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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Michael Morea  
Conducted by Stephen Maxner  
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Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr.  
2 Michael Morea. It is the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, year 2000 at 1:30 Lubbock time. I am in  
3 Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library. Mr. Morea is in Palm Harbor,  
4 Florida. All right sir, would you please begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of  
5 yourself?

6 Michael Morea: I was born in the Bronx, New York City on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March,  
7 1940 which makes me sixty years of age. I was born into a fairly typical Bronx family,  
8 middle-class, maybe just a tad below middle class in terms of financial situation. My dad  
9 was an engineer for the U.S. Navy, worked at the Brooklyn Navy yard for most of his  
10 life, started off as a draftsman and ended up as a department supervisor. My mom was a  
11 homemaker, never worked outside the house, at least not while I can recall. I had a  
12 younger brother named Charles or Chuck, he's about two years younger than I am, and a  
13 younger sister, Dorothy, who is about four years younger than I am, both still living. My  
14 childhood, we were a Catholic family, fairly active practicing Catholics and so my early  
15 childhood revolved around things going on in the neighborhood, in the street, in the  
16 vacant lots that we played in. The school that I went to, which was the parochial school,  
17 the church school for my parish so I spent the first, from the age of five or six, until  
18 thirