training where they ran us through. We had to write a will, which was an uplifting experience.

LC: I bet.

MM: But the Army was taking care of us. They wanted to make sure everything was covered. Then when we had a few days. Well, then, I had to qualify with the M-16, so I spent maybe a couple of days familiarizing myself and at the range shooting which was kind of fun.

LC: How easily did the target shooting come to you?

MM: Oh, good, because I had hunted a lot as a kid and shot a lot. I had cousins and uncles that’d take my brother and I out hunting and I had a shotgun. I had a rifle I think when I was 9, 10 years old, you know, 22. So, I liked shooting anyway, so I didn’t think much. I didn’t think the M-16 was much of a rifle after an M-14.

LC: I was going to ask you, how did you get along with the M-16?

MM: Oh, it was nice. Hey, it’s a lot lighter to carry. I thought it was an interesting weapon. So, we had to do that and then we had classes on the Vietnamese Culture and some of the words. Then when we had a Medic; a doctor talked to us about genital wounds, make you look like you’re terrible, but don’t worry, you can still function. It was unbelievable.

LC: Right, you’re getting the idea, this is…
MM: And I think they just want to relieve your fears and that and then we had to practice convoys, riding in a convoy and breaking ambushes, so we’d be in trucks and then we’d get someplace and something would blow up in front of us and the trucks would stop and people would be shooting at us from the sides. We would have to run off the truck and shoot back at them and try to break the ambush. We did that, what, two or three times and then they had a Vietnamese village built, believe it or not, in the plains of Fort Sill, Oklahoma and then we had some orientation on booby traps and how to search a village, tunnels. You know, being 6’4” at that time, about 225; they said, “Well, you’ll never going to go in one of these tunnels.” I said, “Yes, I know, that’s why I’m big.”

LC: Right.

MM: And did that and I thought it was all pretty interesting training.

LC: Was it useful to you or did you feel like, “Gosh, I’m an artillery man. I don’t need to know this.”

MM: Well, but see, back of my mind, I figured I was going to a direct support unit which mean that I probably be in an FO (Foreign Office) party anyway so I figured, anything I can learn and I go back to Sergeant St. Clair in basic training saying, “Hey, this training is all for you. You guys soak it up; learn from it because it’ll keep you alive.” So, I was a pretty attentive student.

LC: Okay, and was the culture and you said a little bit of language training there, can you describe that? What did they try to get across to you?

MM: Well basically that you know, “Don’t laugh at them if you see guys walking around holding each other’s hands; they’re not gay. That’s just a sign to show friendship between two guys.” And that telling us, “Some of them are Catholics and some of them Buddhists and try to understand that. If you see a Monk, don’t offer him a hamburger or something.” I mean really basic stuff like that.

LC: Was it essentially do you think, to give you a few, kind of survival hints or was it more about, sort of, respects?

MM: Mostly I think about respect and just understand that these folks are different and like they said, “They use human waste as fertilizer so if the rice paddies smells like crap, it probably is, but that’s normal, don’t worry about it,” and that stuff.
LC: What about the language? Do you remember what kind of words they were trying to get you to…?

MM: Basically just how to pronounce some of the South Vietnamese Army Ranks like Dai Uy and then some of the really easy stuff like, “water” and that’s about all I can remember.

LC: Did you end up using that language?

MM: No.

LC: No?

MM: Over there we’d call it, a little “nook,” which is water, but I didn’t really interact that much with the civilian population wise there, just a few times right at first.

LC: How long did this kind of special training with the ambush and the village and the culture training, all that, how long did that last?

MM: I would say probably a week, maybe ten days, a week or two weeks. It wasn’t very long.

LC: And overall, do you think that was a good idea that they kind of let the military try to give you some of the…?

MM: Yes, I appreciated it, and they talked a little about operations and how they do things and chain of command. You know, like, “Vietnam’s not the end of the world,” that kind of stuff. It was okay.

LC: And at the end of that training, did you feel like you were as ready as you were ever going to be?

MM: I figured I had a good start, yes. I didn’t know what I was getting into, so I didn’t really know if I was that ready or not and then I got orders for the 15th, let’s see, we got orders to report to the 15th Admin Company which is the of the 1st Air Cav and then the guys there so I go, “What’s this? Are they going to make a clerk?” “Nope, nope; that’s just for all their replacements go to the 1st Cav.” “Oh, okay.” So, then I knew where I was going.

LC: In the 1st Cav, right?

MM: Yes.

LC: Okay, Mike, do you want to take a break for just a moment?

MM: Yes, I can, what time is it?
LC: Okay Mike, so we finished with your, sort of, special training on Vietnamese
culture and some of the tactics and you received your orders to 1st Cav. Can you tell us
what happened next?

MM: Well, then I got a leave. I think it was a non-chargeable leave. I believe it
was because I was paid more leave than I had on the books, so when I got out of the
Army. I went home again for, oh I don’t know, maybe 20 days, 25 days or something
like that.

LC: That was quite a good long leave.

MM: Yes, it was nice. So, I went home and the only thing I could remember
about that and Madelaine was there and obviously a little baby was there in her mom’s
house and I can remember; the only thing I could remember is that we had a big wash tub
in the backyard and we’re dyeing all my white underwear green. I can remember that
because they said, “You better have green underwear over there. We don’t want to see a
white shirt.” “Okay, so I’m going to do that.”

LC: When your leave was expiring, how did you feel?

MM: “Well, this is it. See you in a year.” I told Madelaine, I said, “Don’t worry.
I’ll be back; I’ll come home. One way or another, I’ll come home.” I told my mother the
same thing and she said, “Well, you better because I lost one man and I don’t want to lose
another one.” I said, “Oh, okay.” It was kind of a sad feeling going over, I should say
leaving, and then went from South Bend to San Francisco.

LC: Okay, and were you supposed to report at San Francisco?

MM: Yes, I was to report at the Oakland Repot Depot, the Replacement Depot. I
should say, there was another guy in the holding company and I went through this thing
together: Charlie Poore.

LC: How do you spell his last name, do you remember?

MM: POORE.

LC: Okay.

MM: Charlie, he was from Wichita Falls, Texas, over in your neighborhood, but
he was in the holding company with me, same MOS and we both had orders for the Cav.
I met up with Charlie and we went on leave together and then we met at the Oakland
Replacement Depot and I think we were only there, I don’t know, maybe three or four
days and it was kind of an open post and you just had to go make a formation, maybe three, maybe four times a day where they called the names off of the guys that were shipping out and then you just hung around and they had a club. You could drink some beer, that kind of thing. I think that was my first exposure to protestors. There were some people out there because between the area where you had your formation and the bar, the enlisted men’s club was a street and there were some people on the street with signs. They didn’t bother us; we didn’t bother them.

LC: Do you remember what the tenor of their signs?
MM: Something like “Stop the war!” or “Don’t go!” something like that.
LC: And were they old or young or white or black, do you remember?
MM: I can’t remember, I really don’t remember. I just remember looking at the sign and telling Charlie, we were walking over there for a beer, I said, “Yes, I wish to hell I wouldn’t have to go. Do they have the magic thing?” and that was it.

LC: You were actually kind of in simpatico with the protestors, “Yes, let’s stop the war.”
MM: Yes, oh hell yes. I don’t care.

LC: Did you have a general sense or had the Army given you training as to why the United States is actually committing troops to Vietnam?
MM: Yes, this was part of that stuff at Fort Sill about the communists are trying to take this place over and they’re killing all these people, anybody that’s for the government, they’re coming by and disemboweling and doing that kind of stuff.

LC: So that part of your training which you were being told that the communists…
MM: We were told about the atrocities that they were doing, yes. The VC was very nasty bunch of guys.

LC: Right. What was your reaction to that training? Was this new to you? Had you known?
MM: Some of that stuff was in the papers. They’d say about a village getting this and that, but I wasn’t really paying that much attention to it and what they were talking about, and I think they won a little on. I can’t remember if they talked about what happened to Vietnam after the French were there or not, how their coming in and they
want to discredit their government and they’re fighting this. They didn’t really dwell on
it as I recall, but the information was presented.

LC: As you were trained Historian basically, did you believe everything they
were telling you?

MM: Pretty much so. My government never lies to me other than Johnson about
getting drafted.

LC: Right.

MM: You got to remember, I grew up, the government was good. You believe
what these guys are telling you.

LC: Let’s go back to Oakland just for a minute. What was the mood there? Do
you remember, what were guys kind of chatting about?

MM: Everything but going to Vietnam. They kind avoided the subject. I
remember, there was one guy there, I think he was going to the Cav too, but I can’t
remember what his job was, but he was coming out of the, I think it was the 82\textsuperscript{nd}
Airborne and he had been deployed like the year before. When we went into the
Dominican Republic, he was there and he spent a lot of time telling us about stuff in the
Dominican Republic and going in there and that kind of stuff which was kind of
interesting.

LC: Right, did you have any opinion about the United States actions that he told
you about?

MM: I knew we went in there, I had no idea why, but from studying History, I
knew our involvement in the islands and Haiti and Central America through the Banana
Wars and my brother told me all kinds of stuff about what the Marines did because that
apparently, when he was in the Marines, they really indoctrinated him with the history of
the Corps and what all they did in Nicaragua and Haiti and all that kind of stuff.

LC: Did you feel a great deal of apprehension at this point about getting on a
plane and going over to Vietnam?

MM: I was scared. It wasn’t an unknown that you looked forward with bated
breath.

LC: Sure.
MM: It’s not like, “Gee, hey, I’m going to Disney World for the first time and man, I wonder what I’m going to encounter.” It’s more like, “I’m going to Gary, Indiana and what the hell am I going to encounter?” Terrible. It was the apprehension, the fear of the unknown I guess.

LC: Did you find out what time and what day you were going to actually embark by them calling out your name?

MM: Well yes, basically, what happened, they call your name out, you go back, get your duffel bag, you report an hour later, you’re on a bus, you go over to Travis Air Force Base, you get on an airplane and fly over.

LC: Okay, what kind of plane did you actually get on? Do you know?

MM: I think it was a 707. I think going over was a charter from Flying Tiger I think, I’m not sure.

LC: And what was your route? Do you remember?

MM: Yes, we left the Bay area at nighttime, about 10:00. I’ll never forget this, that we’re flying over and I don’t know if it’s the Bay Bridge or the Golden Gate, but you could see that and I think they put on the sound system, they played, ‘I left my heart in San Francisco.’

LC: Did they really?

MM: Yes, everybody got a big laugh out of that. Then we landed in Hawaii at Honolulu International in the morning, A.M. I think the doors to the airport; this is back before security and stuff, you just get off the ramp and walk in, it was open and there may have been one shop or a snack bar or something that was open there, but that was it. We were there about, I say, maybe an hour, hour and a half. It was enough time to refuel and took off again and in the morning, sometime in the morning, it may have been the morning of the next day, but I remember in morning, we landed in Japan someplace and they refueled there. Then we went down and landed in Cam Ranh Bay.

LC: Did you sit on the plane there in Japan and not get off?

MM: No, no; we got off. I think we landed at an Air Force base and I remember, there was a big hanger. They had like a snack bar; get a cup of coffee, a doughnut, soda or something and that stuff.
LC: And were you still with Charlie at forward at this point, was he kind of going over the same…?

MM: Yes, I don’t think we sat together, but…

LC: He was on the plane?

MM: He was on the plane and I’ll tell you, it scared the hell out of me on that flight. That is, ‘I left my heart to San Francisco’ is one and somebody had given me a book to read at the Replacement Depot and I read that and I can’t even remember the author, but it was called, And Johnny Got His Gun and it was written by, he was an American communist, but it was about this guy in the First World War, he got hit by a shell or something, he had no arms, legs, no eyes, ears, nose, nothing and all he could do is just feel things. I read that and it scared the hell out of me, but at the end, the message was, “Gee, it’s so nice to be alive.” It was really crazy. I’ll never forget that, but yes, we got off the plane in Japan and got back on and went back.

LC: Okay, and you said that you landed at Cam Ranh Bay?

MM: Yes. Cam Ranh Bay.

LC: Do you remember your first, was it daytime when you landed?

MM: Yes, I think it was during the daylight, yes.

LC: Do you remember, your sort of first sight of Vietnam?

MM: Well, it was basically just sandbag stuff. There was all these buildings with sandbags around them or I’d say low buildings. I don’t really remember much else. I know they had, I can’t remember, I think they gave us jungle fatigues before. Yes, yes, at the Replacement Depot, we had to turn in our uniforms, our duffel bags with all our military equipment other than our underwear and that stuff and then they gave us…did we travel in khakis? I’m not sure if we traveled in khakis, I think we traveled in khakis and then we had our jungle fatigues and we had to pack our khakis up and then put the jungle fatigues on and the jungle boots and that stuff and then they had us filling sandbags.

LC: And that’s what you did when you first got there?

MM: Yes, just filled sandbags for a day or two or whatever. I can’t even remember how long I was in Cam Ranh, but it wasn’t very long and then we caught a
plane. I’m not sure what kind, I don’t know if it was a Caribou or a C-123, but then we flew from Cam Ranh Bay to An Khe, which was a base camp of the 1st Cav.

LC: How many guys were on that flight from Cam Ranh up to An Khe?

MM: Pretty full.

LC: So, 100 or?

MM: 20, 25 maybe.

LC: What was your first impression of Ah Khe?

MM: It was much more primitive than Cam Ranh Bay.

LC: In what ways?

MM: Well, I mean the living accommodations, I don’t even think they had a paved runway; I’m not sure. I think they just had that, I don’t know what they call it, the interlocking metal grates for their runway. Obviously, there was a perimeter with wire, everybody’s carrying guns, or weapons I should say, and that kind of thing. So, you’re in a war.

LC: And you had the sense maybe for the first time that you were...

MM: Pardon?

LC: At your sense for the first time that you were in a war?

MM: Yes, because at Cam Ranh Bay, it was like being in the states, you know, the EM (Enlisted Man) clubs and movie shows and now we couldn’t go, but we could see those things. You know, they had pretty good food and they had ice machines, all that stuff. They didn’t really have that in An Khe.

LC: What happened to you when you first arrived there? Who greeted you and how did you get set up in your billet?

MM: Well, then they greeted the plane and then they put us all into different barracks because see then we had to go through Charm School. Everybody in the Cav had to go through Charm School.

LC: Can you tell us what that was?

MM: Well, at that point, it was called the First Team Academy, but they changed the name to something else because they didn’t like the acronym because in the Army an excuse the language, but the initials First Team Academy everybody had written on things, FTA and that “Fuck The Army.”
LC: Okay.

MM: Yes, so we had to go to the First Team Academy and it was basically the divisions; I call them Jungle School, that we all had to, I think we were issued our weapons there and then we went through, everybody if you were a clerk or infantry man, artillery guy, or engineer or whatever, we spent, it was about a week and a half with weapons familiarization. Well, obviously, we qualified with the M-16, shot the M-79 grenade launcher, pistols, the M-60 machine guns; LAWs (Light Anti-tank Weapon), we shot those.

LC: What was that?

MM: A light anti-armor weapon.

LC: Okay.

MM: Which was a portable, one shot and throw away bazooka. So we used that. Fundamentals of patrolling; we would go on patrols during the day around the terrain, around the base camp and at night, we would have to pull perimeter security, practice repelling off of towers and out of helicopters, practice walking down Jacob’s ladders, off of helicopters, that kind of stuff. This is great, I’ll tell you, it was really great. It was a great orientation.

LC: When you say it was great, can you elaborate?

MM: Well, it got us used to the heat. There were two instructors and these guys were old pros and they gave you all kinds of survival hints about what to pack and what not to pack, what to carry, don’t worry about this and that. They just exuded confidence like they knew what they were doing and da da da da da, and then during this, then we got the lectures if we wanted to join the LRRPs or you know, do this other stuff and I don’t think anybody did.

LC: Right, and LRRPs are the…

MM: Long- Rang Reconnaissance Patrols.

LC: And why would you not want to join that?

MM: Are you kidding? I don’t want to be out in the bushes away from with three guys out someplace where there are a lot of bad guys are at.

LC: Right, and so they told you this was pretty much high risk assignments?

MM: Yes, oh yes.
LC: They told you that?

MM: Well, they didn’t tell us high risks, they told us what they did. “Okay, fine.” “A helicopter drops you out some place at night and you’re very quiet, you observe the enemy, and you don’t want to be seen by them.” “Okay, does that mean…well, if you’re observing the enemy, then our guys ain’t going to be around, right? Okay.”

LC: Right.

MM: You make the connection real quick.

LC: And not too many people…

MM: No, I don’t think. Maybe one guy did, but I don’t think anybody did.

LC: So, this lasted, this period?

MM: I want to say it was a week or 10 days and then we were assigned to our units because this was just a base camp. The whole division was away from the base camp, but everybody’s rear area, rear Echelon was still located and I think it’s called Camp Holiday or whatever it was in An Khe. I was assigned to the 1st through the 21st Artillery and they had a rear area, which consisted of, I think there was a clerk and like a Supply Sergeant there.

LC: Did you receive that 1st through the 21st assignment after the…

MM: This is during the Charm School.

LC: Okay. You said that the instructors were exuding confidence about what the mission was and how you were going to carry out and the tools you would need, did you absorb some of that confidence?

MM: Oh yes, we all did. We weren’t scared.

LC: Really?

MM: We got over, “Hey, these guys are pros” and they really hit us with a lot. The Cav was a pretty tough unit and we got out of there, we were sky troopers. It was like, “Hey, we’re rough and tough.” Just felt good about it. They basically answered the unknown and everybody knew fire maneuver, but now we’re doing it. It was just amazing, you know, just amazing. I think we all felt pretty confident about it. I don’t know if would’ve felt the same way if I was going to an infantry unit as a rifleman.
LC: Right, but you sort of felt charged and this might have been the first time that you really felt confident?

MM: Well, now I’m there and I’m seeing people that lived the life, you know, and now I have something I can relate to. It’s not going to be horrible, getting shot at every minute of the day and that kind of thing. Now the unknown is known and I start feeling confident.

LC: Right, and so when you reported to the 21st Artillery, where was that from Ah Khe?

MM: Well, I was assigned to A-battery and A-battery was, I have to back track. It was a direct support 105 Howitzer Unit and now the Air Calvary was a little different. They had four rifle companies instead of three with the head quarters and heavy weapons company, so they had four rifle companies. The biggest organic support that the rifle company would have would be, I think that each one carried two 81-millimeter mortars, but the philosophy was that a battery of artillery, 105 Howitzers was assigned to each battalion of the Cav. So, there were, what, 9 maneuver battalions in the Cav. The 1st through the 21st was assigned to the 3rd Brigade, so there was the 1st of 7th, 2nd of 7th, and I think was the 5th of the 7th Cav. So, then each rifle company [battalion] had this direct support battery that it operated. We always operated within. Well, the 105 Howitzer has probably a maximum range about 11,000 meters and so the 2nd of 7th Cav always basically operated within that range, so they didn’t have to have any organic heavy weapons per say and they could have more people beating the bushes as infantry men.

LC: So they could operate under the umbrella of the…?

MM: Exactly, so I was assigned to A-battery, which was assigned to support the 2nd of 7th Cav and they were detached from the brigade and they were detached from the division and they were in the extreme southeastern corner of II Corps around the city of Phan Thiet. They were there on operation Byrd. That’s BYRD. That had started probably a year before I got there. A little history, I think the 2nd of 7th was about annihilated in the Ia Drang valley and you saw the movie, *We Were Soldiers Once*, I don’t know if you saw that.

LC: Yes.
MM: That was about the 1st of the 7th. After the movie ends, the replacement troops are walking, Mel Gibson’s group, the 1st of the 7th Air Vac out. The 2nd of 7th walked out and in the process of walking out, they walked through a horrendous ambush where they lost about 150 guys.

LC: Okay.

MM: So, I think, I’m not sure, but I think as the division, as they were refitting, they assigned them down to this Operation Byrd which started out as a guard the rice harvest type of operation and they just stayed there. In fact, it was the only self-contained battalion task force in the Vietnam conflict was down there. So, I went to the 1st of the 21st headquarters on An Khe, they said, “Hey, you’re an A-battery. You’ll catch a flight tomorrow. We’ll take you down to Phan Thiet and you can join the battery.” Okay. Both Charlie and I, we both went down there, so then we went down there and we joined the battery which down there, it was split because it was a pretty big area of operations, so they had three guns on firebase, or an LZ (Landing Zone) called Bartlett, and they had three guns that were on a firebase on their landing zone called Judy. Judy would usually move when they extended their area of operations, the three guns at Judy would usually move out to support operations that were exceeding the, you know, outside of the fan.

LC: I was just going to ask about Operation Byrd and that this operation had been going on for a little over a year, you arrived in September 1967, how much and from whom did you learn about Operation Byrd’s kind of back history before you arrived there?

MM: Nothing, they just said they’re down there. I had no idea where they were. I didn’t even know the operation’s name until I was reading something.

LC: Later?

MM: About ten years ago. (Laughing)

LC: Oh, okay.

MM: I had no idea what the hell they called it and I didn’t really care.

LC: And they did not give you information, you’re part of this big operation and you’re…

MM: No, they basically just this is where we’re at, we’re supporting the 2nd of 7th Cav and that’s it.
LC: When you first went down to the Phan Thiet area, where did you actually go? Did you go to one of the LZs?

MM: Well, yes. I landed in Phan Thiet which was a, around the airfield, they called that LZ Betty for some reason or another, and they had some base units were there and then we were only there, I don’t know, maybe a couple of hours and then we took a helicopter out to LZ Bartlett which was way up in the hills and it was only accessible by helicopter.

LC: Do you remember that helicopter ride?

MM: Yes.

LC: That had been your first other than…

MM: No, we rode helicopters in Charm School and repelled out of them. Basically, they’d run a supply helicopter out there two or three times a day or something and they’d take people back and forth. It was like a cab.

LC: It was like a cab?

MM: Yes, in fact, they called them, well; the last one of the night was called the yellow cab. I don’t know why, that’s what they called it.

LC: When you got out to Bartlett, could you describe what you saw?

MM: Well, it was a very hilly terrain, very rough hilly wooded terrain and there was this place, or it probably had the area of maybe a football field, although not shaped like a football field. It had to follow the top of the hill and a lot of bunkers, a lot of holes; guns had their parapet. They had three Howitzers out there, they had their parapets built up, a lot of fighting positions around the perimeter. You’re in the woods now.

LC: Right, and who did you report to?

MM: Well, I can’t remember that. Obviously somebody met us and I can’t remember who met us there and then they took us down to the Company Commander for a minute. I can’t even remember his name because he left, or I should say the Battery Commander, he left, oh I want to say maybe two, three, four weeks at the most after I got there. The 1st Sergeant, somebody introduced us to the 1st Sergeant and then he introduced us to the Battery Commander and then he took us into FDC and wanted to see what we could do.

LC: Okay, that would be the Fire Direction Center.
MM: Yes, and the Fire Direction Control Center.

LC: What did he want to find out?

MM: Well, he put us behind a chart and said, you know, they called out a fire mission to see if we could plug it into grid, get the right grid plugged in and give them the exact firing data, at that point, the range and deflection. And I did it and Charlie couldn’t. He forgot because this was maybe six, seven months after we finished that school.

LC: Right, it’s been a while since you had done this. So, you kind of aced that first test?

MM: Yes.

LC: And Charlie didn’t.

MM: I can’t remember because I think the battery was laid out. They would have big charting tables and I can’t remember what the battery orientation was, but he just read it backwards. They wouldn’t use degrees; they use mils. You know, you had 6400 mills in a circle and a lot of times, south would be 3200 mils, but if the battery was orientated to the south, south was 0 mills. Okay, he just got it backwards or something; I can’t remember what he did.

LC: He pulled through somehow?

MM: Oh yes.

LC: Where did they take you?

MM: They had a working area in this bunker and then kind of a part of this bunker was also made into living quarters. It was kind of like an L-shaped and the flat part of the L was the Fire Direction Center where basically all they had was two chart tables and a little portable desk where the computer would sit. I say computer, I’m talking about a person, not a machine.

LC: Right.

MM: With a bunch of PRC-25 radios over there.

LC: What kind of radios?

MM: PRC-25 radios.

LC: Okay.
MM: You had one chart, well, one chart was a check chart and I think in that operation, one of the guys in the check chart also operated as the check on the computer too. Always check the data twice.

LC: Can you describe what the check chart was?

MM: It was the same thing. You both plotted the data, okay. You had this chart table and you had your range deflection protractor on there. A forward observer, you’d hear it on the radio, call, “Fire mission over.” and then he’d give a grid reference and basically you would just stick a pen in the grid reference on your chart, hit it with the protractor. You would have the flat side would be your range. You would read off range and then the check chart, the guy in the check chart would do the same thing and I’d say, “Range 6400 or 6450” and the check guy would say, “Range check” and then you’d say, “Deflection 2830” or whatever and then he would say, “Deflection 2830 check.”

LC: So, it was sort of a redundant system to ensure accuracy?

MM: Yes, you bet. Then the computer guy would, at that time, he’s on the horn usually calling the base piece fire mission and then he would give them the deflection, so end up doing that, then he would from that range with a slide rule, he would figure out the quadrant, the up and down of the gun. That was range driven because the range would drive the charge; you had seven possible charges that could be fired. Then he would take, had a little like a slide rule he’s say, “Okay, on a charge seven, a range of”, I don’t know, whatever it was, like 9000 meters, he would slide it to 9000 meters, I’d get the quadrant. Then, he’d call the quadrant and then he’d have a check computer because the battery was split, you had a lot of guys that do the same thing. You follow me? Had to do more than one job, so usually the guy in the check chart would also have the slide rules and then he would check the quadrant as well, and then he’d call it to the gun and then fire.

LC: When he called it to the gun, who made the decision about which of the charges would be used?

MM: The computer would.

LC: Okay, so he would call the gun and he would say, “This is the charge that you…”
MM: Yes, he would call the fire mission and you usually shot with your base
piece first.
LC: With your base piece?
MM: Yes, this is what all the other guns were orientated to because in it was set
up like, if you shot the same data, if your gun is 50 meters away, you’re shooting the
same data, my gun will hit that 50 meter place away, you follow me?
LC: Yes, exactly. Their firing exactly the same, the charges, I’m sorry, the shells
would land in the same distribution in the field as…
MM: Their set up on.
LC: The gun in places were in the LZ, yes.
MM: And range usually dictated charge, the 105 Howitzer was semi-fixed
ammunition. That means it just looked like a bullet. It looked like a huge bullet, but you
could take the warhead off and then the powder was there in bags. So, if it was a charge
6, you would just break off the first bag and throw it away.
LC: It came loaded with seven?
MM: Yes, it came loaded with seven.
LC: And then you broke it down?
MM: Yes.
LC: Okay. Then Mike, you said that the configuration of the, I guess it’s the
FDC was actually kind of L-shaped?
MM: Yes, it was like an L-shaped bunker, yes.
LC: And then part of it was the living?
MM: Living quarters, yes. You had to have some bunks built out of old ammo
boxes.
LC: Out of old ammo boxes?
MM: Yes, the 105 Howitzers rounds would come two rounds to a nice pine box.
LC: Okay.
MM: They would have a piece of tarp paper in between them and then they’d be
wrapped in like visqueen or something; some clear plastic. Obviously, as they emptied
those boxes, you had a lot of boxes around, so you’d break them apart and build stuff out
of it.
LC: Who was actually quartered in that area?

MM: The Fire Direction people were.

LC: Did that include you at this time?

MM: I was assigned there, yes.

LC: Okay.

MM: And Charlie was too, and then we went to the field later for a while.

LC: How long were you actually assigned there?

MM: I was in and out. Now, as I said, we’re direct support battery, so then the battery had to supply FO parties to each company in the battalion.

LC: By FO, you mean?

MM: Forward Observer parties.

LC: Okay and those people did what?

MM: Would basically call in artillery fire.

LC: Okay, they would tell where it needed to be?

MM: Yes, they’d be with the infantry and they’d call in fire or the infantry could get on the artillery net and call it in as well, and each party was supposed to have an Officer Recon Sergeant and a radio operator.

LC: Okay.

MM: You know, 9 times out of 10, there wasn’t an officer out in the field.

LC: Okay and you were saying that you at first were assigned to the FDC party at LZ Bartlett, but you kind of moved around?

MM: Yes, and I did some stints out in the field. I was pretty cautious about doing it, but I did it. I went to some FO parties for a while, you know, in and out, but usually housed in FDC. A lot of times, when a battery’s set up or a portion of the battery’s set up, then an infantry element is assigned for basically to secure it. So, they may have a platoon down to secure the battery and then the other platoons of the company are out humping about doing their own thing. You know, might be, one day, might be several days at a time. So then, a lot of times, the base secure force, they would have to patrol the area in proximity to wherever you’re at and because we are always short on people and FO parties, a lot of us would go with the patrols for the base defense
force. So, the FO resources could be with the other platoons that are further out in the
bush.

LC: They were out patrolling a little bit longer range from the LZ.

MM: Yes.

LC: Okay Mike, let’s take a break for a moment.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Michael McGregor. The date is 17th of December 2003 and again, I am in the interview room at the Special Collections Building on campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. McGregor again is in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Good afternoon Mr. McGregor.

Michael McGregor: Good afternoon.

LC: Let’s begin sort of where we left off yesterday with your taking a test upon arrival at LZ Bartlett, you and Charlie were taking the test and you did very well. What happened next?

MM: Well, basically, the battery was split. They had three guns at LZ Bartlett and they had three guns, which LZ Bartlett was up in the hills and we had three guns on LZ Judy.

LC: Okay, now these are the battery guns that are divided between…

MM: Right. The battery had six 105 Howitzers and the battery was split. They had a presence on each of those landing zones.

LC: How far apart were they?

MM: Probably 12,000 meters.

LC: Okay.

MM: Bartlett could shoot to support us because they were higher, so they’re shooting from a higher area and so the fall of shot would go farther, but we couldn’t
shoot at Judy. They could not shoot to support Bartlett because their shooting up hill wouldn’t go as far.

LC: I think you had said that the maximum range was…

MM: It was about 11,000, 11,500 meters, something like that.

LC: Okay, that sets it up great.

MM: The LZ Judy was, I’m not sure which way it was from Phan Thiet, may have been west. It was kind of flat on a plain, although there was a hill; one kind of aberration hill about 1500 meters outside of the landing zone, but it was pretty flat around. A railroad track went by there, maybe quarter half a mile away. I remember there’s a river, other side of river was a Vietnamese village.

LC: Do you know which river that was?

MM: No I don’t, I have no idea.

LC: Okay.

MM: It was some place between west of Phan Thiet and we never even got down to the river, but I think there’s a bridge, but it was disabled for vehicle travel. I think people could cross it, but anyway, it was pretty flat and I’m not sure how long that was there, if it was even a French kind of thing because the landing zone was kind of oval shaped and it was about as big as the interior of a football stadium. It had the field, and then it had kind of the oval around it. It wasn’t very big, but big enough. They had a, must’ve been about an 8-foot high earthen birm pushed up around it. It was very hard, hard ground. Then they had some watchtowers there and it was very well defended. They had, if I remember, they had four Dusters there and one Quad 50.

LC: By Dusters you mean?

MM: I think it’s old World War II anti-air craft artillery. It was a twin 40-millimeter cannon on a tank chasse and then the Quad 50; those were 50-caliber machine guns on the back of 5-ton truck. They were part of the base defense.

LC: And about how many guys were there? Do you have any idea?

MM: Not too many. There were probably, there’s usually a platoon of infantry securing the place, so that platoon there would be maybe 30, 35 guys. There were three guns and with an FDC section, so you figured maybe 5 guys from each gun section, so 15
and maybe 20 from the artillery and with the Dusters, I think each one had a crew of 2, 3, or 4, or something. At any one time, there weren’t more than maybe 50, 55 people there.

LC: And the principle purpose of this LZ was to house the artillery in places.

MM: Yes, just as a firing location and just that kind of secure, I guess secure the area.

LC: Now, you mentioned there was a village, a Vietnamese village near the river on the other side of the river.

MM: Yes.

LC: Did you know the name of that village at all?

MM: No, I didn’t. I think it started with an M. I’ve never been to the village; I can’t remember what it was.

LC: Did you guys have a name for it or did you just call it…?

MM: No, because we had, it was like on the southeast corner of the LZ, there was an opening in this birm and we called that The Gate and then the locals would set up shop outside The Gate; they had little pavilions set up and you can buy beer there or soda pop, other little stuff, play with the kids and give the kids soap and stuff like that.

LC: And did you do that kind of stuff?

MM: Yes, we did that periodically.

LC: Were there Vietnamese civilians who work on the LZ doing…?

MM: No. No, Vietnamese are allowed on the LZ.

LC: Was that true the whole time you were there?

MM: For Judy it was, yes.

LC: Okay. So, you arrived there from Bartlett.

MM: Yes.

LC: How did you get over there?

MM: By helicopter. They’d run their regular runs, like usually the helicopters came in at least three times a day to bring meals in and mail and equipment, shuttled people back and forth.

LC: When you arrived there, were you supposed to take another test or?

MM: No, they just assigned me to the Fire Direction Control Center and suddenly there’s somebody new.
LC: And this is where you’re going to be?

MM: Well, yes. I was there and the facility of Judy was, I guess I want to say, the mobile part of the thing because we would move a lot. We would go on; they used to do what they call a lot of artillery raids.

LC: What’s an artillery raid?

MM: Well, basically, I don’t know how they determined the thing, but intelligence would say, “Hey look, this is a hot area” so what we would do is we’d air assault in with the infantry. I’d usually send in a platoon, secure the perimeter, then the Chinooks would bring in usually three guns, sometimes two guns with a whole bunch of ammo, they’d set the guns up and then we’d shoot like hell for 6 hours or something at pre-determined targets or targets that were found by scout helicopters and that kind of stuff. Then they’d come back and we’d all go back that night and that was we called an artillery raid. Then we’d do what we call Hip Shoots which were we would permanently; I shouldn’t say permanently, we would temporally relocate that section of the battery someplace else.

LC: You would actually take the 105 millimeters?

MM: Oh yes, on the raid.

LC: Yes.

MM: And the Hip Shoots and they’d sling out and then we’d set up another LZ someplace else and support operations there and then they’d bring back. A portion of the battery Judy did all those things, the ones in Bartlett just stayed there.

LC: Oh okay, so this was the mobile section.

MM: Right.

LC: What was the difference between a Hip Shoot and an artillery raid?

MM: A raid was just one day. We’d just go out and as I said, we’d come in the morning. You know, they secure the perimeter, the guns would come up and take them maybe ten minutes to set the guns up and then we’d just pump rounds, shoot a couple thousand rounds at different stuff and then leave.

LC: And the Hip Shoots you just stay out?

MM: It’s more permanent location would be on going operations in the area, we’d support that. They drew down or went someplace else, and we’d go back to…I
presume we were doing those things because we couldn’t reach them from Judy. That’s
probably the only reason or they couldn’t support that operation from either landing zone
Judy or Bartlett, so we’d have to move to where the action was.

LC: Did you have much information about the kinds of targets that you were
hitting or were you just given locations?

MM: Oh yes, we would get that. Well, when somebody’s directing the fire,
somebody’s observing the fire if they’re on the ground or in the air, usually they call in a
fire mission which they would indicate what the target was and whoever calling it in
would basically specify the fuse to use.

LC: Okay, can you talk about the fuse selections?

MM: Sure, each round came standard with an impact fuse, explode on contact
and that could be set back to a delay fuse, add a little screw or I think just put a little
Allen wrench in the thing and just do a turn and that would either point detonate or it
would detonate like maybe a half a second or a second after impact. The rounds came
with those standard fuses. Then there were also time fuses, which you could set to
explode after a certain period of time. You could use those for air bursts to determine the
time of flight that it would take for the round to get there and then you would just back
off a half a second or so and then the idea was to get it to explode about 50 to 20 meters
above the ground.

LC: So that the impact would be…

MM: Well, the shrapnel would; it’s basically anti-personnel that way that the
shrapnel would come down and cut up everything. You get more of an impact that way
and then we had what they called VT fuses of Variable Time which another name for it
would be a Proximity Fuse where it would do that. It would automatically explode over a
certain distance above the ground.

LC: So, there was some kind of calibration system inside?

MM: Well, it had a little radar transmitter in there.

LC: Do you know much about that?

MM: It was pretty expensive. There were about 90 bucks a fuse they told us and
the problem with that was a lot of times, if you’re shooting into heavy foliage, it’ll
detonate above the canopy, so it’s not going to do any good or if it’s real heavy, humid
air, you might get some false detonations on the thing.

LC: Because the radar would be reading that and…

MM: It’s getting a signal back, yes. It’d be admitting a signal and then as I
understand the engineering of it, when it start receiving the signal back, I think they had
something in there that just measured the time and went from sending to receiving his
certain time then it would explode.

LC: Were those Variable Time or Proximity Fuses being used when you first
arrived in country?

MM: Oh yes, they had them I mean, those things have been standing since the
latter part of the Second World War.

LC: Right.

MM: It was understandable.

LC: I think that was a big break through in engineering in World War II. I just
wondered how broadly they were being used because of the expense of those.

MM: If we could fast-forward a time.

LC: Sure.

MM: After about nine or ten months in country, we got all this new leadership. I
think they just traded battalion leadership from an outfit in Germany with us and we got
these crazy rules that each gun would have to keep a minimum supply of ammunition and
fuses, so we didn’t have enough point detonate to use this, so we were shooting VT as
point detonating. Basically all you would do is just, they had a lever where you could set
a time instead of the proximity thing, so we’d just crank up a time that was ridiculously
long and then it would just explode on impact. So, instead of a 3 buck fuse, we were
shooting 90-dollar fuses, but we were maintaining the inventory.

LC: Yes, for the bureaucratic order.

MM: Right.

LC: Well, someone was happy.

MM: But basically the FO; whoever is directing fire calling for the fire mission
would generally specify fuse.

LC: Now, can you tell us exactly what FO means and typically examples?
MM: A Forward Observer, I’m sorry.
LC: That’s okay. That was a Forward Observer.
MM: Yes.
LC: Where was the Forward Observer relative to the location of the gun?
MM: Well, they were with the unit requesting the fire. They were with the infantry unit or they may have been in a helicopter if it was kind of a recon deal.
LC: What types of information did that FO send back to the FDC?
MM: Well, what they would need is they had this whole protocol. They call on a fire mission and you’d have to repeat, go through the thing that they would come in with a grid reference and the nature of the target and the fuse. It would be something like I’d just go through it. Let’s say, we were Amber Outlaw one time; that was our call sign, so say, “Okay, Amber Outlaw, this is Leroy Socks” and you’d say, “Okay” and then they’d say, “Over” then we’d say, “Okay, Leroy Socks, this is Amber Outlaw, out.” Then he would say, “Amber Outlaw, fire mission, grid 3843256” whatever, and then we’d repeat it a fire mission and he’d say, “Enemy,” you know, a bunker, then define what the target is, enemy in the open, whatever request VT fuse and then we’d repeat it. Then, while all this is going on, the guys on the chart would be plotting the data as we talked about yesterday and then he would also give us an adjustment line. He’d either make his adjustments off of the gun target line or off of the azimuth that he was viewing the target at. Which would be critical in terms of further adjusting because if he’s looking at it from the east and adjust it like right 100 meters, up 100 meters or whatever and if you’re shooting it from the south, that same adjustments going to go someplace else. So, he’d give us that azimuth and then while that is happening, the computer guy, their getting the range and deflection and somebody’s on the telephone to the guns alerting them to fire mission, calling out a charge. Then when the guns shoot, and our protocol was we always had to shoot first round smoke unless it was a previously shot in target.
LC: Okay, and by smoke you mean?
MM: A smoke round.
LC: Okay.
MM: And it would pop up, I don’t know, maybe 150, 200 meters above the ground and it would kick out like three smoke pallets or something and it’d just go down.
LC: And just in case somebody isn’t clear, tell us why you would fire smoke first?

MM: Well, because a lot of times these people didn’t know where they were. You don’t want to put high explosive on them.

LC: Right.

MM: So, we’d shoot, you know, we’d say, “Okay, we shot smoke” and he would say, “Shot out” and then we’d give them a splash. Which we’d usually say, “We give them splash” basically 10 seconds before the round would hit.

LC: Okay, and you’re telling this to the forward observer who’s…?

MM: So, he would know when to expect the round on the ground and then he would say, “Okay, I observe smoke, repeat HE (High-Explosive).” So, then we would have to repeat with High Explosive. Then, we’d repeat that and then he would adjust off of that.

LC: You were primarily in the Fire Detection Center?

MM: Yes and then I was out in FO parties too.

LC: Okay. Let’s take both of those in turn. When you were in the Fire Direction Center and you heard, “Fire mission!” my impression is that you had to act fast?

MM: You bet, yes.

LC: Can you describe what it was like, what you felt like when you first started hearing that, “Fire Mission!”

MM: Well, I just wanted to be real careful, but I just did it. I guess that was the beauty of the Army training because you trained so much, habit just took over.

LC: And you just started going through your protocol?

MM: Yes, and we were good because we could have from that initial call, you know, that the initial, “Hey, Amber Outlaw, this is Leroy Socks” to first round on the ground could be a minute, could be a minute twenty seconds with a forty second time of flight for the rounds, so we’re getting it out there real quick.

LC: Right.

MM: We always had some hints because most of the time, see, we were supported, we knew who we were supporting, so we always had guns kind of trained in that area anyway.
LC: Right, so that your actual adjustments that you had to make at the moment was minimum.

MM: Exactly, and a lot of times, these guys, I know when I was out in the field, I did an awful lot of recon by fire which was basically if you’re going to be walking down someplace that doesn’t look right, so you drop a few rounds in there before you walk in there. Mr. Charlie’s there, keep his head down unless he has overwhelming force.

LC: When you say, “Things don’t look right.” let’s just talk about that for a moment. What kinds of things would you observe as an FO such that you knew things didn’t look right?

MM: Well, basically, you wouldn’t be seeing much yourself because you as an FO, you were usually back with whatever the headquarters element was with the platoon leader or in some cases, the company commander and you could be 50 hundred meters away from the action. So, the point guy would come back and say, “Hey, it looks like some people been walking in the grass, go on north, you know, the way we’re going.” So, you’d look at the platoon leader and say, “Okay. Just stop. Okay, we’ll walk in it.” Then we’d verify with the thing on the map, just basically see where we’re are and we then we just might drop some rounds in there or he’ll come back. Or if we’re hunkered up in a place and you got a line of march and it looks like there might be a likely ambush place or something, so you drop a few rounds in there first. We did a lot of that. I think that was the big difference between the Army and the Marines because the Marines wouldn’t do that. They wouldn’t waste money and we, when in doubt, shoot it up because we were always in a free fire zone anyway.

LC: Right, and by free fire zone, what exactly did you…?

MM: You didn’t need corners to shoot; you could just shoot. Anybody you saw you assumed they were the bad guys.

LC: You didn’t have to go to up the chain…

MM: No

LC: …to get an approval for a firing?

MM: That’s right.

LC: You say that the Marines in general didn’t follow this kind of policy?
MM: Yes, well, when we went up to I Corps, whether the Marines were up that way and they weren’t that generous in using artillery the way we did to recon by fire and that, they would just probe and, you know do it blood and guts.

LC: And you think that was about the expense of the artillery and the shells?

MM: I don’t know, maybe just the philosophy and all. I got a bayonet in my teeth and I’m better than anybody else, so I might want to do it. Our philosophy was, “When in doubt, shoot!” and their philosophy was I think, “When in doubt, six bayonets and charge!”

LC: And you think the Army’s philosophy was a little bit more effective and less costly?

MM: I think so, yes, because it was under the best of circumstances, you just wasted some money or if there’s some bad guys out there, they knew the world was going to come down on them, so they may think twice before they pick a fight.

LC: When you were, as you say most of the time, operating in free fire zone, what did you understand about the fate of the civilians who had previously lived in that area?

MM: This was in the woods; they weren’t any civilians.

LC: There were no villages or anything?

MM: No, down there we never, you know, kind of an operations. There were a few what we call Victory Gardens, but it was basically VC (Viet Cong) stuff. They would get a little clearing and grow something, and if we found those, we’d shoot those up. We never came across any civilian’s way out in the bush like that.

LC: When you would come across these gardens, what were they growing? Do you have any idea?

MM: Well, some places may have been rice, other places just like pumpkins or something. They ate a lot of pumpkin soup.

LC: And when you say you guys shot it up, did you actually get out your M-16?

MM: Oh, no, we dropped artillery on it.

LC: You actually used the artillery?

MM: Oh yes, if we see a Victory Garden, we plow it up with artillery, maybe drop a couple of delay fuses in there to really churn the ground up.
LC: Did FO’s call that in too in the Victory Garden?
MM: Sure.
LC: So, any potential target was a real target that you’d go after?
MM: Exactly.
LC: Thinking now about your time at LZ Judy, when you were in the FDC, how were you housed?
MM: In a bunker. In fact, we built a “Taj Mahal” where in it they had a real old bunker. It was kind of long. It’s just basically rectangular and it had the work area was about the one, about a third of it, and living quarters were the other part of it.
LC: How many guys were in there?
MM: Oh, there weren’t too many of us. Usually, the FDO was there, he’s a Fire Direction Officer, and we had three or four guys.
LC: Did you guys have any pets there or?
MM: One time at Judy they had a pet. Somebody got a cat and it ended up pooping on the XO’s (Executive Officer) clothes, so he threw it out, out of the perimeter.
LC: That was the end of that, huh?
MM: That was the end of the cat.
LC: Did the cat have a name?
MM: No.
LC: No, just cat or?
MM: Just cat. We only had him for a couple of days.
LC: Oh okay, and then he made his error.
MM: Yes, he did his thing and he went on to something else, but we rebuilt the bunker. We built a huge bunker. I told you about these ammo boxes we used.
LC: Right.
MM: Well, you’d use those and the construction you’d fill them with dirt. I think we made one that was big, but I think the walls were like three ammo boxes thick with dirt and then we had like three layers of sandbags on this thing. The engineers put a great big beam over the top and then we put all this, I don’t know what they call it, there was a like a three letter initial for it. Something like metal sections that they’d use for temporary runways.
LC: Runways; yes.

MM: We’d put that on the top and then put like three or four layers of sandbags on top of that. It was pretty impractical. We constructed that and then we had, it was probably a little smaller than the other one because the other one, it had, the sandbags were cloth and they were rotting because of the climate and that and then they got some new kind of sandbags over which were like a synthetic fiber or something that was more weather resistant. So, when we didn’t have anything to do, we were reconstructing our new house.

LC: And you called it the Taj Majal?

MM: Yes. It was nice.

LC: Were you able to sleep well at night?

MM: Well, you didn’t really get too much sleep. During the day, you’re working. You were either building the bunkers or doing something as to when you’re on the firebase or you always had to be in pretty close proximity to the bunker in case a fire mission came through. One person always had to monitor the radio and then at night, you had to take turns either on perimeter guard and or doing what we call radio watch. So, somebody had to sit and monitor the radio.

LC: Did you actually walk the perimeter?

MM: Well, you didn’t walk. They had fighting positions on the perimeter.

LC: And did you have to take the watch?

MM: Oh yes. A lot of times didn’t like to because, but there weren’t that many. The infantry is supposed to do that at night, but a lot of times there weren’t enough of them or whatever.

LC: What weapons did you have with you when you were in the bunker at night?

MM: M-16, there may have been others. Some of them had M-60s there, but just M-16.

LC: Do you remember any particular fire mission there at Judy that kind of stand out?

MM: Well, it was one of my first ones. I don’t know when it was that I was over there. I was relatively new there and there was a, one of the reasons I guess ratified me for not going to the long-range patrol because we got a mission; there was LRRP team up
in the hills and they were apparently, I guess they inserted during the day and they just
stayed there, and then at night, there’s all these lights around them and it turned out that
they were like in the middle of a VC Company. We basically shot for them all night. We
boxed their position in with artillery and just kept a wall of fire around them all night till
they could get those guys out in the morning. Then the grunts went out and got them and
they came back.

LC: Oh okay, so they weren’t extracted by helicopter, they actually were joined
up with another unit?

MM: Yes. Well, I think they were probably extracted, but I think what they did
was they air assaulted it in, probably part of a couple of squads or something around them
and then they went up in the palm and then by this time, Charlie was gone.

LC: When you say you boxed their position, can you actually sort of describe
how that would work?

MM: We figured out where they were and then we just kind of went out to about
50, 60 meters all around them and just kept firing up to that close to them. We had
certain pre-set deflection quadrants and just kept a wall of fire around them.

LC: Did you ever talk to any of those guys or hear…?

MM: Yes, oh yes, they came back.

LC: What was their appraisal of your firing?

MM: They said, “God, thank you.” But then it’s kind of crazy because when
they went in there and got them and they brought back, I think they only found five or six
bodies out there, but they found two or three wounded VC and they brought them back
and these guys were saying, “Hey, we didn’t even know there was any Americans there
until you guys start shooting.”

LC: Oh really?

MM: Yes, but the LRRP guys panic. See, they do these little bitty lights or
matches or candles and stuff you know, to kind of walk around in dark, they didn’t have
flashlights and all a sudden, they saw these, what they were saying over the radio, there
were hundreds of these lights. There were probably a good many of them, 50, 60 of them
over this area. They were panicked because I know we had our fired; well, the officer we
had in the FDC was just an FO from, he was Lieutenant Noles, he was the FO for Delta
Company. He was just staying with us for a couple of three days to rest up and then I
know he was on the horn talking to these guys all night trying to calm them down, you
know, “Hey, don’t worry. We’re there.” He came up through the ranks. He was
probably an enlisted man, 6, 8 years and then he went to OCS. He was a real good
soldier, kind of kept him, but they were kind of panicky for a while. I would’ve been too
under the same situation.

LC: Did you see the POWs (Prisoners of War) that came in? Were they brought
to the LZ?

MM: Yes, they brought them in.

LC: How long did they stay there?

MM: Oh, they brought them there because the field medic worked on them and
then the other medics did some more stuff with them and there was a couple of guys there
that could talk some Vietnamese, so they talked to them until they could get a Medevac
and take them back to LZ Betty, which was a main airport at Phan Thiet and get them to
better medical situation.

LC: Did you have a sense of what happened to the POWs that were brought in
and kind of passed through the elements?

MM: No. We didn’t kill them or anything.

LC: No, right.

MM: They don’t do that. We’ve done a couple of times, but it was when you
find somebody whose cut in half or something. I never did it personally, but I saw a
couple of guys shoot some guys that way, just to put them out of their misery.

LC: Because it was thought that it was beyond…

MM: The medic would just look at him and shake his head. It was something
that I’d want somebody to do to me if, boy, I don’t have any intestines, they’re just
splattered around or something.

LC: And you saw that kind of thing once or twice when you were out?

MM: Yes, not around Phan Thiet; up north I saw it.

LC: Okay. Well, how long did you stay at Judy?

MM: Well, it was in and out. We would be in there, then go out on a Hip Shoot,
then come back. I think I did that for about a month and I know that we air assaulted into
LZ Catfish and I was at Catfish for a while. I think I was there a month and then he sent me back to Bartlett because a couple of guys got in a fight or something and there seemed to be a personality conflict between them or something so they wanted to separate them, so they brought me back and sent this one guy back down to Judy so they separated the two people.

LC: Okay, so you were then back up at Bartlett?

MM: Yes, at Bartlett for a while. It was until I could get out, go back to Judy. I spent most of my time at Judy. I was in Bartlett maybe; I can’t remember how long that was over there. Maybe a couple of weeks and then I was able to get back. I liked Judy better than Bartlett.

LC: Why is that?

MM: Well, first of all, it didn’t have the Battery Commander and the 1st Sergeant and the Chief of Smoke and all these guys were up at Bartlett. So, we were kind of a self-directed work team at Judy. It was kind of more laid back and I became real friendly with a bunch of the guys there on the guns and that. I really liked them.

LC: So that just kind of felt more like where you were?

MM: Yes, it was more like home and quite frankly; I liked being busy. I liked going out on the Hip Shoots and the raids and that kind of stuff because it made time go by real quickly.

LC: When did you start going out as an FO?

MM: All during this process. I was going out with the first tote and the radio and that just on base patrols and that kind of stuff. I think the first time I did it was just around Judy, maybe second day I got to Judy or something.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes, well, they asked me if I wanted to, I said, “Sure, I’d try it.” It was a good deal because we were hurting for people because the place was so spread out and the battery was split and all that. I had kind of the deal that, “Well, you don’t have to do it if you don’t want to.” Nobody forced me to do it. As it’ll go later, they hit some real heavy action in November around Thanksgiving. Right after that I start rethinking what I wanted to do. (Laughing) But I still did it, but I really was kind of choosy about it after that.
LC: So that would be November of 1967?

MM: Yes ma’am.

LC: Where did that heavy action?

MM: It was up in the hills around Bartlett. It was right around Thanksgiving and they air assaulted in a platoon or something and they really caught it, I’m just trying to think. I think there was a place that later became what we called LZ Brown I believe. It was like a plateau and on one side was a hill line and I think the helicopters came in. They were going in just for a regular sweep and they dropped this platoon and they flew parallel to the hill and once the choppers took off, I guess Charlie was all dug in on the hill and they really caught it. It was a big thing, that’s probably the biggest action they had in the Phan Thiet area since I was there at least I know.

LC: And were you at Bartlett when this happened?

MM: Yes. Excuse me. In fact, I was kind of upset about it because I was in Bartlett and I was waiting for a helicopter to go into Betty; they were going to let me go into Phan Thiet for the day and all the helicopters got tied up supporting that operation, so I couldn’t go in.

LC: And were you actually in the FDC or what were you doing?

MM: For part of it because I think in that whole thing, I think we lost, I think they had 6 or 7 guys killed and 20 some wounded in that action. By the time it was over, I think the 2nd of 7th Cav had about two rifle companies up there, 2, 2 ½ and then we went up. Let’s see, that would’ve happened, oh gosh, right around Thanksgiving. I would say maybe November 24th, November 25th, something like that. That happened on that day and I think on the 25th, we went in there. We went in there with, I’m not sure if they did that because I was in Bartlett and I’m not sure if the guns from Judy went up there or if there guns from Bartlett went up there, but I know I went up there with them and they had a couple of other companies and we set up there for about a day, day in a half and blew the heck out of the terrain. By that time, it was pretty much over.

LC: Did you know whether this was VC (Viet Cong) or NVA (North Vietnamese Army)?

MM: All they had there were VC. There was a main force VC Battalion in the area. That’s what our intelligence said and I think maybe two provisional battalions and
the difference they told me is that the main force are regular soldiers and the provisional
are the farmers during the day and at night, they pick up a rifle and shoot at somebody.
No NVA in the area that I know of.

LC: Okay, and in this operation where you took the guns up there, actually were
you hitting what you thought were enemy positions?

MM: Yes, we blew the hell out of that ridge that they were on, but by that time,
they were long gone. I don’t even think we got any fire back.

LC: Oh really, but you were trying to destroy the…?

MM: Oh, I mean, we shot; we shot. If you fool with us, then you’re going to
have hell to pay and I think that was part of the lesson in the Cav that if you had any
significant contact, that we had an expression, “We’ll bring the world down on you.” It
was so, you know, if you’re going to do something, you better think about it quickly or
just do it real quickly and run like hell because you may not want to be around for the
consequence kind of thing. So, we went there and I know they had a lot of scout birds
out and when we didn’t have anything else to do, they were shooting at that ridge and
then they would spot some targets. They’d see bunkers or whatever and they’d bring fire
in on those, that kind of thing. The grunts really didn’t sweep the thing very well. They
didn’t have a sustained operation.

LC: Right, and they had not intended, they had no idea that that’s what they were
walking into.

MM: No, they flew right into the thing, it was almost like Custer and the Indians.

LC: As one of the artillery guys, you were really pretty much at the center of that
bringing the world down on the enemy.

MM: Oh yes, we would bring it all down. We shot a lot of rounds.

LC: And the grunts are really happy to have you around? They’re happy to see
you?

MM: Oh yes, they were best friends because we supported the 2nd the 7th of Cav,
so we were always on the LZs with these guys. We eat together because we’d be cycling
back and forth. A lot of the guys would go out with them; the gun section guys, they’d
take turns going out on patrol with these guys and that, just get familiar with them and so
they can get familiar with us. So, there was a lot of mutual respect there.
LC: Right, and some bonds were formed there between the infantry.

MM: We’ll talk about that later because once we got up north and the difference between a direct support battery and a general support, you know, is like 20 minutes in terms of response time. It’s incredible.

LC: Yes, that’s practically and for some guys, it was a lifetime out there waiting for its support.

MM: Yes.

LC: So, you were at Bartlett around Thanksgiving time and then you went back to Judy?

MM: Yes, I think I came back to Bartlett probably in October and then I went back out to Judy and then back to Bartlett and different things that way, but I think at Bartlett, because we were there, the whole unit moved out on, I think it was January 20th, so from September to January, we were in the Phan Thiet area and during that time, I think I was only on Bartlett maybe a total of 2 months at the most, maybe 6 weeks.

LC: Okay, so about the 20th of January, where did you guys relocate to?

MM: Well, we joined the, this was just before TET of ’68 went up to LZ English which was the forward base camp for the 1st Cav and then we went out into An Lao Valley, a little place called LZ Mustang and that’s where we were when TET started. TET started then we moved with the 2nd of 7th, the whole 3rd Brigade, I think, moved up to Quang Tri in I Corps.

LC: Let’s talk about LZ English for a moment. You were there for how long?

MM: Just about a day.

LC: Oh okay.

MM: We finished all the stuff in the Phan Thiet at that area and we did a lot of stuff in Phan Thiet. I know at one point, we secured the engineers because they were clearing the roads. At Highway One, they had this big, I think, Westmoreland had this thing he wanted to drive, he wanted somebody to drive from Quang Tri to Saigon without getting ambushed on Highway One, so they had all these engineers clearing the road. Basically, just knocking everything down within about 150 yards of the road and then spraying. What they told us was weed killer, which I guess, was Agent Orange, I don’t know on the stuff, so we secured those engineers for a while. We went on some few joint
operations with the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and that, but it was pretty
peaceful compared to the war, you follow me?

LC: Yes.

MM: No real significant contact. I wish I could’ve did my whole tour there, but
as anything, all good things come to an end.

LC: Actually, before we start to talk about the TET period, you mentioned that
there were joint, that you did a couple of times go on joint operations with ARVN?

MM: Yes.

LC: Can you tell me about those operations and what was your impression of
ARVN soldiers and that?

MM: They were good soldiers. They didn’t have the supply that we did. It’s so
funny, you see a bunch of them, they have, you see, “What’s that poking out of their
knapsacks or their packs?” They had live chickens in their packs and their carrying the
ration with them, but the units we saw, they were good soldiers. They had a hell of a
sense of discipline. I can remember, we were at this small LZ, we were on this Hip Shoot
for about two weeks in the middle of some pretty rough country and we had, I think
there’s an ARVN company with us, but one guy was missing a radio or something, so the
1st Sergeant lined everybody up that he thought was responsible for taking it and started
whacking them on the backs with shovels until that guy told them, “Who took it?”
They’re nice guys, we ate with them a few times, but they didn’t really have much light
discipline at night, so when it came nighttime, we kind of go our own way and say,
“We’ll see you in the morning.”

LC: By light discipline, you mean?

MM: They had a big campfire going, they’re wild and crazy guys. (Laughing)

LC: So, you’d just get several yards away from that?

MM: You bet. Yes, they were over on one side of the landing zone. As I said,
they’re probably big as a football field, maybe a little bigger so they were on the, I think,
it was on the southeast side. They had responsibility for the southeast side of the
perimeter and then patrolling that way.

LC: Do you think there was respect between the American and South Vietnamese
soldiers, or what’s your sense of the kind of general relationship there?
MM: In the field there was, I didn’t encounter them that much. I used to go into Phan Thiet on tasks a few times, I think maybe I went five, six times at the most, but I was there and I say task, you just go in, in the morning and come back in the afternoon and go get a couple of beers or something and get a haircut or whatever, but there were a lot of problems with the town in the past. I know, because Phan Thiet kept getting posted off limits because of the incidents between US troops and the South Vietnamese guys.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes. I don’t know if it’s about women, I never experienced it, but I’d heard that, I know one time it was off limits because, I don’t know if it was over a woman or whatever, but South Vietnamese soldier pulled a pistol on one of our guys and he disarmed him and beat the hell out of him and the Vietnamese wanted to hang him and the crowd came after him and a bunch other guys intervened and then they left. I’ve never saw it directly, but I’d heard that those kinds of things happen. I think they were probably resentful because probably like the English soldiers were in England because here’s the GIs (Government Issue) and we probably made more in a month than those guys made all year; big spending and that kind of thing. But I never had any problem with them, you know, always smile at them, they smiled at me, said, “Hi,” we say “Hi.”

LC: Okay and did your little bit of Vietnamese language that you had, did it help you out at all?

MM: No, not really. Most of them knew heck of a lot more English than I knew Vietnamese and then in the towns, there’s a few places that catered to the soldiers, so they could speak pretty well in English.

LC: So you could get along pretty well?

MM: Yes.

LC: So, let’s talk about January 1968. So, you’re moving out of Phan Thiet. Did you know what your new operational situation was going to be?

MM: Well, we knew we were on borrowed time because we were away from the division. We were hundreds of miles away from the division and it was always rumored that you got rejoin the division, we’re going to be rejoining the division and in fact, during that period of time between, oh I think, maybe November, December, a unit of 101st came down to that area of Phan Thiet. It just confirmed that we’re going to give
And that’s what’s going to LZ English was about, was rejoining the division?

MM: Right. English was right around Bong Song, you know, Bong Song Plain and that. I have no idea what direction it was because I know I had to do the rear guard at LZ Betty in Phan Thiet and then, I remember I got to English. I think I took the last flight out and I got into LZ English, I think I say it was like at night, 8, 9:00 at night and then like 9:00 in the morning, I was in with the advanced party going out to this LZ Mustang.

LC: Oh okay. When you were with the rearguard at Betty, what exactly were you guys doing? Were you shutting it down completely?

MM: No, sleeping.

LC: Sleeping? (Laughing)

MM: “Well, in case you’re the last guys out.” “Okay.” “You’re the rearguard.” “Okay, what do we got to guard?” “Nothing, because everything’s left.” “Okay.” So, I had no idea what we were supposed to do. It wasn’t like we were abandoning the thing. It was being assumed by somebody else, like when we came back from Khe Sanh, we were the rearguard at LZ Stud and we had to police that up and burn everything that couldn’t be carried back and that kind of stuff.

LC: Okay, so when you went out to LZ Mustang, what was there? What did you see?

MM: Well, quite frankly, it was an old French fort.

LC: Okay.

MM: It had been occupied. I don’t know how many guys were there, but it had the An Loa River was on one side. There was a creek on the other side, so you had water on two sides. I say a creek, it was kind of like an island, and then there was another LZ called LZ Tape which is just about a kilometer away which is high on a hill and this place was, actually, it’s all deteriorating, but they had a lot of old French cement fortifications, old pill boxes, stuff like that. It was kind of weird.

LC: Had it been occupied by any US or…?
MM: I’m not sure if anybody was, yes, I think they were because on this LZ Tape which was kind of like a forward listening post or something, they called it an LZ, I think they had a Quad 50 up there and then they had another Quad 50 on this Mustang and they were saying how good the hunting was. At LZ Tape, they shoot a lot of people at night up there because apparently they didn’t think they were there or whatever. I don’t know if it was continuously occupied, but there were US guys in and out.

LC: What were you supposed to be doing up there at Mustang?

MM: Just securing the area, I guess. I had no idea. We just went there and said, “Here you boys are” and we get hit, we get hit all the time every night they get hit.

LC: Oh really?

MM: Yes.

LC: What were your guns? What guns did you have up there?

MM: Well, we had the whole battery. We had the six 105 Howitzers on the LZ.

LC: All 6?

MM: All 6, yes, with the batteries all together now; just our personal arms. We had to do a lot of perimeter stuff there because they didn’t have too many people to do security and I guess they figured there was more of us now so we can take care of ourselves.

LC: So, can you tell me what it was like to be at LZ Mustang when the TET eventually began?

MM: Nothing happened there. We didn’t get hit at all. Every place else was going crazy and the only thing we had was a, what was that, I think it was a helicopter Bird, I don’t know if it was a re-supply Bird or what was coming in and they landed and the guy says, “Hey, there’s three hundred guys out here.” I think they said, “There’s three hundred ARVN out there.” About three klicks out of the LZ. I said, “ARVN’s?” because the closest ARVN location that I understood was about 20 klicks away. So, I answered it, I said, “There shouldn’t be any ARVN’s out there” so I went with two platoons out there to see if we could find them and we got out in about a klick and a half and we found an old lady out there, actually, an old Mamasan and I knew he said, “Hey ARVN out here?” She said, “No ARVN, just all VC.” “Which way did they go?” And they showed us and we said, “Hell with that”, and we came back.
LC: So they actually like cooperated and said they went that way or?

MM: Yes, they pointed out which way they went. They said, “No ARVN, just VC, go that way.” So, I don’t know if they went that way or not, so we went back to the LZ and retightened up real quick and then we tried to identify assembly points, you know, on the maps and that and just shot the heck out of that stuff all night with artillery fire. But other than just getting probed, we get shot at; lob a few rounds in, a few rockets or something. I think they were just doing enough to try to keep us in place so we wouldn’t have to move.

LC: When you said that you got a few probes, can you describe exactly what kind of attack they were making? I mean, was it gunfire; was it mortars?

MM: Yes, some mortars, but you know the small arms, a few rockets and grenades into the wire, that kind of stuff. When I was kind of naïve, I was still thinking like down in the Phan Thiet area where I think we got rocketed once or twice when I was there. It was no big deal and then they missed; didn’t even land in the perimeter. I know I was out there. In your interviews, anybody tell you what a piss tube is?

LC: No.

MM: Oh okay.

LC: Are you going to tell me?

MM: Yes, you want to know?

LC: Sure.

MM: Well, basically, artillery rounds would come in a, well, they came in this box, but there are some rounds that came in a tube like a heavily reinforced cardboard tube maybe, you know.

LC: Okay.

MM: So, you cut out both sides of it and we’d bury part of it in the ground and then we’d urinate at the top part of it. Okay?

LC: All right, I got you.

MM: So, I had to go to the bathroom, so I was out. Of course, I didn’t have my weapon with me; I just left the bunker and came in and all of a sudden, “Hawoom!” This thing blew up and everybody starts shooting on the perimeter and all that and I said, “This is a really a smart thing”, like “Oh, here I am, on the ground, right next to the piss
tubes. I have nothing. The only thing that I have to defend myself with is my belt.” That was the first night.

LC: And that was probably pretty scary.

MM: It was, it was. I was really scared. I said, “Oh, I better get back quick.”

Well, no, I didn’t want to go back because some rounds were landing behind me, so I just crawled to the edge by the perimeter in an infantry position. I mean, I went down in there, and said, “What the hell are you doing here?” “Jeez, I was taking a leak.” So, a guy gave me a pistol and said, “I don’t think anything’s going to happen, but here we are.”

LC: Was this right around the time of TET?

MM: Yes, that was, let’s see, when was that? That would’ve been probably, gosh, I want to say February 1st, 2nd, 3rd. It was right around my birthday. My birthday’s on February 5th, so it was just before my birthday I think.

LC: Were you thinking at that time when you’re laying out there basically with your face in the dirt that maybe this was the TET attack that was going?

MM: Well, see, at that time, we didn’t know what TET was. I mean, we knew TET was the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, but we didn’t realize, that we kept getting bits and pieces that all hell’s breaking lose and we’d get a call because see, like in FDC, we’d monitor the radio, so we could hear most of the infantry battalion chatter. And that was basically it. We didn’t know there was a big, generalized offensive going on at that point.

LC: How long until you found that out?

MM: Oh boy. When did TET start? TET started I think at the end of January, right?

LC: That’s right, January 29th, 30th.

MM: 29th, 30th. I would say I think February 1st, 2nd, 3rd, something like that, okay, okay; when they saw those VC and we went out there and that Mamasan told us that, I think that was the first or second day of TET because we’re kind of surprised because everybody saying there’s a truce, you know, so it can’t be that, but we didn’t find anything and then that thing happened there. That probably happened the night after that, so that would’ve been maybe February 2nd. Then we start, about February 1st, 2nd; we
start getting some information we heard that LZ English got hit and there’s a real war
going on. At that point, that was the only thing that we had heard.

LC: Right.

MM: And then a little later, right around my birthday, we heard that the division
CP or advanced CP (Command Post) moved up to around Hue and we were going up that
way.

LC: Okay, and how long did you have between the time you found out you were
going to be going up there and the time you actually had moved out?

MM: I want to say, that I think it was about the middle of February that we
finally moved up there because during that period of time, I remember we got some new
ordinance before we went up there because they said the ground is real open, so we got,
what the hell they call that thing…the Firecracker, yes, that’s right, they called it the
Firecracker round which basically is a cluster bomb that you can shoot out of artillery.

LC: Now, by cluster bomb, what do you mean?

MM: Well, you shoot this round and it would pop about 1500 meters off the deck
and then it would expel little bomblets and then these things would come down and they
hit the ground and they bounce up and explode about 10, 12 feet up in the air.

LC: And again, were these fragmenting bombs?

MM: Yes, they’re like what they call cluster bombs today, what they use and
they called these the Firecracker round.

LC: So, this new ordinance was issued in anticipation that you were going to be
moving to a different kind of territory?

MM: Yes, well, basically, it’s been around that they told us, it’s been around for
a while, but they didn’t want to use it because the terrain wasn’t really suited for it and
they said they didn’t want the other guys to use it either, but I don’t know. I don’t put
any traffic in that, but see these things that they get hung up because they would shoot
them the fire direction; a thing you would shoot at the same way you’d shoot illumination
round and that would burst is if it’s 1500 meters off the ground, so they’d use the same
firing data to get that done, so each one was about as big as the warhead of an M-79
grenade. You know, the warhead from an M-79 grenade launcher and it’d have little fins
on there and it’d streak down and then pop back up, but you know, it could get hung up
on trees and that kind of stuff. If you’re going down there later, you shake it loose and
they come down and blow up on you, so they really had to use it really for targets in the
open, in the real open. I remember they brought that in and they showed us how to use it
and gave us information on that and that was not too long after that, then we went back to
English, got on the airplane, and went up to Quang Tri.

LC: Okay, when you arrived at Quang Tri, what were you supposed to be doing
or were you just waiting to relocate somewhere else?

MM: Yes, that was it. We arrived at Quang Tri. We dug in at the airport and
they told us we had to secure the airport for a while. I think we were there about a day
and then I had my first experience of riding on a military truck.

LC: You want to tell us about that, tell me about that?

MM: Well, then they convoyed us down to Camp Evans, which was a Marine
base. I’m going to say, it was about almost equal distant between Quang Tri and Hue on
Highway One, so we convoyed down there and it almost felt like you were in a World
War II news reel. You know, you’re going down the road and all the people waving at
you and you’re waving at them and throwing them peanut butter or whatever and then
you’d see the remains of vehicles here and say, “Oh god, I don’t want to be on a truck, I
want to be in a helicopter.

LC: Yes, because the truck, you’re right there.

MM: Yes, so we convoyed down into Camp Evans and then we set up right on
the perimeter. I don’t know how long we were there, we were there pretty good piece of
time, I should say. Then from there, and at there at Camp Evans, and it was during what
I think they call The Northeast Monsoon, so it was really cold and cloudy, didn’t pour all
that much, but kind of misty most of the time and a real low ceiling. We were getting
most of our supply by air.

LC: And did the weather interfere with that?

MM: Yes, and it really interfered with Air Mobile Operations too. It kind of put
a halt to that and then we were getting hit every night over there.

LC: Every night?

MM: Every night.

LC: And were these substantial?
MM: Yes, rockets, mortars, sapper probes, and this was a pretty big LZ. It was really kind of huge or camp, but then we went from there to, we went to what we called LZ Noah. At camp, we got in a truck and it was kind of a typical Army deal. The trucks first came, but they didn’t know where to take us, so then they left. Then maybe the next day the trucks came and then we took off and then the truck I was on had a flat tire, so the rest of the convoy left and they left us out there. We finally made it, but I think if you looked at the map, I have no idea what the name of the river was, but we were at again, another old French installation that there was a bridge over this river and we would’ve been on the northwest side of the river was this little French fort. There was a unit there; we relieved them. They were going someplace. I think they were probably going back to Evans. So, why didn’t we just have to stay, who knows? In fact, I remember running into a couple of guys that I knew at Fort Sill there.

LC: Oh, is that right?

MM: They were at this unit, yes.

LC: I suppose these were other artillerymen?

MM: Yes, well, they had, it was a 155 battery there, but see there we had no infantry. They did and we had to secure ourselves and do the perimeter and all that and then we had to provide fire support as well as guard the bridge.

LC: Okay, so you were guarding the bridge over that river?

MM: Yes, it was no big deal because they had about 100 yards on either side of it, they had a wire, many multi layers of barbed wire and this stuff, so they couldn’t even swim to get it. Most of the buildings were wrecked, but there were a few that were left with these, like 2½ foot concrete walls. It was kind of funny seeing the French equivalent of FTA scratched on the walls. It kind of gave me a sense of, “Jeez, does this just keep going on and on?”

LC: Do you remember what was actually written there?

MM: No.

LC: You got the impression?

MM: Excuse the language; I just presumed it was the French equivalent of “Fuck the Army.”

LC: Oh, I got it.
MM: You know, just like us. I couldn’t imagine it was “I love the Gall” or something, but it may have been, I don’t know. I don’t know French so.

LC: But you guys all assumed that it was…?

MM: Yes. It was kind of nice and then the Highway was there, but then the Highway would shut down at 6:00 at night, so anybody that wasn’t across the bridge would have to stay with us.

LC: Was this Highway One still?

MM: Yes. I’ll never forget, this convoy stopped and they parked their trucks out there and said, “Aren’t you guys going to guard your trucks?” “No.” They said, “Well, you want to come in here. You got a full perimeter.” Well, I’m in the Army to drive a truck, not to carry a rifle.” “Okay, go back to your truck then or you stay here with us you know.”

LC: Did the guys usually stay with you?

MM: Oh yes. And in fact, there, it was really kind of funny because we all had; we’d been in country and that and we had a unit of the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne come by, they were in their stateside fatigues and everything. I felt sorry for these guys; I think they put them on a plane at Fort Brag and then they landed in Quang Tri or wherever and here they are. “What am I supposed to do?”

LC: Right, and what were they doing; just passing through to wherever?

MM: Well, there were some of the reinforcements coming to help us fight.

LC: Okay, do you know where they ended up going to?

MM: No I don’t know and I don’t think they even knew. It was just, “Here you are for the night. We got some C-rations we can share fellows.”

LC: Right. Mike, let me just back up for a second. When you were traveling by truck from, actually, you were going out from Camp Evans. You mentioned that there people kind of running along the side of the trucks and waving…

MM: Yes, just locals; the local people. You know, kids, women, that stuff, you know, waving and they were always asking for “chop, chop” which is now what they call for food, so we had some extra C-ration cans, we throw it to them or whatever.

LC: How’d that make you feel?
MM: It felt kind of cool. As I said, like the newsreels you see in the Second World War with the trucks going through a French town or Belgian town or something. It was kind of nice until I saw the wrecks of previous trucks and charred remains and thought, “Well, wait a minute.”

LC: And those were sort of the leftovers from the past?

MM: Previous convoys that got ambushed and that. I said, “Well, hey, maybe it’s not all news reel stuff.”

LC: And when you got out to LZ Noah, was there any evidence around the old fort that there had been some conflict there during TET? Did you see anything?

MM: Well, TET was still going on because, well, the Hue was still happening big time and that basically is what we had to do; we were part of a blocking operation, blocking the northern approaches to Hue. We would isolate the town. Oh yes, there was stuff happening. I remember a lot of masonry debris around the thing and I don’t know if that happened; if that got blown up when during the thing or whatever, I don’t know. I did understand they tried to blow up the bridge. It was kind of crazy because we’d swim in that river. There was an old barge that was half sunk right by our perimeter, so during the day, we’d just go in swimming; tried fishing, we fished with hand grenades, but the fish were strange looking, so we didn’t even bother trying to eat them.

LC: What was strange about the fish?

MM: They just looked different. I guess I was expecting Walleye or Bluegill or something and here’s an Asian. I don’t know if I want to eat that or not. I remember a little Vietnamese kid came by and I say little, maybe 9,10 years old wanted us to teach him how to swim. So, we showed him how to swim, but then that night, it was kind of crazy because we normally wouldn’t fire illumination, but we fired some self-illumination and we saw an NVA squad on the other side of the river.

LC: Really?

MM: They were looking at us, yes.

LC: What made you fire that night? Do you know what?

MM: I don’t know. You would do things randomly, you know. I don’t think there was any reason to do that, but maybe a gunner was getting bored or somebody
wanted to, “Hey, let’s see what’s happening out there at night” and just fired a self-
illuminating round and there it was.

LC: For having randomly fired this illumination round, you actually saw…
MM: Yes, there was a VC, no, I shouldn’t say VC, NVA; looked like about a
squad, 8, 10 guys.

LC: First of all, how did you I.D. them as or how were they I.D. as NVA?
MM: Well, because they were on the other side of the river carrying a gun.

LC: And you knew that wasn’t VC?
MM: Pardon?

LC: You knew that that would not be Viet Cong people?
MM: Oh, I don’t think they had any VC up in that area. It was a whole main
force. Well, they had kind of light colored clothes; you know, like khaki uniforms, that
kind of thing.

LC: What did you know about what was happening at Hue?

MM: We knew it was in deep crap. We had some of our sister battalions were
involved and sweeping down there and we knew they took a lot of casualties. It was like
the war, you know because it was really going on. We were kind of lucky we didn’t have
to go down there.

LC: Did you think at some point that you might be moved down, Highway One
down there?

MM: Yes, oh sure, yes.

LC: What else did you do, do you remember anything else that happened at LZ
Noah that particularly stands out for you?

MM: Yes, I remember one time, there were, what was it, three ARVNs came in
and I don’t even know if they were ARVNs. They may have been CIDG or whatever in
that Civilian Irregular Defense Group guys. Most of the ARVNs wore regular, like
fatigues and these guys were hot shots. They had tiger strips, sunglasses 6:00 at night
and that kind of deal and they walked in and they wanted us to shoot up a village. We’d
say, “Well, why?” They said, “Oh, there’s a lot of NVA there; 30 NVA there. Shoot the
village up.” “Okay, we’ll try.” So, we called in because there we had to get [clearance]
for most fire missions, if it wasn’t requested by an American unit on the ground, we had
to get clearance. So, we called the clearing authorities which I think was the battalion
Fire Control Officer for, I’m not sure who was, but it took about 20 minutes and he came
back and wouldn’t clear it. So, in the mean time, we had big maps. See, we’d have our
charts, but then we’d have a map on the wall and we’d have positions of our units marked
in case if we got a fire a mission in an area and we’d know that for the sake argument,
that, let’s say, Bravo Company is in the area and if the fire mission wasn’t coming from
Bravo Company, we’d call Bravo Company and find out. “Hey, we got a fire mission in
your area on this grid, just be advised” because sometimes they might mistake them for
our guys for their guys because we’re in closer proximity and these three ARVN’s were
particularly interested in the map. We’re kind of looking at them; every time they had a
chance, they’d just be looking at it, so we ran them off and we couldn’t get clearance and
just told them to go away.

LC: Were you suspicious that they weren’t ARVN at all?
MM: I don’t know. That thought never; that was always kind of at the back of
your mind and then maybe they weren’t, I don’t know.

LC: But it was a mystery.
MM: Yes, but they were just looking at that and we hadn’t seen any of them
before and then these guys show up and off they go.

LC: When you say you guys ran them off, that sort of shorthand for what, did
you just kind of escort them out of the FDC?

MM: Yes, just grab your rifle and say, “Di di mau!” and they go away.

LC: And did they actually leave the LZ entirely?
MM: Oh yes, they left. They wanted to stay, “No, we stay here tonight,” “No,
you go away. You can’t stay; go.” Adios pal.

LC: How far away was the village that they were in interested in having shelled?
MM: Oh, about 4 kilometers.

LC: Which direction, do you remember? Was it down the Highway or..?
MM: No, no, it was down the river. Let’s see, if we were on the north, actually,
northeast, northwest corner, it would’ve been the opposite side. It would’ve been the
south, southeast side of the river down about 4 klicks from us.

LC: Did you know anything about that village?
MM: Nope, not a thing. I have no idea why they wanted it shot at and as far as I know, nothing significant ever happened in that area.

LC: When you were at LZ Noah, did you ever go out on, as FO at all or were there no controls like that?

MM: Yes, right around; one on the other side of the river a few times.

LC: Okay, and what was that like? Do you remember those patrols?

MM: Pretty uneventful; didn’t really have much, any contact at all.

LC: How long did you stay at Noah?

MM: I want to say, we were there probably about a week.

LC: Just a week?

MM: Yes, and then we went back up to Evans.

LC: Was Evans still taking fire by this time?

MM: They took it every day; every day they’d take fire there for, almost the whole time I was there, every night, something would happen.

LC: And would you that by the time you go back up to Camp Evans, it’s probably the middle of February or maybe toward the end of February in 1968?

MM: I would say it’s probably towards the end of February.

LC: And when you went back up to Evans, did it again seem like you were just kind of waiting for your next assignment?

MM: Yes, it did because then we were going to do, they had never done an artillery raid up there and then they scheduled us to do a raid.

LC: Do you remember where that raid was to?

MM: Well, Evans, if the geography up that way was on the east, you head to South China Sea and then you have this, I call it coastal plain, it’s just sand dune, sandy, flat area; a lot of lagoons and stuff. I don’t know how far from the water it went that way, but it was real flat and sandy, then we had Highway One. It continued going west, flat and sandy for maybe 5 or 6 kilometers and then the foothills started. We were at Camp Evans; obviously it was much flat area. On the east side of the road was a big graveyard area. It was several kilometers long and then the other part above north of the graveyard, it was just nothing; just little streams would break through, have a little vegetation, but just real sand dune and flat. We were going to go; there was a village
right around the graveyard and that there was a lot of activity and they report a lot of
activity in the graveyard. We were going to go and set up and then the 1st of the 9th Cav
which was basically aerial recon unit was going to go around and identify targets of
opportunity and we’d shoot it up and we did that before guns. I think we just took 4 guns
though.

LC: On that raid, that one day?
MM: Yes. I remember there was a village; well that village, they were getting a
lot of fire from it so we shot a lot of rounds in that village. Then we came back and then
our sister battery, B-Battery and the 1st of the 7th Cav went out there and set up a firebase
and then they operated out of that area.

LC: And you stayed at Camp Evans for the rest of this?
MM: Yes, we went back to Evans then, yes.

LC: What was the scuttlebutt going on at Evans? Do you remember about Hue
and the battle down there?

MM: That it was just war; a big, bad war is happening. I don’t think we knew
the magnitude of it; we knew the Cav was in a big fight. They had a big fight in Quang
Tri and there was a lot of fighting because we screened two or three battalions down
north of Hue back and forth. We know what’s happening, we didn’t know the extent was
like the Marines digging those guys out of the old city and that stuff; had no idea of that.

LC: Right. At Camp Evans, were you seeing evidence of like increased activity;
was there kind of a frenetic buzz going on there in February or did it seem business as
usual because your getting handed money?

MM: Well, it was basically business as usual. It wasn’t any; I’d be on the
lookout, da da da da da. We came from a pretty, pretty peaceful area so we thought,
“Hey, maybe this is how it’s supposed to be.” You know, I don’t know. (Laughing)

LC: Right, because your basis of comparison was a little…yes.

MM: Yes.

LC: When did you leave Camp Evans again, do you remember?
MM: We did that shoot and then I think we were there until; now you know, I’m
thinking about that. I know we were at Noah longer. I don’t think we were back in
Evans until around St. Patrick’s Day, the more I’m thinking about it. I know it was right around St. Patrick’s Day that we got a fire mission for that Firecracker the first time.

LC: Okay, that would be the first time you used that new ordinance?

MM: Well, we used it to no effect because it took too long to get clearance, yes.

LC: Can you explain that? What happened that day?

MM: Well basically, in order to get permission to shoot that round, you had to have battalion level clearance. So, we had a fire mission called in where we had apparently several NVA and it may have been an NVA heavy weapons company or something. They had some mortars set up and they were shooting, they were observing. It’s getting towards night, so the FO can see all the muzzle flashes coming up and he knew the location, so he called the fire mission for the Firecracker and I think 30 minutes later, we got approval to shoot and by that time, the FO said, “Hey, don’t, they’re gone. Don’t worry about; they set up. They fired, and then they scooted.”

LC: How did that kind of stuff make you feel?

MM: Frustrated because hey, they’re going to live to kill, maybe kill me; I didn’t like that.

LC: Did you think about that kind of stuff? Did it bother you over time?

MM: It frustrated me because, I hate to say it, but every one of them that gets away is maybe a GI is going to get killed. I had a lot of empathy for the grunts and that was just that much less that they’d have to face or we’d have to face. It kind of frustrated me. We were learning quickly that the frustration up there because we, to give you an example, we had a, what was it, I can’t remember the company, but it was kept under a guy by the name of Captain Holland. I don’t know if it was Bravo Company 2nd of 7th or whatever, but they walked into a pretty tense situation and I think what turned out to be an NVA, a regimental CP (Command Post) area. So, we did a lot of firing for them and then we laid down a lot of smoke and then he kind of backed away. I got his guys out and then the NVA took off and were going into a village and we shot, oh I can say, we must’ve shot 700 or 800 rounds in support of that and pretty quickly and we were right on target. They didn’t have a FO party there so Captain Holland was doing the adjusting. “You’re right on, keep pumping, keep pumping, keep pumping.” Then, somebody from
the 1st of the 30th Artillery who we always supposedly fell under for fire clearance and
that got on the horn and called an end of mission for us.

LC: Why was that?

MM: They said we shot too many rounds. We were livid; we were upset. But
we had to give an end of mission and the ludicrousness of it was they would have us do
that; shut the fire mission off, but every night, they’d have us shoot 2 or 300 rounds of
what we call H&I; you know, Harassment and Interdiction Rounds that pre-set targets to
hopefully keep the NVA off guard so they wouldn’t rocket the base so the guys could get
a good night sleep, you know.

LC: And the preset targets, what were those? Like road crossings…?

MM: Yes, well, the footprints in the sand or “Hey, this looks like a good place to
set up a rocket launcher.” Who knows?

LC: So, in someway, almost random?

MM: Yes, would pick up and then you just fire. You’d get these things and
you’d have your quota to shoot at night at various times.

LC: Was it Captain Holland; what was his reaction when you guys did the same
situation?

MM: Well, he came back; I think that day or the first part of the next day, he
came back to us and thanked us for the support. You know, he was able to get his guys
out; you know, that kind of stuff. Then he says, “How come you guys quit shooting?
You were right on them; man, you were cooking them.” Then, we told him and he got
very upset, so he said, “Well, I’m going to over there and talk to those guys.”

LC: And do you ever know what happened?

MM: Oh yes. Some of the guys from the 1st of the 30th came over and they
wanted to be real friendly and sat down, maybe we misunderstood and da da da da da.
You know, “Okay, we’re going to apologize” because they won’t apologize to us. The
poor guys in D-Company, you know?

LC: Did it sort of get kind of smoothed over?

MM: To a point, but as I said, they were a general support thing. Give you an
idea, like; when you got rocketed or got probed or they dropped some rounds in on you or
whatever, everybody had certain anti-rocket targets to fire. You had certain areas that
you would target and you would just saturate with fire. You’d pick an area; they would
pick a likely place or someplace where they can watch something before or they found
evidence and then they do what they call a zone. It could be a 10 by 10 zone or 20 by 20,
which basically meant that you would fire. Now, this is a battery, it would fire, say, one
round or two rounds at that point and then you would keep adjusting out by ten mills in
quadrant and deflection. And then you fired more and more and more so you would
cover about ½ kilometer or half a square click that way, pretty well saturated. When they
get hit and then you’d hear on the radio, “Okay everybody, you’re authorized to fire
your” whatever, I can’t remember what the hell they called it. We would be done with
ours before some of these other guys would even start. It was incredible. It was
incredible.

LC: Do you attribute that to the efficiency of your team or is that the difference
between a direct and a general?

MM: I ascribe it to the difference between a direct and general support because
our guys knew the urgency of it. They were friends with the grunts; they knew first hand
and they were many times out in the field living with these guys. They just had a higher
sense of mission.

LD: The general support batteries, were they compositionally the same? Did
they have the same hardware you guys had?

MM: Yes, pretty much so, but basically what they would be is see, we were
assigned to a specific unit to support a specific unit primarily, okay and then anybody
else who came by and the general support were more, “Okay, we’re here, so we’ll shoot
for anybody.”

LC: Anybody who’s in the area?

MM: Yes, anybody who’s interested, but they don’t have FO parties, they don’t
do any of that, they’re just there and we’re here.

LC: So, they didn’t have a relationship with any of the units that were out on
patrols that they were firing for and that kind of translated into their sense of urgency
they had around.

MM: No. Yes, it was a lot of stateside crap too.

LC: How’s that?
MM: Well, you know it was run more like the Army than the field. They’re hung up on authority and they don’t do all this stuff and a lot of them use these computers. They have the FADAC computer.

LC: Can you tell about that, when did those…?

MM: We threw ours away. Well basically, what happened, this is back when I was still around Phan Thiet. We said, “Hey, we’re going to computerize this deal.”

LC: With an electronic computer?

MM: Yes, they call the FADAC computer, whatever FADAC stood for.

LC: How is that spelled?

MM: FADAC (Field Artillery Digital Automatic Computer) I guess, I don’t know for Fire Direction Automatic Controllers; I have no idea.

LC: (Laughing) You’re doing pretty good; that’s pretty good.

MM: But then, we sent a couple of guys back to be trained on the thing, so they brought it back and in fact, they brought it to Bartlett. I wasn’t at Bartlett, but I heard all these guys clued me in on it. Well, it had to have a generator, so that was an extra weight that you had to carry and the extra fuel and then they got a fire mission and it took the thing like 5, 6, 7, 8 minutes to calculate the quadrant and all that stuff.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes, it took very long, so they had a couple and they just used it for like marking missions or recon by fire; nothing real pressing…

LC: Time sensitive?

MM: Because they wanted to test the concept or test it out and they would have the guys calculated that on the charts and the guys, they would calculate the data and then be reading a book until they get a firing solution from the computer. Somebody very early on said, “Hey, this is ain’t going to work” so I think it was probably ascribed to in the property records as a “casualty of enemy fire” or something and since probably still on some mountaintop around Phan Thiet, but I think these guys, I think a lot of those outfits use that.

LC: The general support units?

MM: Yes.

LC: Yes, they would kind of “Well, since it’s here, let’s just use it and rely on it.”
MM: Right. Hey, can we take a little break for a minute?
LC: Sure, absolutely, hang on.
MM: Okay, thanks
LC: Okay, Mike, when was the first time that you heard about Khe Sanh, do you remember?
MM: Oh, it was during January, February. I don’t know who sent it to us; we would get the international copy of Time Magazine in the mailbag.
LC: Oh really?
MM: I don’t know who sent it out to us, so we’d read the magazine, so we knew what was happening there. When was that, we knew that was happening and we kind of figured that we would probably be involved somewhat in that and I can’t really tell you when that was. I missed the deployment going out because I had put in for an in-country R&R (Rest and Relaxation).
LC: Yes, how’d that go?
MM: I got it.
LC: Wow.
MM: Let’s see, I got it in, oh; it was the end of March. I went out on the end of March and I think they deployed to Khe Sanh; they left the 30th of March I think, I’m not sure. I want to say it was like maybe 27th, 28th of March. I knew they were going because we had orders to pack up and, “This is what we’re going to do is Operational Pegasus.”
LC: So, was that the 2 of the 7th that was ordered out there?
MM: Pardon?
LC: Was that the 2 of the 7th that was ordered out there?
MM: The whole brigade.
LC: Oh, the whole brigade.
MM: Well, I think the whole division was involved in the thing or at least I know two brigades were and it was a big move because I know I said, “Hey, I’m surprised you guys are still letting me go on the R&R because you guys are doing this.” They said, “Well, we thought about it, but you know, hey, why not? You might as well enjoy yourself.”
LC: Well, where’d you go?

MM: An Khe, I meant, sorry, not An Khe, Da Nang. This was just a three-day in

LC: What’d you do during R&R, do you remember?

MM: Well, they had a little beach over there; went swimming a couple of times. I

LC: Did you…go ahead.

MM: I’m sorry, I connected with a guy, he was a medic for jeez, I don’t know. I
didn’t know the guy before, he was a Medic, and so, we kind of hung around together.

LC: And was he on R&R as well?

MM: Yes, he was on in-country R&R.

LC: Where was he stationed, do you remember? Was he in I Corps or…?

MM: I think he was with the 1st of the 7th, I can’t remember what company he

LC: Okay.

MM: He was a Medic, a black guy, wore glasses. He was a nice guy, real nice
guy.

LC: You remember his name?

MM: No, I can’t remember his name. I wish I did. I think I just called him Doc.

LC: Oh okay, right.

MM: We just drank some beer. I can remember getting frightened because of the
moving to Khe Sanh, transportation was real messed up and I didn’t catch the R&R flight
till late for that the plane out of, it would’ve been Camp Evans to Da Nang and I didn’t
get to Da Nang until, oh, I want to say it’s late in the evening. You know, 10:00, 11:00,
something like that. They directed me to wherever the barracks were and it was kind of

good to sleep on a mattress and get to sleep. The next morning this Vietnamese woman
was shaking me wanting to wake me up, “Ah GI, want shoe sign?” God, I panicked.

LC: Was that like the first time that you had had a Vietnamese civilian sort of in

your hooch basically?
MM: You bet. You bet.
LC: And it scared you to death?
MM: Yes, now I understand why they made us leave our rifles in the company office there.
LC: Yes, and was she equally scared when she saw that you were scared or do you remember how that was?
MM: Well, she should’ve known because you know; our clothes were really faded and dirty and didn’t have a lick of black on the boots, they were all bleached white. We had this strange hallowed walking around. (Laughing) You know, there’s a big difference between rear area soldiers and guys out in the field. If nothing else, the smell could’ve told her.
LC: Were you able to, for example, get a shower and a haircut and all that?
MM: Oh yes, they had a shower and shave, took most of our clothes off, let somebody wash them.
LC: Did you get new uniforms at any point there?
MM: No. Our uniforms out in the field were, when we first got in country, we were issued some jungle fatigues and we’d tote some of those around, but generally, we discarded them because the battery would have basically, they’d have these big, orange mailbags and you’d take your uniform off and throw it in the mailbag and everybody throw them in the mailbag and they’d take them back, somebody washed them once a week, once every two weeks.
LC: Oh, okay.
MM: Then they would bring a mailbag of fresh ones off and you go through, pick them, “Looks like my size” and you put it on.
LC: Oh really? So, you didn’t even stay with your own clothes for very…?
MM: No, not at all.
LC: There at Da Nang, was there a club you could go to, to get a beer?
MM: Oh yes. I don’t think they had any entertainment, I know there was liquor and beer there because I drank a lot of it and there was kind of strips where they got like civilian, you know, there’s the Vietnamese bars and some places with some of the ladies, they were there, that kind of stuff.
LC: And you pretty much avoided that?

MM: Yes.

LC: You were in a different place.

MM: Well, I was married and I took that seriously, but the ladies weren’t like what you see in the movies. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing) Okay.

MM: A box of rocks would look better than they were. They weren’t classy.

This medic wanted me to cover him, he wanted to go, so I said, “Okay, I’ll sit there and I’ll drink a couple of beers and make sure nobody hassles us.” You know, all this stuff.

LC: So, you just kind of hung out, right.

MM: Yes, he didn’t want to get robbed, so I’ll do that. But it was that way, I remember there was a beach and I went swimming one day, just kind of laid on the beach and ate a lot. They had a Mess Hall. It was pretty much whatever you wanted to eat whenever you wanted it.

LC: Were you able to relax at all during that time because you knew there was…

MM: Yes, I did. I wrote some letters and read a little bit; slept a lot. I think out of the three days there, I was probably sleeping probably 48 hours. I was tired.

LC: And then you had to kind of turn around and go back up.

MM: Yes, and then let’s see, it was only a three-day R&R, but I think they shipped out on the 30th and I went out before then and I didn’t rejoin the unit. I think it was April 8th, 9th, something like that because the transportation; everything was involved in that move and when I got back to the unit, they were on, I think it was LZ Thor, which was nothing more than the…Highway Nine went into Khe Sanh and Thor was, oh I want to say, maybe 7, 8 kilometers away on the top of a ridge; pretty rough country. A really high hilled ridges and this kind of stuff. They were on the spine of this ridge and there was a wood line about maybe 100, 150 meters away, maybe not even that far. Until I got there, they told me they took fire, all the time, from the wood line until I think they quieted down the day I got there, just before I got there.

LC: Had that LZ Thor, had that just recently been set up?

MM: Yes, they just air assaulted in and set up a perimeter, brought the guns in and start shooting.
LC: Was the wood line, had that been basically created by defoliant or was…?
MM: No, when I said the wood line, it was open and then you had the trees and
the woods there.
LC: Okay, so it was kind of open area and that’s probably why they…
MM: In fact, I got there and I just found out that a good friend of mine got killed
there.
LC: Who was that?
MM: A guy by the name of John Atkins.
LC: Had he been kind of along on most of your moves?
MM: Yes.
LC: What was his job?
MM: He cocked the cannon sometimes; he worked on the guns and he’d carry
the radio in FO parties. In fact, I think he was in an FO party because I think he was
doing what I should’ve been doing if I was there.
LC: Is that right?
MM: Yes.
LC: Did that bother you? Did you like think about that?
MM: Yes, it did a little bit then; it does a heck of a lot more later. It did bother
me once I got home. He was married, had a little girl, that kind of stuff.
LC: Where was he from?
MM: Ohio.
LC: Do you know where about in Ohio?
MM: I can’t remember the name of the town; it escapes me right now. I was
going to go back 100 times and talk to his wife and his little girl and never did. That’s
something I feel bad about. Oh well.
LC: Yes, what actually was the action in which he lost; was it like a mortar or
was it a gunfire?
MM: Gunfire, got shot through the head.
LC: Oh really?
MM: He had a radio on his back and those are magnets. The hierarchy of shooting is you get the guy with the radio, you get the guy with the machine gun, then you get everybody else.

LC: Yes. I’m sorry, was he out on a FO when that happened?

MM: I think just close by the perimeter, probably just out there calling in fire from another battery until these guys could get set up or something.

LC: So, by the time you got up there Mike, the LZ had pretty much kind of quieted that down so you weren’t taking in that intense, kind of close up fire?

MM: No, not that close up. I got there and it was pretty calm until you got in about maybe a klick. See, we were on the spine of a ridge and you could look across the valley. I don’t know how far it was, only 2 or 3 kilometers and then another big ridge going up and see, we can just watch or see the NVA up and down the thing and we did a lot of direct fire there.

LC: Did you?

MM: Yes, I mean with the cannons and everything else; we’d see these guys and we’d drop white phosphorous in front or behind them and let the fire get them.

LC: Is that right?

MM: Yes, it was pretty brushy and that kind of stuff, so they did a lot of that.

LC: And was that the first time you’ve been using those phosphorous shots?

MM: Oh no, they used white phosphorous all the time.

LC: Okay, then you used those a lot.

MM: Yes.

LC: How long did you stay at Thor?

MM: Well, till Khe Sanh was relieved and because from there, we had to secure that and then they wanted a Marine unit to walk into Khe Sanh, so we had most of the 2nd of 7th was up there too; had a lot of guys up there in or around there and then we, I can’t remember how long it was, but then a column came up with Marines up the road because see, what the Cav did, we started out, I think it was that they created a big landing zone called LZ Stud, I think the name of it was, and we just kept air assaulting in closer and closer to Khe Sanh. I got there, I guess in the last phase when they just went into this LZ Thor and so the game plan was to let the Marines walk in. So, then this Marine task force
or whatever it was, they come up the road and then they pass through us and I’m not sure
whether they hit something up there. I don’t know what it was and they came back and
then eventually Delta Company 2\textsuperscript{nd} of 7\textsuperscript{th} went through and I went with them. We
walked down the road and nothing happened and we kind of walked into Khe Sanh and
came back.

LC: So, you were walking along with the FO?
MM: Yes, I went with them.

LC: And you didn’t encounter anything on that walk there?
MM: Nothing after that.

LC: About how far was that from Thor to…?
MM: It was maybe; I don’t know, maybe 5, 6 kilometers, not very far at all.

LC: And the group of Marines that had walked up there previously and had hit
something, how long the lapse between their attempt and your success?
MM: I’d say maybe a day; I’m not sure. I can’t really remember that, but then
there were people going into Khe Sanh from the other sides too because basically what
we did was we went around them. We air assaulted all around it and then just kind of
worked from the edges to the center. I think by that time, what was being encountered
was the, I think that most Vietnamese decided it was a losing proposition and they pretty
much moved out of there before the operation climaxed the way it did.

LC: How did you feel walking along there and actually walking up into Khe
Sanh and seeing what you saw there?
MM: Well, I just remember seeing lots of bomb craters, lots of bomb craters. It
was incredible and we just walked over there and turn around and come back.

LC: Did you actually like kind of see the guys who were up there in Khe Sanh?
MM: I didn’t go all that way in there. Some of the other elements went, I went
back to the battery with a bunch of guys. I think they just wanted to walk down the road
and make sure the road was open or whatever and then it was and then all kinds of stuff
was happening. There was a lot of helicopters up and Birds and everything and it was,
you know, really no big deal.

LC: Okay, well Mike, let’s take a break here.
MM: Okay.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive in Texas Tech University and I’m continuing my interview with Michael McGregor. Today’s date is the 19th of December 2003 and I’m on the campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. McGregor is in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Mike, there were a couple of thing that you had recalled about some time period that we’ve already covered, but maybe we can go back and talk about those? Was there a special Christmas time event that you recall from 1968?

Michael McGregor: It was ’67.

LC: Sorry, ’67.

MM: Because ’68 I recall real well because I was home. (Laughing)

LC: You were home, I’m sorry, that’s right, that’s right.

MM: ’67, now we were in and out of LZ Judy and it was close to Christmas, it wasn’t on Christmas Day, but a Protestant Chaplin, a wrangled Chinook helicopter and he brought out to Judy a kid’s Vietnamese choir. There were, I don’t know, probably 20, 25 elementary school aged kids. They were in a uniform; they had like a white shirt and I think they all had dark blue shorts on and then they sang Christmas Carols to us for about an hour. It was neat and we ended up, all these grizzly guys and we would end up, they’d sing in Vietnamese and some English and we got to the point that we’d sing a verse in English. I presume they sang the same thing or the next verse in Vietnamese and we’re kind of going back and forth and see who could sing the loudest and had a great time. Kids were laughing and all that and I think we gave them; we used to get a lot of tropical
chocolate because we used to get lots of SP packs, so I think we gave them a lot of chocolate and other stuff. Then they went in the helicopter and went someplace else I guess to do it.

LC: How did you feel when that was going on?

MM: I felt happy; kind of a connection to Christmas you know. I was from the mid-west, so Christmas usually meant snow and obviously there was no snow there and it was warm, but it was just a time to think about Christmas. It was kind of a good feeling. It was nice that, I felt appreciative that somebody cared and did that for us and they didn’t have to, it was really nice.

LC: Did you ever see that Chaplin again?

MM: Not that particular one, no.

LC: Did you see Chaplin’s much?

MM: When we were in the Phan Thiet area, yes, we saw, I’m Catholic so we had, oh I think we had a Chaplin out once, I think every couple of three weeks, I think our battalion Chaplin, the artillery battalion Chaplin came down to see us once or twice and then we saw mostly the Chaplin assigned at infantry would come down. I’d say the whole time down there around the Phan Thiet area, maybe 5 or 6 times, they had Military Chaplin’s and then on, particularly on Bartlett, I don’t remember it on LZ Judy, they would make arrangements and they’d bring a Catholic Vietnamese Priest out and he’d have a liturgy and that and then he would go back. So, that happened probably a half a dozen times and in fact, on Bartlett, I can digress, it wasn’t that big of an LZ, but it was very remote. You couldn’t get to it other than basically by helicopters on top of a hill and pretty rugged terrain. We had a Mess Sergeant and we didn’t really have much of a Mess there. All the food was brought it, so he didn’t really have much to do so he’d take all these ammo boxes apart, and the guy built a Chapel out of the wood; he built a chapel.

LC: Wow.

MM: We would help him every now and then and it wasn’t very big, but not a sandbag bunker, it was just out of the wood and he had that and I remember there was a guy got baptized and everything.

LC: Really?
MM: Yes. You know, they say there’s no Atheists in the foxhole and this one
guy, I remember Catholic Chaplin baptize guy out there.

LC: Did you actually go to that service?

MM: Oh yes.

LC: Did you?

MM: Sure did.

LC: Was it a Military Chaplin who conducted that?

MM: Yes, in that case it was, yes. And the guy was, I think he was in Delta
Company 2\textsuperscript{nd} of 7\textsuperscript{th} Cav. He was an infantryman; got baptized there.

LC: Did guys carry bibles much?

MM: Some did, yes, if you’re religious. You had a little bitty bible; it depended
on the person.

LC: But you would see that occasionally?

MM: Oh yes. A lot of the guys from the south, you know, they’d have them
because I remember before we shipped out and I think it was in the Oakland Repot
Depot; they had a table where I guess they had all the faiths covered. They had like a
pocket size edition of the New Testament and a Jewish Prayer Book and some stuff like
that that you could take and most guys took one.

LC: That you could kind of pick up and take with you?

MM: I took one of each; I wasn’t hedging any bets.

LC: (Laughing)

MM: I took everybody’s. (Laughing)

LC: Did you keep those books with you?

MM: Yes, pretty much. Well, most of I carried, yes. What I ended up doing is I
got an empty can from machine gun ammo, you know, the metal ammo can’s waterproof
so I’d keep all that stuff in there so it wouldn’t get wet. I kept a journal when I was over
there and I kept that in there in battery bags so they wouldn’t get wet and you know,
letters and writing supplies and something a little extra to have to carry, but I thought it
was worth it.

LC: You did keep a journal most of the time?

MM: Yes I did, yes.
LC: Was that something you had done before? Had you kept a journal?

MM: Nope, never did.

LC: What made you think to do that, do you know?

MM: Well, I tell you, I think it started it probably in October. I had written when I first got in country, I wrote to a guy that I knew I played rugby with in college who was in the Peace Corps in Iran and I think he graduated a year ahead of me and he joined the Peace Corps right out of college and he finished his tour I think before I went in the Army. Then he went to work for them as an area supervisor or something. He was more of a paid staffer for the Peace Corps and then he wrote me a letter and you know basically saying, “Hey, I’m sorry to hear that you’re in the Army, but hey, you’re living history, so, make the most of it and make sure you know what’s happened and write it down if you can.” I said, “This sounds like a good idea” so I did.

LC: Very good.

MM: I had a little bitty notebook I start using and then at that Gate in Judy, I bought a little bitty, kind of a little Vietnamese notebook that was made out of rice paper that I start putting on.

LC: Mike, I want to ask you about a time a little bit later, a little after that Christmas.

MM: Okay. Well, also, just before getting out of Christmas, also we got two Red Cross sacks, from the, they called them Red Cross sacks, but we got them from a Baptist girls group in Indiana and one in Rhode Island. We got like a little cloth sack with a drawstring and then had like a cigarette lighter in there and nail clippers, ball point pen and something like that and they had then whoever sent it wrote a little note you know and said, “We’re thinking about you” and that kind of thing and that was nice. They came by and gave those out and that was nice.

LC: Was that meaningful to you to have that kind of; I mean, was it sort of anonymous thing, but yet it was a demonstration…?

MM: Yes, I’d get packages from time to time from my wife or my mother and brother or whatever, but it was nice to know that hey, somebody you don’t know is thinking about you and wishing you well.

LC: Yes, okay.
MM: It meant a lot.
LC: It's interesting that you recall where those were actually from too.
MM: Yes, I remembered. I can’t remember the town in Indiana or Rhode Island, but I remember it was Indiana and Rhode Island.
LC: That’s kind of neat. Was there a time at that LZ Mustang when you were measured for new clothes?
MM: Yes.
LC: Can you tell us about that?
MM: Yes, basically we were there and we had heard, I can’t remember how. I don’t know if the battalion sent alert down or whatever, but they told us that North Koreans captured a ship and which turned, we found out a couple or three days later was the Pueblo. And when that happened, we said, “Okay”, didn’t know what that really meant and then I think two or three days later, all the supply guys from their rear came out and they measured for us, what they said were winter clothing because if it heats up in Korea, the division was going to re-deploy and they wanted it to make sure that they had the equipment for us. (Laughing) It created some crazy feelings.
LC: Can you go head and describe some of those? Like, what were the guys saying?
MM: Bologna, we’re in one war, we’re not going to go to another war and I think at that point, it was perceived that, well; we had guys in the unit who cycled through from Korea. In fact, we had a lot, I shouldn’t say a lot, but several people had volunteered for Vietnam just to get out of Korea because of the cold and everything else and what they were saying that if we go to Korea, it will be a real war with tanks and all kinds of that stuff; not like the thing we were fighting. You had the fear of the unknown. It kind of shook us up for a little bit.
LC: And did you ever get word that that possibility had been excluded?
MM: No, they never said that; they did that and they measured it and off it went and that situation, you didn’t hear anything. You know, no news is good news and that was just forgotten.
LC: At some point it just kind of faded?
MM: Yes, and then we had the anxiety because that was right around the time of TET and then we were moving further going in to I Corps then, so.

LC: Right. Let’s see, after TET when you moved into the relief of Khe Sanh and Operation Pegasus, you were assigned and we talked about this earlier, to LZ Thor. Can you tell something about as an artilleryman, you’re assessment of what you faced from enemy artillery?

MM: Well, yes, basically, as I said, I got there late because I was on in-country R&R so I got into the Thor and that is the best example. We didn’t have any bunkers or anything, they just had a big hole dug and then they had the FDC and I don’t know if it was a hole or a crater that they had appropriated and put like a tent top or something over the top and we’d keep the light out, keep the rain out, and that’s where we worked. Then they kept hearing these and we were really right on top of a pretty, steep, narrow hill, ridgeline, whatever and I know there were some explosions below us. We kept hearing this side of the hill and I was out with I think with one of the gun sections or something, that happened, I came back to the FDC, I said, “Hey, who’s firing?” It sounded like somebody was firing, it sounded like a 155 round hitting there. I said, “Who’s shooting? That’s getting kind of close to us.” The guys were laughing and they said, “Oh no, that’s the gooks.” I said, “What?” They said, “Yea, they’re shooting.” They couldn’t pinpoint them, but they said they’ve been taking fire from either in or beyond the DMZ and from Laos and turned out to be that they were shooting a 152-millimeter Howitzers or cannon at us. It was a hard thing to hit with regular fire. They could’ve probably hit us with high angle real quickly, but then the target acquisition people would’ve found them and they would’ve been gone. It was kind of a wake up call because before that, the biggest thing that I was ever subject to was some rocket fire on Evans which was a 122 millimeter and that couldn’t really come too close or some 57 millimeter recoilless rifle fire. I know we got some of that in when we were by the river on LZ Noah and then mortar rounds, but that was the real stuff. You know, we shoot at them and they shoot something bigger back at us and I said, “Holy cripes. I hope they don’t come any closer.” And they didn’t. As I said, by that time, it was in their waning days and they knew it was a lost cause and they’d go on someplace else. So, that happened, probably 2 days, 3 days; very intermittently.
LC: Yet it was still pretty electrifying in a way?
MM: Yes.
LC: Did you ever see enemy artillery? Were any of that abandoned as you moved?
MM: No, I never saw that there. In some other places later, I saw some anti-aircraft artillery, like 37-millimeter guns and that kind of stuff that were knocked out.
LC: Now when you say target acquisition people would have located them if they had used the higher altitude-firing path, can you explain how that would’ve worked?
MM: Yes, basically they had radar sets and they could identify the trajectory of the round and then just kind of back track it to its origin. I don’t know if I did at JPEX and I guess figure pretty closely, you know where it was coming from.
LC: And then what would happen in that event if they were…?
MM: What would happen that way and a lot of times, the artillery would get fire missions called to them based on the target acquisition as well as radio intercept; that we would just get a call that, “Hey, you know, you got a fire mission. You put, you know fire a 6 X 6, or 5 X 5, or 3 X 3 zone, two rounds or three rounds per aiming thing at this grid reference and then we just saturate, we just fire there and the thing was to saturate the area because if they did, I don’t know, 8, 10,000 kilometers out, not kilometers, but meters out, 8, 10 klicks out, you know a 5 X 5 zone with a battery spread would probably cover half a square kilometer with everything.
LC: Did artillery share the duty of knocking out or attempting to knock out these enemy emplacements with bombers and air support?
MM: Yes, if they couldn’t get an air strike, then they would target for us and a lot of times, it would be and I don’t know how precise the thing was, but we would get this call and they would say okay and most of these missions would expend a couple of hundred rounds. As I said, you just really worked over the area and I guess you hokied out of it. But I imagine, you know, people like to see these World War II movies, the Germans driving around with cars and moving the antenna back and forth and I think probably that’s probably what they did was they got a sign on the signal in two different locations and just did back azimuths and wherever they intersected, they’d shoot at it.
LC: And that kind of a fire mission was generally handled by the artillery rather than by calling in air support?

MM: I don’t know if any air was ever used. I would imagine probably mostly the artillery because it was iffy and quite frankly, I don’t even know how old that stuff was. They would just call it down. I don’t know if they got it real time, if they were doing in real time or if they went through some analysis and channels or whatever. I don’t really know; just higher headquarters would call it down and that’s what they would do.

LC: During Operation Pegasus and particularly when you were up there at LZ Thor, did you see much in the way of US Aircraft coming over the top?

MM: Yes, there was usually a few planes on station. We didn’t see that many because it was kind of, it wasn’t clear, you had, maybe the ceiling was a couple of three thousand feet, but we knew they were on station because we were under fire control and that; we could hear people calling them in or we could call them in if we needed to.

LC: How as LZ Thor supplied once you got up there?

MM: By helicopter.

LC: And, so helicopters were their landing pad?

MM: Yes, I think there was a…yes; it probably could take one or two Bird’s. It was a pretty small pad.

LC: Do you remember how the equipment that were off loaded was packages?

Do you remember if it was on pallets or what was it?

MM: Well, basically, they would sling it in; they would carry a sling. The helicopter would carry the load externally. It’d be a big, imagine an upside down parachute; it wasn’t a parachute, but it was like a heavy canvas or sling and you had maybe the ropes that were, I don’t know, on to a hook that might be twenty feet long or something and then be hooked to the bottom of the helicopter, they’d just bring her down and set it down, and somebody unhook them and off they go. And then sometimes like when they brought food and that, then that was on inside. They would touch down and then off load it.

LC: Were the helicopters in a hurry to get out of there? Was it really quick or?

MM: Yes, pretty much so. You call, they haul and somebody else is calling them. They were pretty busy.
LC: And did you get mail delivered up there?

MM: Well, I’m not sure if we got mail up there or not, but mail was pretty…

Maybe you wouldn’t get any for a week or 10 days and then you get 25 letters; it’s kind of that way. Usually like when we moved up there, I would say, I can’t say this for all certainty, but I don’t think we got any mail because whenever you transitioned, it took the rear area a long time to figure out where you were at and establish those channels to get that stuff to you. So, it sometimes took, you know, we left Camp Evans and then they set up on LZ Stud I think, became the brigade or division forward base area, so you don’t have to go from Evans to Stud, then they’d have to figure out where you were and sometimes where you were yesterday is not where you are today and that takes a while.

LC: Right, and the 1st Cav was moving pretty quickly.

MM: Yes, pretty much all the time. I can’t remember mail, but we may have gotten it, I’m not sure.

LC: Okay, when you went into Khe Sanh, you yourself walked?

MM: Yes, we walked into the edge of the end of it; we saw US troops and turn around and come back.

LC: And when you came back to I presume LZ Thor, what was the next deployment? What happened next with your unit?

MM: Well, we hung around there for a while. I can’t remember how long. It wasn’t that long, then we went back to LZ Stud and then we kind of stood down, they said, “Okay guys.” Didn’t really have a role and although, everybody was redeploying back, okay?

LC: Back to?

MM: Back to Evans.

LC: Okay.

MM: And then we were designated as rear guard. So, we didn’t really have anything to do while all that stuff was happening. People were packing up and moving out and one funny thing that happened there though, “So obviously”, said your unit, “We’re not going to get supplied, so here, you got to eat C-rations.” Okay, so we had a bunch of cases of C-rations and a couple of the more enterprising individuals went out and they came back with a refrigerated truck which was the, kind of like a, I don’t know
if it was built on a deuce and a ½ ton frame or a five ton frame, but anyway, they brought
the thing back and it supposedly was the mess truck for the Brigade Command Post. And
I remember, we made a grill out of ammunition rods and we just ate steak for four or five
days. (Laughing)

LC: You had to help clean out that truck, did you?

MM: Well, no, they found the truck. The truck was supposed to go back and
they said, “Okay, you can go back, we’ll go back later.”

LC: And it was stocked with all kinds.

MM: It had, I remember, there were a lot of steaks in there, a lot of t-bones and
we had the grill going almost 24 hours a day. It was kind of nice; just grab a steak and
gnaw on it. That was fun. (Laughing)

LC: Were you able to get other kinds of supplies up there that helped kind of
move the time along, like a year?

MM: No, no, nothing like that up there. No, we just had to scavenge because
everybody’s going back and then what we had to do is police the area up as soon as the
last people were going and then anything that couldn’t be hauled back or that wasn’t
worth hauling back, then we’d burn. Then we got on, I don’t know if we flew back, I
think we helicoptered out of there and then went someplace else, I’m not sure and then
back into Evans on; I don’t think it was on helicopters, I think we came back into Evans
on either Caribous or C-123s. I’m not sure.

LC: When you got back to Evans, you were sort of the last of the 1st Cav units
from to leave?

MM: Well, the last to leave LZ Stud; where the other ones went to, I don’t know
and then we got back to Evans.

LC: And when you got back to Evans, what did you think your next assignment
was going to be and how long did it take you to find out?

MM: I think, they were talking about going back in the A Shau Valley and I’m
not sure, I think we got back to Evans around, I don’t know when we got back to Evans.
I know they were talking about the A Shau Valley and I said, “What?” I know some guy
got to because I know we were in Khe Sanh, that was what maybe mid-April, I’m not
sure.
LC: Yes, I think that’s correct.

MM: Yes, because I know my wife’s birthday is, I think, what my wife’s birthday is April 19th and I think, I want to say yes, we were back on Camp Evans on her birthday because we were… I think they were already going into… some units were already going into A Shau Valley and we were waiting to go on her birthday, yes. So, that would be April 19th.

LC: And you moved out pretty quickly after that, is that right?

MM: Yes, pretty much so, but we were socked in by the weather. Okay, on her birthday we were supposed to go and I think some of the other battalions went in because I know they had a bad time. They lost a lot of helicopters. Okay, I take this back; half of us stayed at Evans and they sent I think either two or three guns up to what they called Signal Mountain and basically what they did is they air assaulted in to a hill, I think it was the highest hill on the east side of the A Shau Valley and they set up a small firebase. There was either two or three Howitzers and some infantry there to basically secure a radio relay station so they could relay communicate. The signal corps set something up to relay radio signals out of the valley to the rest of the world. Part of a section went with them; I know Charlie Poore went up there and a couple of other guys from my section and I think it was two guns or three guns, I’m not sure. So, we were kind of at half strength and we were kind of just waiting around, so I don’t think we had the priority like maybe a full compliment kind of thing because it runs in my mind, we didn’t get out there until maybe the 22nd or 23rd.

LC: Of April?

MM: Yes.

LC: Did you… go ahead Mike.

MM: I’m sorry, because of weather and then there was a hold on apparently where we were supposed to go or around where we were supposed to go. They were waiting for some B-52 strikes or something and then we were going to do something after that because I remember a good friend of mine by the name of Cox, I don’t know what his first name was. (Laughing) He’s a real good friend of mine, but see, there, you just knew them by their call signs or their last name or whatever, but I remember, he went in the first assault and his helicopter was shot down, they were picked up by somebody else
and that Bird was shot down. Finally, the third time, they brought them out, he hurt his
arm a little bit, but you know, nothing. He was still fit for duty, so he came in and gave
us the poop and we were complaining and I said, “Hey, we want to join the rest of the
guys.” He said, “You don’t want to go there pal.” I remember him telling us that.

LC: How did you feel when you were talking to your buddy that got shot down
and him telling you it’s not a good place?
MM: Oh shit. (Laughing) Then I kept saying, “Well, hey, maybe it’s good that
we wait; get it over with.”

LC: Well, Mike, how much did you guys know about what the picture was in the
A Shau Valley and what you were supposed to be doing?
MM: Well, not really much. We had a little bit of history on the thing because I
remember they gave us a big, big pep talk that there weren’t any US troops in that valley
for two years or three years or whatever it was and they said an incident which I
remember as a civilian that they, oh way back, I don’t know if it was ’65, ’66; they had
some bad press because the Marines were kicking some Vietnamese off their helicopters
because they couldn’t take off because they were so heavy and that happened to be,
apparently that was when they were evacuating some special forces camps in the valley
and that was the last time they were there. We got to back and they’re calling on the Cav
and we got to pull our sabers out and go and rah, rah. So, they gave us a little bit of it,
but I had no idea what the operation was, we just say, “That’s where we’re going.” They
said, “It’s a pretty big logistical base of Charlies and it’s like a funnel pointed at Hue and
we got them in Hue and we’re going to get them there.” We said, “Okay.”

LC: And what level of command was sort of giving this kind of briefing, do you
remember? Like the Company Commander or…?
MM: Probably the XO (Executive Officer), maybe the Company Commander. I
didn’t see anybody above the rank of Captain in the field other than maybe once or twice.

LC: In your entire tour?
MM: Yes.

LC: How’d you feel about that?
MM: Well, I didn’t really care at the time. It kind of bothers me afterward, but
you have to understand, the Battalion Commander, we’re spread out all over heck, so
they spent all their time in what they call Charlie, Charlie command and control 
helicopters. I mean you have a company here; you may have a company three klicks 
away and so there was no cohesion. At that time, I really had a lot of respect for that 
grade of officer and I think we missed a lot by not having them in the field, not having 
that leadership in the field.

LC: Did you spend time at Camp Evans hear of or know of General 
Westmoreland trips in and out of there around this time?

MM: No it didn’t. Well, when Creighton Abrams was appointed the, this is a 
little later, I think he was appointed as Westmoreland’s assistant, then he eventually took 
over, he came out and we saw him. He came out and inspected us and I have a funny 
story about that.

LC: Okay, well, go head and tell me, go head and tell me now.

MM: After the A Shau, we basically spent the whole time in the sand dunes east 
of Camp Evans, between Evans and the sea, and we had a little firebase there and I was 
telling you about that big graveyard.

LC: Right.

MM: It was just north of that graveyard, so we spend the rest of the time, like 
maybe three months at that LZ just working that area. Abrams came out with somebody, 
I can’t remember who. He was doing an inspection tour. In this LZ, it was hotter than 
blazes. It was probably about 120 outside during the day, 110, 120, but then the sun 
would cook you coming down. It would bounce, reflect up the quartz in the sand and 
cook you coming back up and it was hot, so we didn’t wear shirts. Our Company 
Commander at this time was a West Point Grad.

LC: Do you remember his name?

MM: No, I have no idea what his name was. (Laughing) I’ve been trying to 
think of that. He had his whole career mapped out. He was married to an Argentinean 
gal and his thing was, he wanted to go back to the states and he wants to spend the rest of 
his time, I guess he was fluent in Spanish, and he wanted to spend the rest of his time as 
military attaché staffs in South America. That was his career ambition.

LC: Wow.
MM: I may think of it, I can’t remember his name, but he was a funny guy. He was a nice guy; he was kind of funny. But anyway, so Abrams comes out there and he’s inspecting us; nobody has shirts on which isn’t unusual but we’re not wearing dog tags. LC: No dog tags, okay. MM: No dog tags; you usually just kept them in the pocket. So, he’s basically casually mentioning to this one guy, as he’s inspected him, “Soldier, where’s your dog tags?” “Well, they’re in my pocket sir.” He says, “Why aren’t you wearing them?” Before he could speak, the Company Commander said, “Well sir, he’s probably like me and they kind of get tangled up in the hair on his chest and pulls out and it’s uncomfortable, so we keep them in our pocket.” (Laughing) And if looks could kill. (Laughing) He just kind of, the Cav gunner Miller said, “It was one of those ‘Oh shit!’ moments” and off he went.

LC: Abrams wasn’t too thrilled about that?

MM: No, I saw him there and he obviously came out with either the Brigade Commander or somebody, but it was maybe 20 minutes and then when we were on an operation earlier in Phan Thiet, we were way out in the woods. We were out there about two weeks, the II Corps Commander, I don’t remember what his name was, he came out for a, I think he was maybe there five, ten minutes, but we got some relief off of that one because we were very short handed. We didn’t have many people, so he said, “Where’s everybody at?” We said, “This is what we got.” So, he made sure we got some replacements. But other than that and then once, I think our Battalion Commander came out when they changed command, you know, just kind of press the flesh, but they never spent the night in the field or anything.

LC: Did that visit from Abrams result in anything, any kind of change or did he speak to the troops at all?

MM: No, he just, hey, this is who it is, just want to see what it is. He paid his dues.

LC: How’s that; what do you mean?

MM: Well, in the Second World War; he paid his dues and everybody knew his reputation.

LC: And the men, would you say generally were respectful of him?
MM: Oh yes. He came by, “How’s it going soldier? Here you are, pats on back. This is it, keep up the good work.” Off he goes.

LC: Was it meaningful to you to see, to have somebody at that level of the command structure actually come out?

MM: It didn’t affect me one way or another. It really didn’t. In a state side unit, I’d say it was probably detrimental because you have to go through, if you know in advance, you go through a week of BS, getting ready for two minutes.

LC: And you guys clearly did not do that?

MM: No.

LC: Right. Can I ask you…well…go ahead Mike.

MM: I don’t think anybody asked him because right around that time we got this crazy regulation through that you had to write your names in your boots. On the inside of your boots, you had to have your name written down.

LC: What was the point of that?

MM: Help identify the body.

LC: Did you guys know that?

MM: That’s what they said. I’d say, “What in the hell we have to do this for?” “Well, some rocket scientists figured out that once you get killed, maybe it will help us identify the body; if we just find your foot.”

LC: Okay.

MM: I said, “Well, if you just find my foot, don’t worry about it.” I remember one guy said, “I should’ve asked him that.” I think his name was White; he was kind of smart aleck. “I should’ve asked this guy what rocket scientist thought up for this one.” I said, “Well, why didn’t you?” You know, he’s one of these guys; “I should’ve” after the fact.

LC: Right. Can I ask you about the dog tags?

MM: Yes.

LC: Why did you guys take them off; was it because it was hot?

MM: Yes. I don’t know; just a lot of times, to keep them on the…I didn’t like them because I had them all taped up. It’s like duck tape, but it was olive drab color. I had them all taped because I didn’t want them to clang and then I think quite frankly my
chain broke or something and I’d wear them and I’d just cut the chain down and just put
in my pocket.

LC: Were you able to keep them? Did you actually lose them?

MM: Yes, when we got out. I don’t know whatever happened to them. I was
looking for them about 10 years ago and I think my wife threw them away or something.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes.

LC: You wish maybe you had them now?

MM: No.

LC: No.

MM: They just had my name, serial number, blood type and religion. I can get
them for three bucks a piece at an Army Surplus store; they can make them up for me if I
wanted them.

LC: You never felt kind of connected to them in any way?

MM: No.

LC: Okay. Let’s go back to the time at Camp Evans; you’re anticipating moving
out in this new deployment. Some of your men, I think you said Charlie Poore had
already gone out.

MM: Well, no, we weren’t going to go to the same place; we were going to go
someplace else.

LC: Oh you were not?
MM: Yes, they went up on this hill to what they called Signal Mountain to set up something to provide security for that radio relay.

LC: And you think they had maybe two or three of the batteries [howitzers]?

MM: I know they took two; I think they were going to take three and one got lost.

LC: One got lost?

MM: And they only ended up with two. Yes. I have no idea what happened and I think they were supposed to leave with three guns and only two showed up there.

LC: Okay.

MM: Because I know that happened to us later as well.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes. So, I don’t know if the guy was...they normally took these things out with Chinooks and I don’t know if he’s getting some fire and they just cut the load loose or what or I don’t know what the circumstance was. I think they were supposed to have three, but they only ended up with two, which is okay because we were real short handed and I don’t think they had the personnel to operate three anyway.

LC: Do you know if roughly how long after they left to go up to Signal Mountain that you actually moved out into A Shau Valley?

MM: Two days maybe at the most; a day, two days.

LC: Can you talk about that deployment, what happened?

MM: Well, we were air assaulting on to a hill. It’s kind of funny to say, “Hey, we’re in the valley” but we really were on a hill and we went in with Huey’s and as I recall, the LZ is real thick, real heavy thick woods kind of stuff and I think there were some air strikes there, but they didn’t really clear much up and we had just a real small pad. I think it could only take one Huey or maybe a Chinook could fit in there at a time and we went in first, advanced party and the helicopter, I’m going to say, was disabled. Its rotor hit a tree or something, I don’t know, so that had shut the LZ down and so then they had to extract that.

LC: Did anything extract you?

MM: No, the busted up helicopter.

LC: Oh okay, yes.
MM: So, that was a while and then everybody else came; then they start slowly bringing people in there. I’ll never forget my first time in a helicopter [ride there], I really had problems because I don’t know, they must’ve been up 10, 12,000 feet because they said to avoid fire, but I must’ve had a bug or something in my sinus cavities because it felt like my head was going to explode; I never felt such excruciating pain in my life going in there. One time I was relieved to get in the woods.

LC: Wow.

MM: So, that happened and then we were there and they called that LZ; I think it was LZ Pepper; I’m not sure. It was a god-awful place because it was cut by a…there’s a big valley there, kind of a cut in the ground, so the LZ was split. You had part of it on one side of the depression and the other part on the other side, but it was really thick. They had some trees there that we couldn’t cut down. Then we even tried blowing up; we couldn’t blow these things down that what was so hard, I don’t know what the heck they were. I mean, I hit it with a machete; it wasn’t, maybe as big round as a telephone poll or something and you hit it with a machete and the machete just bounce back at you. We put some C4 around it and that just blew a couple of splinters and the engineers had to finally come in and do something with it, but it was really thick; had this higher trees. I remember the valley was beautiful though; it was just beautiful. In the morning, there’s a low-lying fog over it, you see the tops of these rock outcroppings and the green hills. It was just pretty.

LC: Were you able at the time to sort of appreciate that beauty?

MM: Yes, I did, I thought that was cool. I really thought it was neat. We were so remote and it was so rough; we didn’t have a cohesive perimeter, but I don’t think we really needed one because we got a few guys there, but it was like the North Vietnamese didn’t even know we were there. As I said, didn’t have a cohesive perimeter, but we cut all this brush and this stuff and just made piles of it on the perimeter and tied cans in there and you’d hear them, but I can remember I was out having a bowel movement and go out, dug my little hole and I’m sitting there and all of a sudden I hear a shot, and I look and there’s a Black Hat come running by. There’s a North Vietnamese guy who is about maybe 10 feet away from me, I didn’t even know he was there.

LC: Really?
MM: Yes. I don’t think he knew I was there.

LC: Did you see him first?

MM: No, I didn’t see him at all. As I said, I went out and dug my hole and was squatting and then I heard this shot and kind of interrupted me and the Black Hat; I remember this Black Hat’s name was Ed, I don’t know what his last name was, but he come running by and say, “Hey Mike, you’re lucky.” I said, “Why?” He said, “Look.” I look over there and all I said, “Holy Toledo.”

LC: Did you see the NVA guy there?

MM: Yes, he killed him.

LC: And then you went over and saw him?

MM: Yes, just a kid. I said, I told Ed that I had to thank the United States Army for guarding my bowel movements because I would’ve probably been toasted if he wasn’t there. (Laughing)

LC: Do you remember the man’s name who basically saved you?

MM: Well, his first name was Ed the Black Hat.

LC: Now by Black Hat?

MM: Well, I don’t know what their actual MOS was; most of these guys were airborne pathfinders, but they served as like air traffic controllers for the LZ. They’d be some of the first guys in and then they would tell the helicopters which way the prevailing wind was and that kind of stuff; they’d talk them in. I think they work for the aviation companies or I’m not really sure, but there’s usually only one on a landing zone or a firebase when you went out. Most of the time they hung out with us.

LC: With us, meaning the artillery guys?

MM: Yes, usually in the FDC area or around the command element or something. They had their radio. They were good guys to know especially down in Phan Thiet because if you wanted to go on pass; if you got pass then they could sweet talk the helicopter some place to divert to pick you up to bring you in.

LC: They were good to know.

MM: Yes they were.

LC: Even without one of them saving your life.
MM: But I don’t even know if this guy saw me. As I recall, I don’t even think the guy’s weapon was charged.

LC: Do you remember what he was carrying?

MM: He had an SKS (Samozariadnyia Karbina Simonova), yes.

LC: Was he carrying anything else besides that weapon?

MM: Well, the usual stuff. He had a snake bite kit and I think he had kind of improvised first aid kit; had like a pressure bandage and a bar of soap, didn’t have any papers or anything on him. But I think he probably got spooked because see, when they went into the A Shau from the guys who were down on the valley floor was primarily, there’s a lot of, I guess, North Vietnamese logistical apparatus and that kind of stuff, so he probably just grabbed, when they were first coming in, he probably just grabbed what he could and just made it for the hills. I don’t know.

LC: When you first arrived there at LZ Pepper, about how many guys got there before you did?

MM: We were the first. We went in an advanced party, yes, we were first. The Black Hat was with us and myself and I think there were maybe a fire team or two of infantry on that first. Well, there were supposed to be…well, I think there were six or seven Huey’s in the stick, but then we landed first and then the other ones couldn’t land because that one was disabled.

LC: Why did they put you on one of those first helicopters?

MM: I don’t know, they just said, “Hey, go.” “Okay, I’ll go with the advanced party.” I think I just got on a wrong bird I don’t know. (Laughing)

LC: Oh, okay. (Laughing) I was wondering.

MM: Really, I went with Ed, the Black Hat, because we were kind of buddies and I saw him there and he said, “Hey come on Mac.” “Okay. Here we go.”

LC: I wondered whether there was some particular job that you were supposed to do like figure out where the guns were supposed to go.

MM: No, no. Well, with us was the, we called him the Chief of Smoke for the battery. He was like the, you know, you got a 1st Sergeant and then you’d have a 1st Sergeant like for the field or something. He was the guy, he was really in charge of all the gun sections and he was with us. He was an E-7. He would be the guy who would
say, “Okay, let’s set up. This is where we’ll set the guns up and this is the orientation
they’ll have” and that kind of stuff. He would do that.

LC: Do you remember that first night out there?

MM: Yes, it was digging a hole. I think it was kind of rainy, well, not really
rainy then, but I know it rained like hell later, but it was pretty busy. We spent most of
the night digging and digging a hole and figuring out where we’re going to be and start
digging a hole for the FDC, trying to develop a cohesive perimeter; didn’t really get too
much sleep. When we landed then the infantry went out a little further and everybody
has to report back. Other than a few stragglers, there’s nobody around. There weren’t
seeing anybody.

LC: Those other stragglers, did the infantry guys on those patrols kind of take
them out or?

MM: Well, they’d see them and maybe they’d go after them, maybe they
wouldn’t, but all throughout this thing it was almost like I said that they interrupted these
guys and they just took off with whatever they could get because we’d have them coming
through. I remember, we got two of them; they were just coming through; the
Vietnamese guys like to hold hands you know, like friends and they were just holding
hands walking just coming through the woods and here they are.

LC: And what happened, do you remember?

MM: They were disarmed and captured and sent back.

LC: Okay. Would you thought they would be put on a helicopter and take them
back for interrogation?

MM: Oh yes. I’m sure they took them back and the intelligence guys were going
to find out what unit they were from. At that point, they didn’t have a clue that I guess
that we were where we were at. As I said, I don’t think these guys were front lines; I
don’t think they were the NVA infantry, I think they were just supply guys, kind of rear
area stuff because just walking through and not, oblivious to anything.

LC: Right; walk right into it.

MM: I don’t know, maybe they didn’t know we were there or obviously they
didn’t know we were there, but they probably didn’t think there was any hostile people
there I guess.
LC: Did LZ Pepper sort of become your new station there?
MM: Yes, that’s where we stayed the whole time of the A Shau, yes.
LC: About how long was that?
MM: Oh, we stayed there into May, sometime into May and what was that, I think we stayed there probably until mid-May. I want to say May 15, May 12th. We stayed there a lot because during that time, we got a new 1st Sergeant and he came out and he quickly impressed everybody as a field soldier as opposed to the other guy who would take advantage of us. I can remember Charlie Poore had talked to him and told him to talk to me because he saw Charlie first and he came to me and said, “Hey, what’s this that you and Charlie want to go see the IG”, the Inspector General. Well, it goes back to R&R. Charlie was married; I was married, so when we first got assigned to the unit, they said, “Hawaiian R&Rs are very hard to get, so put in for them as soon as you can.” So, we thought we’d put in for them in September, October. Now here this is May, I haven’t gotten any word on R&R and this kind of stuff, so then I said, “We want to go on R&R. It’s been over six months and we haven’t gotten anything and I don’t think that’s right.” He said, “Well, I tell you what, you’re more than glad to see whoever you want to see, but let me work on it and see what I can do.” I know that was in May and that at LZ Pepper up there that I talked to the guy about that because I think we were doing that in reaction because I think around the 1st of May, the R&R stuff comes up for the next month and they announced who was going in June and Charlie and I weren’t there so I think that’s what precipitated the whole kind of thing. I remember that, talking to the guy about that.
LC: And he was receptive to your…?
MM: Oh yes, he did some checking and he came back and his name was Sergeant Campbell; he came back and said that, “Hey, the records don’t show that you submitted anything for Hawaii.”
LC: Oh no
MM: See, what happened, and then he told us later that once he got on the scene that the previous 1st Sergeant was selling the Hawaiian slots to other people that wanted to go.
LC: Oh.
MM: Some of his other lifer buddies or whatever.
LC: Oh boy, how did you feel about that?
MM: I would’ve shot him if I found him, but he was gone already. He did crazy things like if you’re in the field, you were supposedly entitled to what they call the Class Six Allowance that you could get two cans of beer and two cans of soda pop on the government everyday. Not get it everyday, but that was your entitlement.
LC: Okay.
MM: So, until we got this 1st Sergeant, we never got any Class Six.
LC: Did you even know about it?
MM: Oh yes.
LC: You knew that other guys were getting it.
MM: The infantry guys were getting it and all this stuff and I always thought the 1st Sergeant; “Can’t get any Class Six, but I was able to buy some from someplace so I can sell them to you for a buck a can.” (Laughing)
LC: How did you handle that; the small little thing that you were entitled to get and it was being taken away from you?
MM: Well, that upset us, but see, this guy, the 1st Sergeant, he would never, ever stay in the field at night, he was never there when we’re in the field. When we were at Camp Evans or a bigger place; Camp Evans is the biggest place there and he’d always stay at Camp Evans and he would always headquarter himself at the battalion headquarters because he had the Liaison, so he was never in the field. It’s just not me; there were 35 guys that would’ve killed him.
LC: Did you think he was a coward, a crook?
MM: A crook. I don’t blame him for not going in the field because after that tour, he was sent to retire after his 20 years or whatever, but he was just feathering his nest for his retirement.
LC: Well, you weren’t upset then to see the back of him?
MM: No, then they say, after when Sergeant Campbell came there, he was a soldier’s soldier and he took care of us and Charlie Poore, he said, “Don’t worry, we told him what happened.” He said, “Hey, I believe you guys. You will be in Hawaii within a month or within six weeks or something” and by god, we were. We start getting Class
Six and we start getting ice cream and we start getting some milk. I hadn’t had, other than being in Da Nang that in-country R&R, I didn’t have a glass of milk until Sergeant Campbell got it for us.

LC: What was the food like out there on LZ Pepper? How was that?

MM: Just ate C-rations. Maybe we got some LRRP-rations every now and then.

LC: What was the difference?

MM: They came out with LRRP-rations were freeze-dried stuff, you know, just added water or hot water; it was pretty good and the C-rations weren’t bad either. If you’re hungry, you eat anything.

LC: Sure, exactly. So, you were starting to get your couple of cans of beer out there?

MM: Well, going up into the bushes like that, they weren’t going to waste that, you know, bring it up to us, but I think when we redeployed from there, we may have just transitioned at Evans for a day or so and then we went to that place east of Evans. We set up a firebase between Evans and the sea.

LC: With sandbags?

MM: Yes, they brought it out and once we got set up and so they brought a case out for everybody or half a case or whatever and “Here it is, here’s your stuff.”

LC: Well, up there at LZ Pepper, what exactly did you do? Did you set up the guns?

MM: Yes, set up the guns up and we were firing support for a lot of different people because once Charlie got there, I say Charlie, the NVA got recovered, then they start hitting everybody pretty hard. I know we got rocketed a lot. We got some 37-millimeter fire, a lot of small arms fire. I mean it was so thick and I’d just shoot and that kind of thing and we were just doing that and then it’d start raining. That was something.

LC: Was the small arms fire coming up pretty close to the further there?

MM: Yes, and see, we didn’t really have a cohesive perimeter because it was so thick, so we put these big brush piles out there. In fact, they’d be on either side of our brush shooting in, hoping that we’d shoot back. A few guys just throw grenades back at them or something.

LC: Did you say something about tying cans?
MM: Yes.
LC: How did that work?
MM: Well okay, at night, you put a couple of little stones or something in the can and tie it to a branch and they move the branch and you hear a “clank, clank.” Then we had to put a lot of Claymore mines out there and stuff like that.
LC: Who actually did that; the placing of the mine?
MM: Infantry and we did. We took segments of the perimeter and hopefully the infantry do it all if there’s enough of them, but we’d do it.
LC: How many men were up there?
MM: Oh, I don’t know. There was probably maybe 70, 75 at the most.
LC: Really? And did you spend time in the FDC basically that you had been digging?
MM: Yes, I spent a lot of time there and then a lot of time doing perimeter stuff in the perimeter. I didn’t go out in the bushes at that time.
LC: You didn’t do any FO?
MM: No, because other than, we just sat put because it was so thick and that and they said, “Just stay here” and then we were just firing support for people further down in the valley.
LC: Do you know what units you were recovering?
MM: Yes, it was most of the 2nd of 7th Cav, yes.
LC: Okay. Were those units being moved around by helicopter primarily?
MM: No, I think they were just sweeping areas because they were finding a lot of stuff.
LC: Like what, do you know?
MM: I think they found a bulldozer down there and they found a lot of uncovered, like a hospital. They would have a lot of arms, a lot of anti-aircraft sites; just supply stuff. A lot of rice, they burned that up. Not really that much contact. Most of them ran off towards Laos and then they start coming back from Laos and pushing out and trying to hit us.
LC: And that’s when you start taking some…?
MM: Yes, and as those people got…they were disorientated and then once they
got some cohesion, then they start going.

LC: So, around the middle of May was when you sort of packed up out of LZ
Pepper?

MM: Yes, we went right out of Pepper and if I remember, they took us back to
Camp Evans and we just sat in the field there and then they brought in the other part that
was on Signal Mountain there together and then from there, we then air assaulted in; the
guns didn’t even set up there, they were just so march order and then we air assaulted
into, what was the name of that place, I think we called it LZ Jean.

LC: Was that the sand dunes?

MM: Yes, it wasn’t really sandy, it’s just sandy soil; just kind of flat with a few
little creeks breaking it up, but it was just almost like the beach.

LC: When you guys pulled out of Pepper, did you have the sense that you had
accomplished the mission?

MM: Well, we kept hearing these reports that we got of all the supplies that was
captured, destroyed, and that kind of stuff, but it was just, “That job’s done, where we
going now?”

LC: Now on to the next one.

MM: Yes.

LC: Did you have any kind of sense of, I don’t know, frustration maybe about
that time in the A Shau Valley?

MM: No.

LC: No?

MM: No, the only frustration I encountered was, I think it was after that, I don’t
know when it was, but we heard that they abandoned Khe Sanh. That upset me a little
bit.

LC: Why?

MM: Oh, because Atkins was killed there and you say, “Hey, if he was killed and
then we give the damn place up. Was it worth it? Why even bother doing it in the
beginning? Why not just leave?”
LC: And did you start to have those kinds of feelings like then while you’re still there in country still?

MM: No, just there when I heard about Khe Sanh and everybody had the butt on that because we lost some guys there and it was tough, not as tough as the poor guys that had to live it for three months or four months until it was besieged, but said, “Hey, because we did that, so why bother?”

LC: Yes. Mike, let’s take a break.

MM: Yes, hey, I got to run.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins. I’m continuing my oral history interview for the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University with Mike McGregor. Mr. McGregor is in Grand Rapids, Michigan and I’m here on the campus of Texas Tech in the Special Collections interview room and the date is the 6th of January 2004. Mike, last time we were talking, you were talking about your arrival at LZ Jean.

Michael McGregor: Right.

LC: And about the graveyard area that was nearby. Can you describe that graveyard again?

MM: Well, the Vietnamese graveyards, they buried people in kind of like mounds and there’s these, kind of like conical mounds and Jean was just north, well north, I was going to say, we were probably 3 or 4 kilometers, maybe 5 kilometers north of this graveyard. The graveyard was huge. I think it encompassed several kilometers or square kilometers. We went into Jean and then the idea was I guess to stabilize the area east of Camp Evans, which was growing and then we had operations in the graveyard area because they told us that there were apparently two NVA regiments operating in that area.

LC: Do you know which regiments they were?

MM: I have no idea. Somebody said that they were there, so.

LC: Did you leave the LZ very much?
MM: Yes, somewhat, that was in May and then I went on R&R; finally got that thing straightened out. I went on R&R; I think was in June. After that, I would get real short timers syndrome. When we first went into Jean, we were getting, we air assaulted in, there was no opposition and then they were getting mortared about every night and a lot of sniper fire. I wouldn’t even say sniper fire; somebody’d jump up and you couldn’t even see them out in the dune someplace and just let loose a few rounds into the area of what became the landing zone.

LC: Were you doing much firing? Did you have targets?

MM: Yes, we were supporting the operation out there. Quite frankly, most of the missions out there were marking missions.

LC: Okay, what do you mean by that?

MM: Well, basically help people find out where they were because there was no real terrain features; it was just flat and sandy. Jean was by a little stream, but you had a lot of little streams breaking through there. You could be three, four klicks off and wouldn’t know it, so, every now and then, if you were out in the field, wasn’t sure of, pick two grid intersections and shoot a smoke round at each one and do a back azimuth and that’ll tell you where you’re at.

LC: Right, and was that primarily the kind of activity that you were doing?

MM: So, we did a lot of that and as well as just supporting, I can’t remember any big significant fire missions there. Also, we did a lot of destruction missions where they would find, you know, if they found a bunker complex or something, they did a lot of that and they would shoot at those with delay fuses to bury and cave them in and that kind of stuff. They did a lot of that and your regular fire mission; if they take sniper fire or whatever or recon by fire and stuff like that.

LC: How many guns did you have there and what kind were they?

MM: It was the whole battery; the six Howitzers from A-Battery was there and right around this time, and there, I stayed at Jean. We and the battery and all that stayed at Jean from there until September when I returned to the states because what happened was, I think it was the whole thing in the Cav. They created a 5th Company that they took all the 81-millimeter mortars and put those into Echo Company; so they formed an Echo Company, and so they had the 881’s I believe were four, four deuce, 4, 4.2 inch mortars
and then they had an infantry platoon. If an element of the battalion was operating outside of our fire range, then this Echo Company would move out to support them. If they weren’t, then they stayed on LZ Jean.

LC: Was A-battery still in effect supporting the 7th Calvary?

MM: Yes, just the 2nd of 7th, yes.

LC: So, there wasn’t a lot of combat action really for you those last months that you were there in Jean.

MM: Well, it was like sometime in May. I see him like every other night or something, you get probed with just a few people. I think the biggest body count we got were, I think at one night there in the morning, there were 10 NVA KIA (Killed in Action) just outside the wire. They probed us and like 2’s and 3’s and that kind of thing, but there was no big battle or anything like that. It kind of makes sense because it was after TET where they played their wild card and then after A Shau and everything else which kind of disrupted them, so they were kind of laying low.

LC: Right. When you would get probed like that with say a platoon or something in that order of strength of the enemy, did you actually respond with artillery?

MM: Oh yes. They would respond either they’d call it in, the battery would have defensive targets or they would shoot at direct fire and they did a lot of that even when we were at Evans because we were right on the perimeter. So, if they’d see the muzzle flashes, they’d have to get permission. That was relatively easy coming to engage the targets of direct fire.

LC: Now those months that you were at LZ Jean, was it in some way a relief to be kind of in one place?

MM: Well, we never knew we were going to stay there. You never knew you were going to be there from day to day because in the end of service, there’s always rumors. It was a good place to kind of watch the war because it was kind of flat and especially at night, you could see the gun ships operate and all kinds of stuff.

LC: What was your sleeping pattern like there at LZ Jean? Were you able to sleep at night or during the day or how did it work, do you remember?

MM: Well, with the battery together, if not much was happening, we would, I’m just trying to think, I think we did like 12 hours on and 12 hours off if nothing much was
happening. Well, twelve hours in a Fire Direction Control center, then when you weren’t
doing, then you tried to get some sleep then or then you were employed in strengthening;
building bunkers, helping put out more wire, Claymores, you always had something to
do. Hopefully there, you probably got 5, 6 hours of sleep, but it was pretty much routine,
you know, do some stuff but as I said, we were always getting nit picked a lot. Then
where we were at, I don’t know if it was May, maybe June, there’s a destroyer came off
station or off the coast and they wanted a lot of the fire missions, so we would relay a lot
of them to the destroyer and let them work.

   LC: Okay, what kind of guns were they using, do you know?
   MM: I think they were using 5-inch; 5 inch would’ve been about, well, there’s no
Army equivalent to that because I think there’s about 25-millimeters in an inch, so 5-inch
would be like, what, 125-millimeter gun.

   LC: How did the information go back and forth between the destroyer and your
FDC?
   MM: We would relay it.
   LC: Was there any trouble around that?
   MM: No, we’d get a fire mission and the Navy had our frequency and they were
monitoring it and I can’t even remember what their call sign was and they said, “Hey, can
we have it?” We asked the FO and he said, “Sure, we just relay it.”
   LC: Was there any reason or rhyme of reason to their selection of certain ones
that they wanted to do? Do you know what was operating there?
   MM: No, I think they just wanted to help. They were on station and I can
remember, they were always eager for results. I know a lot of the FO’s and I fired them
in as an FO a few times. We’d give them like three chickens killed or something. We’d
pull their string a lot.
   LC: There at the LZ, was Charlie Poore still there?
   MM: Yes, he came in country with me and we left together.
   LC: Oh okay, so you guys were together the whole time?
   MM: Yes.
   LC: Do you remember making friends with other people there or was it the same
people you had been seeing all along?
MM: Basically the same guys seen all along because at this time, when we first went up north in January, February, we got a lot of new guys. I was with Judy at LZ Judy way back in Phan Thiet and all the new guys came to Bartlett. Then we got together and then after that, we were operating as a full battery and I would say there’s Charlie Poore and myself, Ray for a good part of that time, and there was another guy, Peterson. We were the only, everybody else is new, pretty much just came over. In fact, it was kind of remarkable because when we were there, I was in Vietnam longer than some of these guys that been in the Army. It was kind of interesting.

LC: Do you remember anyone rotating out and kind of how that felt when someone was leaving?

MM: Oh yes, all the time. In fact, when was that, one of my good friends, a guy by the name of Phiffer from New York State. Man, I was happy he rotated because I could remember telling him a long time ago when I passed my new guy introduction and got accepted by these guys, I said, “Man, when you go home, I’m going to be a real short timer.” I remember when he left.

LC: That kind of ticked something off in your head about…?

MM: Yes, and we had a Supply Sergeant in the back, in the rear and I think when you got six months in, he would send everybody a real gross short timer calendar.

LC: Can you describe it?

MM: I think it was like a six month calendar and he started to count at maybe 180 days and it was just a cheap rendition of some kind of pornographic pictures or something, but he’d send everybody a short timer calendar. (Laughing)

LC: Okay, sort of explicit stuff.

MM: Yes, very explicit. (Laughing)

LC: Did you have other feelings when people were leaving, like were you glad they were leaving or?

MM: Yes, I was glad that they were out of it, yes, that they were going home. I was kind of envious. I said, “Gee, I wish I was going” but I knew I had time to go.

LC: Was there a PX (Post Exchange) there on the LZ?
MM: No, this LZ was like, maybe as big, if you imagine a football field at best, okay, you just had the six guns there and you had bunkers and fighting positions on the perimeter. I think after a while, they strung some wire around there and that was it.

LC: So about how many guys were there?

MM: Well, there was the battery which had, oh gee, there was six guns, you figure each one had maybe five in the crew, four or five, I’m not sure what the…there were probably six of us in FDC, at the command structure, maybe four or five in that and then you had the ammo section with three or four people. From the artillery, maybe 45 or 50 people at most and then there was always a platoon. Well, most of the time there was a platoon or two of infantry there as well.

LC: How were you being supplied?

MM: By helicopter.

LC: Were they flying in pallets and slings or?

MM: Oh, they were bringing sling loads, they had these, I don’t know what the hell they called them, they were these round metal insulated like tubs with a, well, not really a tub, but they were like a cooler, but like a Coleman cooler, but rounder at the edges and had a insulated top and they’d bring the hot food out in that. If you could get supply, they’d bring hot food out usually once a day, sometimes more. If helicopters were being busy or something, something was happening, then we’d eat C-rations or whatever.

LC: Okay, which you had stocks, which the LZ had stocked up?

MM: Oh yes, they’d always have cases of that and SP-rations and that stuff.

LC: What about water?

MM: Well, we were by this creek, so we had some; well, it was kind of swampy around it and there a lot of snakes in there, but then I knew we were staying, I can’t remember when it was, but I remember a Chinook brought out a back hoe and some engineers and they spent an afternoon digging out the swamp and digging a nice swimming hole and that kind of stuff.

LC: Did you guys go over and use it?

MM: Oh yes. It was just outside the wire.
LC: Did somebody kind of have to stand guard while you were out there swimming?

MM: Well you took your weapons with you and somebody was and usually out during the day, nobody was going to fool with you.

LC: What about the snakes? Did you actually see any of them?

MM: Oh yes. In fact, I’ll never forget this, I was going out there and I saw a snake, it had bit a bird, had a bird in its mouth eating it from the backend.

LC: No kidding?

MM: Just about swallowing it, so I shot the snake and the bird flew away.

LC: The bird was alive?

MM: Yes. It must’ve just grabbed it.

LC: What made you think to shoot the snake? Did you just want to free the bird?

MM: Yes, free the bird and I didn’t like snakes.

LC: (Laughing)

MM: It kind of made me feel good. You know, here a little bird get to fly away and it was a big old Black snake. I don’t know what kind it was.

LC: That was great. Did you see lots of different types or was it primarily that?

MM: There was, like what you all call in Texas, these King snakes or Black snakes?

LC: Yes.

MM: They’re a lot like that. They’re a few Cobras, but once we got habitating there, they pretty much went away.

LC: Oh right, because of the activity.

MM: Yes, and they don’t like people. It’s like down in Phan Thiet, those nasty little guys, these Bamboo Vipers, they were terrible.

LC: Did you see those?

MM: Oh yes, they used to like to stay in moist, warm places. They looked like a piece of green bamboo and a lot of times, in habitations, they would if it was pretty wet, they would come in and stay in between sandbags and that and then you’d see them; they’d lay on leaves of bamboo things out in the bushes.

LC: Did you ever know of anybody to get bitten?
MM: No I didn’t, but I stepped on one once, just on his tail and he turned around. They weren’t any bigger than a big night crawler maybe with a little bigger head. Obviously, kind of like a triangular head and he turned around and start hitting the toe of my boot. He must’ve had a puddle of venom on there that was probably equal to about half of his body weight. I looked that and said, “Holy smokes! I don’t want to meet you anymore fellow.”

LC: And they were really small, huh?

MM: Yes, they weren’t very long. I’d say maybe the longest maybe a foot.

LC: Did you find yourself kind of looking around after a while?

MM: After a while I didn’t look around. I have ever since a kid; I had a pathological fear of snakes.

LC: Me too.

MM: In fact, I got kicked out of the Boy Scouts for killing the Scout Master’s pet Blue Racer.

LC: Oh boy.

MM: Because he made everybody stand in line and had to hold the snake.

LC: And you were not going to do that.

MM: I told him I’m afraid of snakes and come my turn, I dropped it and stepped on it.

LC: Oh did you really?

MM: Yes.

LC: Wow, well, I think that explains the bird incident then.

MM: Yes, so I got a Dishonorable Discharge from the Boy Scouts.

LC: That’s not good on your record Mike. (Laughing)

MM: I know.

LC: Let me ask you about communicating with home.

MM: Yes.

LC: Now, I think, did we briefly mention the issue of trying to get a phone call through?

MM: Oh yes, at MARs, I was, let’s see, I know I called home once, maybe twice, I’m not sure. I know I called home twice because I went on in country R&R and in Da
Nang, the MARs place was closed, but because of the big movement back up to Khe Sanh, I got stranded with this medic guy that I met on R&R. We got stranded in, I believe it was Phu Bai, which wasn’t too far from Camp Evans and Hue and that area. There was a big MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) compound there so we had to stay there while we’re waiting for transportation. We were there for a couple or three days and just been passing us, one guy said, “Hey, you guys tried to call home?” I said, “Yes, the place is closed in Da Nang.” He said, “Hell, we got a place here” so he took us over and so I called and made a MARs call there and then I think I called once from, I can’t remember where it was from…Da Nang, maybe even An Khe, I can’t remember because the R&R came down really fast because I wanted to go to Hawaii and had my wife come over and meet me. So it came through real fast so I wanted to make sure she got a copy of the orders that I mailed home so she could fly; the airlines made her a good deal, but yes, I think I made two calls.

LC: Now the first call were the guy that you invited to come in, did you actually go over to the MACV area?

MM: Yes, we were staying there while we’re waiting for transit and they had a little airport or something and they knew where we were at and they had a little compound so we just stayed there. They were nice.

LC: Yes, and you called your wife?

MM: Yes, on this MARs call, yes.

LC: What time was it in wherever she was?

MM: I have no idea, I think it was like 6:00 or 7:00 Vietnamese time, so Vietnam time, I have no idea what time it was.

LC: But she was there?

MM: Yes, thank god, yes, she was there.

LC: How did that go, how was it?

MM: It was kind of strange because the MARs call was a short way radio and what they would do is they’d try to raise a ham-operator in the states and then the ham-operator would then call collect to your number, so then he kind of puts his microphone by a speaker and then holds the handset there. (Laughing) You just kind of go back and forth. It was wonderful, I think it lasted maybe four or five minutes, but it was great.
LC: It was just good to hear her voice.

MM: Oh yes.

LC: I’m sure she felt the same way.

MM: Yes, it was great.

LC: And then you called her a little bit later to talk about setting up the R&R?

MM: Yes, because I don’t know if we got into this before. When Charlie Poore and I, he was married as well and when we first got to the unit, we had heard that Hawaiian R&Rs were very hard to get.

LC: Right.

MM: So we put in for it immediately. I think right when we got to the unit, we put in for it. I remember somebody saying, “Why the hell are you thinking about R&Rs? You just got here.” “Well, hey, I just want to get the name in the hopper.” Then we put in for it again, I can’t remember what the circumstances were. So, now, here, we haven’t heard anything and you were supposed to get it about 6 months into your tour.

LC: Right, that was the idea.

MM: Here it was in May I think, we get a new 1st Sergeant and he comes by. It may have been April; I’m not sure. Anyway, to make a long story short, this is when the 1st inquiry was when we were in the A Shau because Charlie was separated. He was up on that Signal Mountain and he had talked to the 1st Sergeant first and then the guy came by and this is where we said, “Hey, I want to go see the IG. I got a big problem.” He wanted to know what it was. We told them and he said the same thing as Poore and he said, “Well, I’ll tell you what. Give me a week or two to work on it.” He said, “If I can’t get the thing resolved, you’re free to see whoever you want to see.” So, we did and then he came back and said, I don’t know what time it was, he came back and said, “Hey, there’s no record of you guys putting in for it.” I said, “Oh hey, bologna.” Then I’m not sure if the Supply Sergeant, the guy in the rear or whatever was telling him that the previous 1st Sergeant was selling the allocations to other people. Whatever, and then it was, gosh, I want to say it was sometime in May, not toward the end of May because I know we only had three weeks. I think we were there Hawaii maybe the 2nd week of June and then maybe in the twenties in May. I’ll never forget this, that I was sleeping and Charlie Poore comes up to me and he wakes me up and I kind of gruffed because I
was really tired and all this and I said, “What the hell’s happening Charlie?” He said, “Hey, we’re going to Hawaii!” He said, “The orders just came through.” So, that was good and he gave me my orders and Charlie had my set as well as his and I mailed it out. I don’t know how long it took mail to get to the states. I presume probably a week or so. I was kind of concerned that, “Hey, I’m going to show up in Hawaii and I’ll be by myself.” I didn’t hear anything and I know my wife wrote me everyday, but I might not get anything for three weeks and then get a whole shoebox full of stuff. So, I called from someplace just to see if she got it and she said, “Yep,” and told me when she’d be there and all that kind of stuff, so that was good.

LC: Now how did you actually get on a plane and where did you leave from?

MM: Okay, we left the field, left Jean, took a chopper back to Camp Evans. I don’t know where we went from there. We either went to Da Nang, maybe Cam Ranh Bay or something; no, we didn’t go to Cam Rahn then. Anyway, we ended up in, then maybe we took a flight direct from Evans to An Khe or Camp Ratcliff or whatever was there, processed through, got our khakis out of storage and had them tailored because I had lost a lot of weight and all that stuff. I know we were probably there a day or two and then went from there to Cam Ranh Bay and then got on a big old 707 and if left from Cam Ranh Bay and I think it stopped in Guam to refuel and then straight on to Honolulu.

LC: How did you feel on that flight?

MM: Wonderful! Wonderful and kind of numb, you know. It was okay, here it was and I drank a lot in An Khe, you know, back at the base camp. I’ll never forget because they were getting hit, just probe some rocket rounds or something, I can’t remember what it was and all these guys were scrambling, getting in trenches and Charlie and I were sitting on top of a building drinking beer, watching the war. We were probably crazy. It felt good and then we stopped in Guam and then getting really nervous and then got into Honolulu. We took a bus over to Fort DeRussey, which is right on; I guess it was right on Waikiki Beach. I know it was right on the beach right by the hotels and that kind of stuff. If they wanted to balance the budget, all they have to do is sell that property and that’s where Madelaine had gotten there I think the day before and they put her up there. She met a gal coming over to meet her husband in L.A and they shared a room. I’ll never forget it; it was really kind of funny because she said she didn’t sleep. I
said, “Why?” “Well, we pulled back the covers and there was some bugs scattered
running around.” I said, “Well, you’re in the tropics. They won’t hurt you.” “Well, we
spent all night in the chair.” I’m not sure if she brought some civilian clothes or if I
bought some civilian clothes there and we spent a week.

LC: After that week, at some point you realized that you had to go back.
MM: Yes.
LC: And that was probably tough.
MM: It was extremely tough, yes. I got to add for future generations though that
the people in Hawaii were extremely gracious, extremely gracious. I kept wondering
because we’d be in a restaurant and an automatic discount added. They’d have the price
of the entrée and then maybe 40 percent off. I said, “How in the hell? What’s this?”
“Well, you’re a veteran. You’re from Vietnam aren’t you?” “How did you know?”
LC: How did they know?
MM: Just by the look of you I guess. We were kind of skinny and gaunt, that
kind of stuff. Everybody gave us discounts like the hotel discounted the room. I don’t
know 50, 60 percent for us.
LC: And did that sort of feel to you like a little bit of acknowledgement?
MM: Oh yes, I thought it was great. Nobody came over and said, “Thank you,”
and patted you on the back or anything, but you go to a tour company and we took a
couple of tours around and hey, okay, gave us a different price. It was really nice.
LC: How did Madelaine do with that visit?
MM: She was glad, she was happy to see me like I was happy to see her. Parting
wasn’t even sweet sorrow; it was torment.
LC: Where did you fly back into?
MM: I think we went the same way back. Honolulu to Guam to Cam Ranh Bay
and then went from Cam Ranh to An Khe, got our stuff and had some of my stuff stolen
there.
LC: Really?
MM: Yes, I’ll never forget these idiots, yes.
LC: What kind of stuff?
MM: Well, I had a cleaning rod attached to my rifle barrel because it was very hard to find and get, and that was gone. Because we were in the sand, we had some big goggles that you’d wear when you had to unload helicopters and stuff like that because it was kicking up all the sand, those were gone and a couple of other things were gone, I can’t remember what they were now.

LC: Did that really like tick you off?

MM: Yes. It just upset me. “I don’t know, it didn’t happen on my watch.” We didn’t leave our stuff, no, I don’t think at that time we didn’t even have a rear area there anymore because there was just a big area. I think everybody for the 3rd Brigade had their stuff in. I’ll never forget it, it was a big one story building that it’d just have like little bins with your name or your serial number or something on there. You supposedly put the stuff there. Then when I got back to the field, I was really paranoid. I didn’t want to do anything.

LC: Yes, I was going to ask you about that. Did having your R&R at 9 months in, did that really sort of accelerate your short timer?

MM: Yes and it took about three or four weeks to wear off. I wouldn’t go out in the field at all, I wouldn’t do anything. I’ll never forget, the 1st Sergeant came in, this guy Campbell I think his name was, he’d come in because I would just do my duty and then sit in a bunker. I just wouldn’t go outside and he wanted to know what’s happening and I told him, “Hey, I’ve got a life man.” He said, “Hey, I understand and I know you’ll do the right thing.” No pressure, no hassle and gradually worked out of it.

LC: Was that pretty common, for example, how did Charlie do when he came back?

MM: You know, quite frankly, I can’t remember.

LC: Really?

MM: I can’t remember how Charlie reacted. I know he was upset leaving. I can’t recollect; probably the same because, yes, we shared a bunker that we lived in. That was our position when we weren’t working or kind of on the perimeter where we lived and you were there if something happened and I’d stay in a little bunker or whatever. Yes, we stayed together there for a while.

LC: And you say it kind of wore off after you leave?
MM: Yes. It was kind of crazy that you’re over there for a while and
philosophically and, I guess, intellectually you know you have another life, but you don’t
really know what it is and then now you see the other life again and hey, it’s nice and
sweet and precious and I don’t want to give it up and I don’t want to lose it. I don’t want
to risk it and then it takes a while for reality to come back in and you get back into that,
what that reality is and I just thank God it was a relatively peaceful kind of thing because
some of the heavy traffic, I don’t know how I would’ve reacted. I’m sorry.

LC: When you started to kind of fall back into the routine of being there, did you
again kind of a split mind about it because the weeks are now ticking down towards your
departure number?

MM: Yes, you know you’re getting short; it’s kind of hard to explain, I don’t
really know how you would explain it. You have that reality and I think this is coming
back in the end of June or middle of June and saying, “Hey, I got to go, three more
months yet.” It wasn’t really a short timer as if it was August; you follow me?

LC: Right, sure.

MM: It still seemed like an abstract date.

LC: Do you remember when is started to get real?

MM: Oh yes. That was probably towards the end of August, mid August, end of
August.

LC: Was there a specific thing that happened or did you just kind of click one
time and think, “Oh gosh, I’ve only got however many weeks left or days”?

MM: There was a lot of talk. See, when your short, you counted your days; you
counted your days plus a wakeup. Your last day in the field was just a wakeup because
you weren’t there the whole time, so you’d have, “I got 90 days and a wakeup.” Then
there was talk for a lot of the units, they were letting guys, they were giving them a drop.

LC: Now what do you mean by that?

MM: Giving them, you don’t do a full year, “We’ll let you out two weeks early
or a week early or ten days early” or something like that.

LC: Why was that happening?

MM: Well, basically, you know, “Hey, you’re getting short, we don’t want you
to get killed” I guess, I don’t know. When you really got short, you were talking about
what kind of drop you’re going to get. I think that happened probably the end of July,
first part of August. I’m starting to count my days and I’m counting my days with a 5 to
10 day drop or something like that.

LC: So you were kind of planning on getting a little reprieve at the end?

MM: And just saying hopefully we don’t move, hopefully we don’t do anything
yet. Then at that point, it seemed like you didn’t have any problem getting out, going
back to like Evans or someplace to get your teeth fixed or getting a new I.D or you look
for any excuse to get out of the field.

LC: Right, and did you do stuff like that?

MM: Oh yes. I went to Evans for the dentist a couple of times I think.

LC: What was that like going to the dentist at the camp there?

MM: Well, first time I went, I could feel a hole in one of my back teeth with my
tongue and the guy said there’s nothing wrong with it, but he gave me 500 darvosets in
case it bothered me. He gave me a great big bottle of stuff and I went back about a week
later and the damn tooth still hurts so okay, I went back and a different dentist fixed it.

LC: What did you do with 500 darvosets?

MM: Gave them away.

LC: Did you?

MM: I didn’t want them. I think I gave them to the Medic.

LC: Oh you did?

MM: Oh, I wouldn’t of given them to the other guys.

LC: What did the Medic say; he probably was amazed?

MM: He said, “Oh, you saw the dentist.” (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing)

MM: He must’ve known.

LC: That’s interesting.

MM: I said, “Yes, you’re right.”

LC: What was the dental treatment like? I mean, was it standard? Was it what
you would’ve expected if you were back home?
MM: Oh no. That’s kind of a field area. I’m not sure if he was in a tent or in a bunker, but he had, I want to say, I’m not sure if it was a foot powered drill or what. It was real primitive.

LC: Mike, Mike? Okay Mike, you were telling me about the dentist and that he was kind of in a tent or something.

MM: Yes, and if you really needed something done, they’d send you further back, like to Phu Bai because I know Charlie Poore, they sent him to Phu Bai because he didn’t have many teeth at all and he had to get some false teeth made.

LC: Okay, so that was a more major operation?

MM: Yes, they’d send them out there. I think this was just maybe first echelon and I don’t know if they held graves, registration, verify people through dental records; I don’t know what they did, but they didn’t really do too much.

LC: Did you go away from the LZ for another kind of administrative sort of purpose at all in there?

MM: Yes, I went back to, I can’t remember, to get an I.D made or something; I can’t remember what it was. You look for any excuse, you just jump a helicopter and go back and maybe if you’re lucky, you can stay overnight at Camp Evans and then come back the next morning.

LC: Did you have any concerns about going back and forth on the helicopters that they were vulnerable in that instance?

MM: No, not really. That never entered my mind. I know the first time on our way back, I cut my finger in LZ Catfish in maybe October, September, October and they had to send me back and get some stitches and I was coming back. In fact, I think it was the first time I got shot at, the door gunner start shooting then the (indiscernible at this time, McGregor 4, Track 3.wav,1:32) was pointing to me, so looked out and when we landed he got off and he showed me a couple of holes in the tail boom and I said, “Wow. I didn’t even hear anything.” (Laughing)

LC: Really?

MM: Yes, I had every confidence in the helicopters and that kind of thing. I never felt they were going to go down.
LC: Well, as your time to depart grew very close, can you tell me what kinds of things you were thinking or were you still actively involved in the FDC?

MM: Oh yes, still doing that. In fact, around, jeez, I’m going to say probably July; things start heating up down there on the beach.

LC: Oh is that right, how so?

MM: A lot of fire missions, we did a lot of patrolling and again, just a little getting sniped at and stuff, but there were lots of sightings of a lot of units, a lot of NVA units with heavy weapons and that kind of stuff in and around the area. It’d just start picking up and in fact, I’m not sure, somebody told me it was on Ho Chi Min’s Birthday, but I’m not sure. I don’t know when his birthday is, but Camp Evans got hit pretty hard and they hit the ammo dump. Where we were at, I wouldn’t of given you a dollar that anybody was still alive on the whole place because I mean the whole western horizon was just explosion after explosion and all this ammunition cooking off and everything. I can’t remember, they told us something about you know, if you extend your arm with your palm up and then if things are on the outside of it, it tells you how many klicks away it is and how wide the thing is. We could do it with two hands and the stuff was going on the edges of it. It was sometimes during the summer. We had a spectacular firework show and as I remember it, I think I went in there a day or two after that and nothing. (Laughing) It just looked like it always did.

LC: Did that attack sort of rattle you at all? Thinking maybe things were going to heat up again?

MM: Not really. As they said, we were getting a lot of crazy stuff. We’re getting nibbled at a little bit here and there and it wasn’t any big deal. We were obviously doing a lot more patrolling around and we had a lot of ambushes out and stuff like that and it was so open that I figured we probably wouldn’t get a massive kind of thing because there probably wasn’t that much cover and there were a lot of elements out there. There was a lot of CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) things out there you know, with their advisors and the 5th MAC came over and they were operating north of us in an area out there. There was just a lot of troops out that way. I didn’t really do that and at that point, there’s a lot of distractions because we had a guy go AWOL (Absent
Without Official Leave) out there and then we had another guy who was AWOL that they
picked up at Camp Evans and they brought him back in; just a lot of crazy stuff.

LC: What were the circumstances around those AWOLs, do you remember?

MM: Well, one fellow was a black guy. He was in one of the gun sections. He
went out on R&R in May and never just came back and never came back to the field. I
know I saw him a couple of times in An Khe going out and coming in from R&R and he
was apparently living, I don’t know if he was living on the base or in the town with some
Vietnamese girl or something and he felt he got the shaft in terms of he should’ve gotten
a promotion or something. He said the Army’s screwing with him so he’s just not going
to fool with the Army anymore. What was his name, I can’t remember his name; Turner
maybe, I don’t know. I don’t know the circumstances of it and he apparently got picked
up and then they brought him back. I don’t know what the circumstance was and then
they had a court marshal for him. He stayed in our unit out at Jean or whatever that was
and they had a court marshal. I know he asked me if I’d be a witness for him and I said,
“Sure, if you want me to.” They never called me; apparently the only or the deal was that
he can only have one or I don’t know what the story was, but he had this other guy go for
him.

LC: Where was that Court Marshall upheld?

MM: I think it was at Camp Evans. I never saw the guy again.

LC: Do you know what happened?

MM: No, I have no idea.

LC: Okay.

MM: I’m sure he got some jail time out of it, but I don’t really know what
happened.

LC: But that was quite unusual?

MM: Yes, and then we had another guy, went on R&R, but this guy was kind of
crazy. What was it, before I joined the unit, he was in an FO party and he apparently shot
himself in the foot or someplace, some kind of self-inflicted wound. I thought it was the
foot. He was out a long time and then, I don’t know when this happened, if this
happened in July or August before I got there in September or whatever and then he came
out; he must’ve been in the hospital six, seven months and they brought him back. I
think there, if you were going to be hospitalized, if it looked like longer than a month,
they would evacuate you out either to Japan or the states, but with I guess apparently self
inflicted they wouldn’t. They’d keep them in country and apparently hospital time didn’t
count for your tour.

LC: I’m sure.

MM: So, then they brought him back and then he took off. Just one night, I
remember the guys on the perimeter opened up because they saw something moving out
there and apparently it was this guy, he just took off. Then he showed up at an ARVN
base about 20 klicks away and he said he had been captured by the VC or NVA and he
escaped and apparently he used his own identity so then he’s back out to our place. Then
they sent him back someplace; I think they sent him to Da Nang. They were going to put
him in a jail in Da Nang or something and then the scuttlebutt was that he took off from
there, broke out, and I have no idea what happened.

LC: What was the reaction of guys in the battery to these events?

MM: You got to be nuts to go over the hill in Vietnam, you got to be crazy.

LC: Did the guys like shun him when he was brought back or do you remember?

MM: You know, I can’t remember too much. I don’t think so, but the guy was a
real prick. He’d go out of his way to alienate people, but I don’t think people cared too
much one way or another.

LC: I was just thinking it was quite a small group and you guys had been together
a long time.

MM: Well see, most of the guys didn’t know him because he was out in an FO
party. He wasn’t living there day in and day out, but I don’t know. I think a lot of guys
felt sorry for him. I mean everybody was afraid and different people handle it differently.

LC: Right. I’m sure you do remember your wake up day; can you describe that
day?

MM: Oh, we had a, I think either a typhoon came through either the day before
or the day after and it started raining. I never saw it rain sideways in my life until I saw it
there; it rained like hell. Just hey, I packed up and I had some because when we were in
the sand there, it was very humid and very, very hot. It would be like 120 during the day
and then the sun would burn you coming down and then bouncing off the quartz and
reflecting off the quartz in the sand baking you coming back up. And at night, it would
get down to, oh god, maybe 65 or 70 and you were just, I’ve never been so cold in all my
life. I say that looking out at 10-degree weather.

LC: And snow. (Laughing)

MM: You’d have a 50-degree change literally and it was terrible, so I had a
pretty heavy sweater that I had somebody send me. I said, “Hey, this is really crazy;
sending a guy a sweater in Vietnam.” I don’t know if they had my brother send it to me
or whatever. I remember giving the sweater to a guy and giving my watch to a guy who
didn’t have one. I gave the battery cigarette lighter to another guy that was a good troop
that we had kind of a tradition on this thing. I have no idea when it started, but a guy by
the name of Pete started it. It must’ve been when the division first got there, so lighter
said on one hand on one side, Pete Saigon, and on the other side, what they told me in
Latin and excuse the language, it was, “I came, I saw, I fucked.”

LC: Okay.

MM: That was engraved on the other side, so that was kind of the artifact, so I
gave that to a kid from Ohio who’s a good troop.

LC: Who had given it to you?

MM: A guy by the name of… I think it was given to me by, that’s a good
question, by Sergeant Shankle. He came down with Typhoid or Typhus or something
and they medevaced him out and he gave that to me.

LC: And about when was that, do you remember or where?

MM: Probably, I think we were still south. I think we were still around the Phan
Thiet area because the story goes on because Shankle joined us again later. He got cured,
got out of the hospital, re-upped and volunteered for the unit again in Vietnam. He was
one hell of a soldier. He said, “You still got the lighter?” I said, “Yes.” I said, “Here,
you want it back?” He says, “No, no, no, you can only have it once.” So, I gave it to this
kid from Ohio. I have no idea who Pete was or what the symbolism of that was or if
Shankle was just pulling my leg, I don’t know.

LC: What did the young man from Ohio think when you gave it to him, do you
remember?

MM: He thought that was cool.
Did he?

Yes, he thought that was cool. He said, “You mean I get to go to Saigon?”

I said, “Yes, sure, play your cards right, you’ll get there.”

Did you sort of told him the story?

Yes and then Shankle told it to him too. I kind of consulted with him on

my choice. He said, “Yes, good choice.”

Okay. So, you got on a helicopter?

So I gave this stuff away and I took a Huey, the log bird came in, in the

morning and Charlie Poore and I jumped on it and we went back to Camp Evans and then

we got on a plane and flew to, I think we went direct to An Khe, I’m not sure, I think so

though. We out-processed at An Khe; it was two or three days and threw away most of

our stuff that we had in storage. We got our stuff and went to Cam Ranh Bay and I think

we were in Cam Ranh Bay about, I don’t even think we were there overnight, I’m not

sure. We got an airplane and I can’t remember where we stopped, but we ended up at

Fort Louis, Washington.

Can you…go ahead.

I’m sorry, we got there about 10:00 in the morning and I was out of the

army by 10:30 that night.

Can you tell me about that flight? Was it a commercial flight?

Yes, it was commercial. All those, even like the R&R flights were; I think

they were all Pan Am; I’m not sure.

What was the mood like, do you remember?

Happy, but nobody was cheering. You know, when they had wheels up, it

was almost a big collective sigh of relief. “The Golden Gate in ’68 to Bread line in ’69,”

that’s what a few of the guys were saying. (Laughing)

Were you at that point thinking about the guys you had left there at the LZ?

Nope, I was just glad to be out of there. I was so glad to be out of there and

just relieved, just slept a lot on the airplane.

And Charlie was right there with you?

Yes. I don’t think we sat together. I was sitting next to a guy, I don’t know

if he was Special Forces guy or what, but he gave me a Montagnard cross bow. I said,

LC: Have you kept it?

MM: Yes, I had it for a while. I had it for four or five years or maybe longer than that, but it got discarded in a succession of moves.

LC: When you touched down in the states and you knew you were actually in the states, can you describe that for us?

MM: Well, just happy, just glad. As I said, we landed in Fort Louis, Washington. It was a gray day, no rain though, but very overcast. They trooped us to an old barracks and we had to wait there for a little while. Then we got trooped, and we all out-processed. We got measured for our new uniforms, went through a re-enlistment lecture, which, I admired the guy who was doing it; that’s here, here; had an out-processing physical. I’ll never forget the audio-metric one. “You know, hey, I can waste a half an hour doing this test for you, but you can just sign this thing, say your hearing’s okay.” “Okay, I can hear you.”

LC: Is that how it went?

MM: Pretty much so and had some medical kinds of processing and then we got our new, I think they were summer greens; we got the new summer greens, put them on. Then we got our coming home steak dinner. Everybody gets a coming home steak dinner, so we ate steak and I don’t know if they were pulling our leg or not, saying, “Oh, you guys got to stay here a day because the office closes at 5 and we ain’t got all the paperwork done.” We say, “Hey, bullshit, we’re leaving.” So, I remember I signed out of the Army at I think it was 10:25 P.M, got paid. Back then; the Army paid you in cash. I got some cash, but they did give me a check because I had a lot of money on the books I guess. I never could figure out why or what the reason was because I thought I had most of it going home to Madelaine, but I think they let me out with, I think I had about 2000 bucks which was a lot of money then.

LC: Yes.

MM: Then I’ll never forget that there was a couple of other guys, they were going through Chicago to get home and I had to go through Chicago too and jumped in a
cab and there was a, I’m not sure if it was a United flight or I don’t know what it was, but there was a flight at like midnight or something and we were pretty far from the airport, but the three of us jumped in a cab and said, “Hey, there was a 20 a piece if you can get us to this airport in time to catch this flight.” So, off he goes and he had radioed his dispatcher and they called and this is back in the old days before terrorist stuff and security and told him, “Hey, we got three soldiers coming back from Vietnam and want to go home. So, ya’ll wait.” So, I remember we walked in together and the gal at the main ticket counter said, “Any bags to check?” “Nope” and just motioned us on, told us what gate, we went in, and they had just finished boarding and the gal said, “Oh yes, you guys are flying stand-by” you know, military stand-by which is 50% off and we had to pay and says, “Well, unfortunately there’s no coach seats available.” “Oh jeez, we got to pay full fair?” “No, no, you can fly. We’re putting you guys in first class.” “Okay.” So, that was nice. So, I’ll never forget and we were the only three in first class. The stewardess just came by and just parked the little drink cart and said, “Just tell me when you want some more.” (Laughing) We had a nice party going back. It was great. Got to O’Hare, I don’t know what time it was, but I had like a three or four hour wait, caught a plane. Well, in the mean time at Fort Louis, I called home and told them I’d be coming home in a day or two and then from Chicago, I called and woke everybody up, told them what time I’d be home and then I think we landed at, oh gosh, it was probably 9:30, 10:00 in the morning in South Bend, maybe a little earlier.

LC: What was it like to get to South Bend?

MM: Great, I got off the plane and this is where you had to…they didn’t have jet ways, just walk down the thing and there’s Madelaine and Mike, little Mickey waiting for me, and my mom, and my aunt, and my brother. It was just great. I think they were a little shocked by how I looked because I had lost probably about 55 or 60 pounds from when like my mother last saw me.

LC: Wow.

MM: I was kind of a lightweight then. I think I probably weighed about 165 pounds when I got off the airplane. I think I went over about 220 so…I lost about a bunch of weight.

LC: And how was your mom?
MM: Oh, just happier than a clam at high tide, just happy.
LC: Yes, I bet she was. What was it like to finally have time to spend with your son?
MM: Well, he looked at me. I had a big old Ho Chi Minh mustache and he looked at me and he screamed; he just screamed. He wouldn’t even let me touch him.
So, the first thing I did, I went home and shaved. Went home, got out of my uniform, put it on a hanger, put it in the closet and shaved. Well, he was momma’s boy there for a whole year, so it didn’t take too long, but kind of fully integrated back into his life and that was great. I watched him the first year of his life through pictures and it was kind of neat.
LC: Mike, can you talk about your sort of transition back to being in Indiana?
MM: Well, I could’ve gone back to the job I had, but I didn’t want to do that, I didn’t really like it.
LC: Which job was that again?
MM: Well, I worked at Bendix in that production control thing and had military return rights for what, 90 days I think it was and I didn’t particularly like doing that so I thought I’d look for something else. A friend of my mother’s or a friend of my aunt’s told me about some…said, “Well, why don’t you come to work for the phone company?”
So I said, “Oh okay.” So, they had an interview scheduled for me that I didn’t even know about when I got home like three or four days later down in Indianapolis, but I wanted to take some time off anyway, so we drove down there, did the interview and I didn’t like the operations, so I’m not going to waste your time, don’t waste my time. Then we took a vacation, and we went up to a good friend of mine who had supplied me with different stuff when I was in Vietnam who lived up in Rochester, New York, so we went up, spent a couple of days with him and his wife. Then went into Canada. We were on probably vacation for a couple of weeks and came back and looked for a job, found a job, and went to work.
LC: Where’d you find a job?
MM: Well, I got a job; it’s kind of funny. There in Niles, Michigan, there’s a big Simplicity Pattern, the people that made patterns for home sewing at a huge plant up there and they were in a big growth phase and somebody told me, “Hey, that place is
growing leaps and bounds, they may have something going for you.” So, I filled out an application, went up there and applied and the guy, the personnel manager called at the time comes in, looks at the application, “I’d like to talk you.” So, we go in and he talked to me, asked me what I’ve been doing and that kind of stuff and told him and he was a World War II guy and he said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, I can tell you normally carry a little more weight than you do now.” I said, “Yes, probably about 35, 40 more pounds.” He said, “You’re a pretty big guy back from the war, I got just the job for you.” They had six unions in the plant and he said, “I want you to handle discipline for the plant.” I said, “Okay.” I had no idea what it was, but it sounded like fun. So, I went to work there and then working in personnel or human resources ever since.

LC: And so you moved the family up to Niles?

MM: Yes, well, Niles is just right across the border from South Bend.

LC: Right.

MM: But we bought a house in Niles and then we lived in Niles for a bit. I think I was there, what, 6 years, 7 years.

LC: So you got that job in, would’ve been early ’69?

MM: No, this was probably late ’68. This is maybe mid to late October ’68.

When I just got home.

LC: Oh okay. That was also the beginning of the academic year on college campuses, including Notre Dame and other schools that are nearby there. Were you aware or paying any attention to the degree of protest against Vietnam?

MM: None whatsoever.

LC: Okay.

MM: None whatsoever. I didn’t watch the news for the war, you know the war stuff. The only time I perked up when, oh jeez, I kind of stayed in touch, and well, I knew the Cav moved south. The whole division redeployed south. I have no idea; I can’t remember how I knew that. Maybe somebody sent me a letter, I don’t know. There was a guy in the unit who was from South Bend. In fact, quite frankly, he lived about two or three blocks; that’s probably where I found out from, from his mother because he lived about two or three blocks from where my mom lived. So, I went over and saw his mom, told her he’s okay and this and that; and there was another guy, he was from Peru,
Indiana which is about 90 miles south and on my way to Indianapolis, stopped by over there and told them, visited the folks and said, I can’t remember the guys name today, but said he was doing okay and he sends his regards and he’ll be home soon. I think this woman that lived by my mother told my mother that the Cav moved south, but I’m not sure, but I know they went between the Cambodian border and Saigon over there. Hey, that was then, this is now, I’m not interested in it.

LC: How long did that feeling last for you Mike; that feeling of, “I’ve already done it and I don’t want to know”?


LC: Really?

MM: About 20 years, yes.

LC: Did you pay any attention, for example in 1975 when South Vietnam fell?

MM: I just shook my head and turned the T.V off. I didn’t want to know about it, they were done with it, that’s fine. I did my time, whatever they wanted to do; that’s what they do, I’m not interested.

LC: What happened in the late 80’s to make you kind of start to think about it?

MM: Well, I wouldn’t even say I was in the service. If you asked me if I was in the Army, “Yes, I was in the Army a while back” and that was it. I wasn’t ashamed of it, but that was a different life and now I’m living in the present, I’m not living in the past.

LC: Okay.

MM: And sat on that stuff, I fought for a long time and then I started having some, well, let’s put it this way, I’d start becoming… I’d have a few dreams every now and then and nothing that I thought was very significant and I find out a lot later that they were. But I don’t remember a lot of the stuff, but later my wife said, “Yes, I put up for years for the yelling and screaming at night, the sweating and all that kind of stuff.”

“Huh? What’re you talking about? Are you talking about me?” Yes, but I wasn’t conscience of a lot of the stuff.

LC: And she never really told you about that?

MM: No, never did. I think probably on advice of her relatives who she had a lot of aunts that were married to World War II guys and I’m sure they talked about it and
said don’t worry about it or whatever. I don’t know, she just made that statement, but then about it, I’m going to say…

LC: Okay Mike, go ahead.


LC: Okay.

MM: 1987, 1988, I’m working in downtown Grand Rapids and at that point they had, oh like what, a lot of cities that they blocked off two or three blocks of a main street downtown and it became a pedestrian mall and warm weather, there’d be a lot of food vendors and that stuff. So, I’d walk down there for lunch in the nice weather and one day I’m walking there and I hear a Huey someplace in the distant. Like I say, if you heard a Huey, you’ll never forget the sound, the distinctive “Thump, thump, thump, thump” and I said, “Gee, I better grab a smoke before we saddle up” and I was in a store, had bought a pack of cigarettes and had it half smoked before I said, “What in the hell am I doing?”

LC: Wow.

MM: Then I start becoming conscience of some very recurring dreams and then some thoughts coming back and this kind of thing. Quite frankly, I thought I was going crazy. Like I’d be driving down the road and I automatically stop and just start looking around. I didn’t know what it was; and around, I’m going to say ’88 or ’89, I told my wife, I said, “I think I’m going really nuts. You probably don’t want to hear any war stories.” She said, “I know you’ve been having these dreams a long time, but you probably haven’t been aware of it” and then she told me the stuff; “Oh god.” So, it just so happened that the local paper, the Grand Rapids press did an article about these store front Vietnam Vet VA walk-in centers or something, these counseling centers. So, I think that was in the women’s section of the Sunday paper which I normally don’t read, but my wife pulled it out and said, “Hey, you might want to read this, might be interesting.” So, I screwed my courage to the sticking point and dropped in and just said, “Hey, I don’t know what’s happening, but I’d like to talk somebody to ratify that I am nuts or that I’m not.”

LC: Right.
MM: Then I got a counselor, a fellow by the name of, I can’t remember what his last name was, but his first name was Mike. And he lost one leg below the knee and part of his right leg and I think part of his left foot and he was in the 25th Infantry Division. He was a MSW (Master of Social Work) who after I guess some rough times decided to go to school and help Veterans; and he walked me through the thing. Basically it was a situation of what he said, repressed feelings that you can only push on them so long and they’re going to come out one way or another either in a positive manifestation or a negative one; and helped me realize that and deal with and gave me some strategies to deal with these dreams and to come to terms and say, “Hey, I know serving, that was then this is now, but you have to acknowledge the then, don’t run away from it.” “Okay, I won’t.”

LC: How long did you go and talk with him over a period of?

MM: I probably went just as an outpatient and I don’t know, maybe 7, 8, 9 sessions, something like that. It wasn’t very long. Then he left, he went to open up a center I think in Ohio someplace. Then I was put with this other guy who then had kind of a group going that I went once or twice to that and said, “I don’t know what Vietnam these guys were in, but they weren’t in my Vietnam.”

LC: How was it different?

MM: Well, a lot of stuff they were saying in-group, jeez, the guys should have the Congressional Medal of Honor five times and just unbelievable kinds of things, like single handedly holding off battalion of NVA. I don’t know who they thought they were kidding and other people that just blaming everything under life under service in Vietnam. You know, “I can’t hold a job because I was in Vietnam.” “Well, hey, bullshit, because have you ever held a job?” “But I used drugs because I was in Vietnam!” I said, “Did you do use drugs before you went to ‘Nam?” “Oh hell yes.” You know, “Huh?” Give me a break, you know, give me a break! I didn’t really have any common kind of interest with most of those guys. I just quit going.

LC: And when you hear similar things even now, do you have pretty much the same response when you hear things about Veterans claiming or people claiming on their behalf that their somewhat disabled by having been in Vietnam? Does that still kind of strike as you common?
MM: Well, I don’t think that was the defining thing in their life. I think if they were sociopaths now, they probably were before they went in or whatever because everybody I knew and I’ll be it, I was just there a year and just had a small cross section of exposure, but I was damn proud of my unit, that the guys I served with, what we did, and I think we were all honorable people and did the honorable thing. Everybody that I know that was over there that they have the bonafides for that is the same way. I’m not sure if it’s a disconnect or whatever. You know, like people say, a lot of people did drugs there. Yes, a few guys did grass. How many people were smoking marijuana on college campuses in ’68? You know, give me a break! I think a lot of these guys, I don’t know if they were over there, I don’t know what they did even if they were over there or whatever, but it’s almost like they took Hollywood’s stereotypical portrayal of the Vietnam Vet and said, “Hey, that has to be me.”

LC: Right.

MM: I’m sorry, go ahead.

LC: Through this whole time period from the time you got back in late ’68 until this kind of see change in your own feelings about what had happened to you in the late 1980’s, did you just not talk about the experience with anybody?

MM: Yes, not really. Well, with my brother, talked about it a little bit, some of the stuff because he was a peacetime Marine, but he was a grunt. He knew what the life was. My father-in-law was a heavy combat Veteran of Europe in the Second World War and we talked a little bit; usually when we’re in half in the bag and we’re drinking at a family reunion or something. Other than that, I didn’t really talk about it; didn’t really want to, care to. As I said, that was then, this is now and I’ll get on with the rest of my life. I got a family to raise and support, let’s do it.

LC: And once you started kind of dealing with it on your own level, did you give thought to, for example, why the United States had been there and whether it was a good idea?

MM: Not at all.

LC: Okay.

MM: Not at all because and I knew you were going to ask this question.

LC: Okay. (Laughing)
MM: (Laughing) But you got to remember, I was a little older, I was in school. I can remember once a week in elementary school, we had to hide under our desks and…

(Technical Difficulties: portion of the interview unable to hear)…that was the option.

LC: Right and do you still feel that way today?
MM: Yes and quite frankly, I’m sorry we didn’t do what we had to do to win.
LC: And what have that had been do you think?
MM: I shouldn’t say maybe win, but to change the landscape a lot. I think now that I acknowledge I was over there and study it a little bit, I think if LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson) very early on would’ve done what Nixon and Kissinger did, you know, to restart the peace talks and get them serious, basically carpet bomb Hanoi, tell them that we’re serious about this thing, I think that would’ve totally changed the whole complexion. I don’t think it would’ve solved the whole problem because I always say, to solve the problem we needed to take over the entire government and do like we did with Germany after the Second World War, but obviously we couldn’t do that to I guess, an independent nation that was our ally. We tried to think of them in our terms and they weren’t us, they didn’t have those traditions and that, but I think if we gotten tough with North Vietnam way up front that they would’ve sat back and they would’ve said, “Okay, we’ll wait 30 years to do what we got to do”, you follow me?

LC: Yes.
MM: “And we won’t do it right away. We’ll know that the price is totally unacceptable to us.”

LC: And you think that kind of thing if it had occurred in the early Johnson administration might have produced a better outcome?

MM: Oh, I think it would have, yes. I think it would have because I didn’t think the price was just totally unacceptable to what those guys are doing. They could’ve done it relatively inexpensively because hindsight tells you that their defense system wasn’t anything until later, until the late’ 60’s and early 70’s.

LC: Right, and do you have any opinion on the Kennedy administration after the poll of his question?
MM: Well, I’m not sure. Kennedy starts sending the advisors over there; it’s hard to say if he could recognize it as his quagmire or whatever. I understand that McNamara even asked him apparently in a memo for what the request in an exit strategy, but that’s what I understand. I only say that because yesterday I heard the guy that’s produced or directed, what, that new film, *Fog of War* or something.

LC: Okay.

MM: I heard him on the NPR; they were interviewing him. Apparently it’s about this whole thing, but I don’t know, I don’t really think about it, but then you got to remember, Kennedy, “Pay any price, bear any burden.” He was speaking to our generation coming out of the thing. The Russians, they built the wall in Berlin; we got to stand toe to toe with them, we can’t tell them, show them we’re weak. I’m not sure any of those things came into the GEO political equation, but it was the tenure of the times. Could that happen today? Hey, it’s happening in Iraq. Right or wrong, I think we knew what the enemy was as a generation, but again, as I say, I graduated from college in ’65, I was what, 22 years old. I was a little older than kids that came up after that and that kind of thing.

LC: It sounds as if you might’ve done some reading about the war and can you mention any books that you think that are useful?

MM: Just a little. Well, I went back and read a lot of Bernard Fall’s stuff to just see, “Hey, how did we get here in the first place?” Oh, what did I read, da da da da da da, I read a book, I can’t remember, the guy’s name starts with a K I think; Kramer? I don’t know, it was something like History of the Vietnam War or something like that. I read parts of it; I didn’t read it all.

LC: Would that be Stanley Karnow?

MM: Yes, that’s probably it, yes.

LC: The *Ten Thousand Day War*?

MM: Yes, *Ten Thousand Day War*, that was it. I think that was pretty much it.

LC: Have you seen movies that depict the conflicts?

MM: Well, this Mike and I, put this counseling in time, it was when *Platoon*

came out.

LC: Yes, the movie, *Platoon*. 

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MM: And he took me to that. He said, “Here, you got to go see that.”

LC: Really? Did you see it together?

MM: Yes, and we walked out about 2/3 of the way through.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes.

LC: Tell me about that, why? What did you guys talk about afterwards?

MM: Just, “What Army was this guy in?” (Laughing) You know, a fellow, Stone, I think is an IU grad, I’m not sure.

LC: I think you can think you’re correct.

MM: He apparently is supposedly over there in the 25th Infantry Division and Mike was a grunt in the 25th. He said, “Hey, what war was this guy in?” We didn’t do that in villages, we didn’t smoke. (Laughing) He couldn’t relate to it and since then, I saw it again and I say, “Okay, hey, it’s not” and the one thing we did feel was that the battle scenes were too quiet.

LC: Really?

MM: They weren’t loud enough. I think we walked out right after he shot that woman and when they tore up that village and that.

LC: Right.

MM: We left after that, said, “Hey, forget it.” Then later, I saw it and a kind of interesting character study between good and evil. I don’t know if that was our yin and yang or whatever. It was unreal. I saw that on T.V, I saw Apocalypse Now, which was kind of interesting.

LC: How did you react to that one?

MM: Well, obviously that was Conrad’s, Heart of Darkness set in Vietnam instead of the Congo or wherever the hell he wrote this story about whenever he wrote it. Other than bringing the surfers in, I like that air assault in that village. It was far fetched, but there you knew it was, “Hey, it ain’t real” you know. The last one I saw was We Were Soldiers.

LC: What did you think of that one?

MM: Pretty good. I liked it; I think it depicted a lot of the reality of combat.

LC: The battle scenes were…
MM: From what little I know of and the integrity of the troops. You didn’t see anybody smoking dope there.

LC: Oh that’s right.

MM: That was the Cav; that was at least up to the time I was there. I’ve talked to guys that were in the Ia Drang and they saw the movie and said, “Hey, it’s about 70 percent right.”

LC: Did you tell me that you knew some people that film was depicting the one-7th, but did you know…?

MM: Well, that was the 1st of the 7th and there was also, I think one or two companies of the 2nd of 7th that was over there as well and then I think there was one of the 1st of the company of the 1st of the 5th that was over there.

LC: What about the battle scenes in that film, *We Were Soldiers Once…*?

MM: It looked pretty realistic. I never encountered anything that massive, you follow me? Was it real? No. Was it close to being real? Yes.

LC: For example, the calling in of fire, do you remember that scene?

MM: Yes.

LC: Did that look pretty much right to you?

MM: Well, the only thing is that they would’ve been doing a lot more of it.

LC: Okay.

MM: There was, I’m sure, constant artillery around that place the whole time and it was because Colonel Moore came by and I think A-battery, 1st of the 21st was out there and B-Battery and I’m not sure where they were. LZ Falcon and they were around there and as I understand it, these guys, they were shooting 6, 7000 rounds a day out there. By each battery, it was just incredible, but you can’t do that in a film, so you can understand it. You know, it started off well, you saw the LZ prep with artillery as they’re going in for the air assault and that.

LC: Do you know Hal Moore or know of him in his career path after the Ia Drang confrontation?

MM: No, just from what I know from the back of the book and stuff like that. A few stories I read about him, articles after the movie came out. There were a few articles
about him. I’d like to meet him. He goes to the 7th Cav reunion every year in
Washington. It’s on my list of things to do is go out there and meet him if I can.

LC: How many associations do you feel a kind of kinship to? How many
Veterans Associations are you sort of involved with?

MM: Well, I joined the VFW because a good friend of mine talked me into it and
I joined the American Legion because another good friend of mine talked me into it here
in town and then I belonged to the 1st Cav association and that’s it.

LC: Okay, and when did your affiliations with like the VFW (Veterans of
Foreign Wars) begin? Was that in the late 80’s?

MM: ’93, ’94 of May.

LC: How did you feel about kind of being back with Veterans again after having
kind of shut off that whole experience?

MM: Oh, kind of nice. I mean, nice guys and cheap beer.

LC: Cheap beer.

MM: I probably go to one meeting every two years or something, but I help them
out when I can. We have a Vet home here in town and they do bingo there once or twice
a year. I go help them out with that and their kids Christmas party and that kind of stuff.

LC: Mike, have you gone to the Wall in Washington?

MM: Yes I did. I used to avoid it and I can’t remember when the first time I was
there, but I’ve been there probably three or four times.

LC: What is that like for you, going there?

MM: Tough.

LC: Yes.

MM: Yes, tough. The last time I was there was two of us, a Vietnam Vet and
another guy who was a Vet, but he wasn’t in Vietnam and another guy, actually there was
four of us, but wasn’t in the service at all. We had like a boys night out weekend and we
did a road trip to Washington and went to the Wall and I was sitting out there by John
Atkins’ name and I was crying and I felt a hand on my shoulder and a very female British
accent said, “God bless you” and walked away. I’ll never forget that.

LC: Really?

MM: Yes.
LC: Wow.

MM: So, all the Brits understand I guess. It’s tough. You go there and you see the lives unlived and maybe I can relate to it more because my father was killed in the war and I know what it’s like to be a war orphan if you will. Have you ever seen that, it’s a Russian movie; it’s called *The Ballad of the Soldier*?

LC: I don’t think so, no.

MM: Incredible movie. It’s about this young kid, I don’t even know what battle it’s in, but he has anti-tank rifle and there’s this big German thing and he shoots, disables three or four tanks. I mean, the battle scene is just maybe two minutes and as a reward, they would give him a medal or they’d give them a week of leave so he can go home. So, he takes the leave and the movie is basically his story getting home. He gets home and embraces mother and he has to leave right away because it took him like 3 ½ days to get home and now he has to go back 3 ½ days and then it shows him, I don’t know if he’s walking or riding in a truck into the sunset if you will and I don’t know what his name is, let’s just say his name is Ivan Ivanavitch but I have no idea what the character’s name was. As it pans the Russian steppe and all this stuff, and it says, “Ivan Avanavitch could’ve been a great doctor, a great architect, or a great artist, or a great musician.” You know, like what he could’ve been and then the film just ended. It didn’t tell you he got killed, but that’s the kind of feeling I have to go there and just say...this is the flower of our society and these guys, what could they have been? The children they could’ve fathered, the cure for cancer, whatever, the loss just makes me so sad. Then you think, obviously, the pain of the families and the loved ones and all that. It’s just tough.

LC: And when you are not at the Wall, but thinking still about those issues…

MM: I think about it everyday. I think about John Atkins every damn day of my life; even when I wasn’t thinking about it.

LC: Yes, I think understand.

MM: Even before that.

LC: Yes, I understand. Do you think of the men you knew and all those men that you didn’t know who also died in terms of waste or do you think of it as a noble effort or do you kind of go back and forth?
MM: Not a waste; not a noble effort, maybe just a loss of contribution. They did
what they did, they did what they had to do, they did what hopefully they thought was
right or this sounds corny, duty, honor, country. And did they want to be there? No, for
the most part. Did they try to avoid it? Probably, but when called, they went and they
served well.

LC: Do you think the US government has taken care of those of you who came
back as Veterans?

MM: I don’t know. When I came out, I got a form from the VA or maybe it was
even when we were processing out that we could file a dental claim. We had a year that
they could send us to a dentist and get all our teeth fixed up and upgraded and all that
stuff, so I did that. I applied to get the paperwork for a VA mortgage, which I got this
certificate of eligibility, but never did get a VA mortgage. At that time, I couldn’t get the
GI Bill, which I thought was kind of strange.

LC: Why was that?

MM: Well, I already had 48 months of Veterans Funded Education under the

LC: Oh, okay.

MM: In fact, I think I got that changed; I’m not sure, but my father-in-law was
kind of a minor politician in South Bend and they have this very unique thing to South
Bend, but there’s this Polish holiday called Dyngus Day which is the party time after the
Monday after Easter. Well, it’s a big political kick off thing in South Bend so all these
halls, they have free booze or free beer and food and all the politicians come around and
shake hands. Well, at that time, our congressman was a guy by the name of John
Bradimeas who was at that time; I believe he was the democratic whip in congress. He
was coming by and he came by to us and, “Hey, is there anything I can do for you guys?”
My father-in-law said, “Yes, this kid’s getting screwed.” “What do you mean?” So, I
explained it and I said, “I had 48 months of War Orphans Education from the VA, but
now I come back from Vietnam” and I’d been back maybe 4 or 5 years, I can’t remember
how long that was “and they say I’m ineligible.” He said, “Well, that’s not right. If your
father would’ve lived, I would’ve presumed he would’ve paid for you college, but we
should do something for your service.” So, low and behold, a couple of years later, the
laws changed to give you another 12 months. So, I got 12 more months as I used that partially to fund my master’s degree.

LC: Okay, where did you go for your masters?

MM: Aquinas College here in Grand Rapids.

LC: And what did you study Mike?

MM: I got it in Management.

LC: Okay, so that contributes to your human resources personnel work?

MM: I guess. I thought it was kind of a behavior based. You know, a lot of communication, organization and behavior, that kind of stuff. The accounting and finance and that stuff never interested me. Actually, the quantitative stuff never interested me. That kind of stuff did so I thought I’d try going back to school for a little bit and I took a couple of classes and liked it and just finished it then.

LC: When did you finish?

MM: ’80.

LC: Did you feel that the government had kind of made amends in that way for not having given you to the GI Bill?

MM: No, I still think I should’ve gotten an entitlement based on my service.

LC: Okay.

MM: If my dad was alive and my family paid for my schooling and I went to Vietnam, I would’ve gotten 48 months of it. Then this case, my surrogate father paying for it was the Veterans Administration. I kind of wished I would’ve gotten it because who knows what I would’ve done.

LC: Did you receive any citations or commendations from US Army?

MM: Yes, well, everybody got the National Defense Medal and the Vietnam Service and Campaign Medal and I got the Brown Star and I think I got a Vietnamese thing, Cross of Gallantry or something.

LC: Okay, and what was the Brown Star specifically for, do you remember?

MM: Yes, just doing your job.

LC: Okay. How do you feel about those citations now?

MM: I’m proud of them.

LC: Are you?
MM: Yes, I’m proud of them.
LC: If you could tell young people today, let’s take it young people now, something about the war that you think they ought to know? Can you say what that would be?
MM: Yes, honor those that had served, that’s all. It’s whatever your politics were and I can understand why people were against the war and although, I think most of it was personnel reasons, not political, but just honor those that served. Don’t condemn the guys that served; if you want to have a beef, you have a beef with the government, not with the people that did it.
LC: Right. Mike, is there anything else you’d like to add?
MM: Yes, there’s a few things.
LC: Okay.
MM: Well, we could go on forever on it. I just hope that a hundred years from now when somebody reads this that I hope they’ve kicked off the Hollywood stereotype because I think that that has dishonored for so long the memory of those guys that didn’t come back and the contribution of those that served. Can I just tell you one story?
LC: Sure.
MM: When did the Gulf War end? ’91?
LC: Yes.
MM: I’m not sure, okay. Well, I marched in one parade in my life and that was July 4th parade here in Grand Rapids where Bush came to review, going to be at the parade.
LC: That would be in 1991?
MM: Right after the Gulf War and a focal point was a National Guard or Reserve Unit from Greenville which is a town around here that the whole thing got called up and they served over in Arabia someplace, so they were in the thing too; but it was a big deal because the President’s coming in and it’s a very high republican area and that kind of thing. A couple of friends of mine called me and said, “Hey, a bunch of Vietnam Veterans are going to march in this parade. Want to come on down?” I said, “I don’t do parades, I don’t march.” “Come on down.” Well, I wasn’t going down and then they called about 9, 10:00 and I don’t know what time the parade was, like 1, 2:00 or
something like that. So my wife took the call and they said, “Hey Madelaine, send him
down there. We’re going to March, we want as many Vietnam Vets as we can get.” So,
she and my son who’s visiting us at the time said, “Go down.” I said, “Well, I’ll go down
there just to pacify you guys, I’ll just take a look at it. Now, what I was afraid of is all
these guys wearing their jungle fatigues and beards with their roach clips around their
neck and this kind of bull. I wasn’t going to march with these guys and so I get down
there and they told me where they’re assembling and I go down there and here there’s
about 120 guys there. And there’s a couple of guys in their fatigues, but that’s about it
and I think it was the Kalamazoo VVA (Vietnam Veterans of America) had a color guard
so I was kind of thinking about joining the march or not, and then they were forming out
and there’s this one guy was in the front row was in a wheel chair, only had one leg. The
color guard, one of the guy’s in color guard said, “Hey, you can’t be in the front row
because you’re going to slow us down.” And I heard that and so, “Wait a minute, this
guy can be wherever the heck he wants to be and if he has to be, I’ll carry him!” So, I
was on the outside pushing a wheelchair and this guy got to be in the front row. Now,
this unit from Greenville is maybe two or three units ahead of us and it was a very big
parade because the President’s in town and there’s thousands of people. We hit the street
and you know, I don’t think we walked a half a block and there wasn’t a dry eye in the
group. People were just going nuts, cheering, yelling, “Thank you!” Women were
running breaking through and kissing this guy in the wheelchair. It was incredible! As I
said there wasn’t a dry eye among us and I think after about a block, we were probably
20 feet high. It was a wonderful experience. I just said, “Hey, that’s how it should be.”
Of course, then the guys in the fatigues are saying, “What a crock this is, this is twenty
years too late.” You know, just go away. I don’t want to listen to this crap.

LC: Right, and you’re sort of perspective on it was that this is like one of the
most wonderful things that happened?

MM: Yes, it was great. People cared, they really cared. It may have taken a
while, but they really cared and that’s a heck of a thank you. I appreciate that and in fact,
a friend of mine’s wife works for one of the T.V channels, so she sent me a video of the
parade and they had the whole thing, so that was great. I watch that every now and then.

LC: Yes, I bet.
MM: It’s kind of neat to watch.
LC: I bet.
MM: But that was the only thing I wanted to say. So, maybe recognition happened a little late, but I think it did.
LC: Well, I’m glad you told that story. That’s quite a good feeling, I’m sure and to have it so that you can relive it.
MM: Yes.
LC: Is also wonderful.
MM: It was so wonderful by just the people’s reaction and it was kind of hard to say, but there were people that were in the parade saying, “Hey, it was the loudest for you guys even louder than it was for these Greenville guys.” And about halfway through, there was a guy in Greenville, in this National Guard thing who was in Vietnam, he left his unit, came back with us. (Laughing)
LC: He would rather be marching with you guys.
MM: (Laughing) Yes. I thought that was cool. Yes, it was just a good feeling; “Hey, I feel good.”
LC: Well Mike; thank you very much.
MM: Oh you’re welcome.
LC: Okay, hold on one moment.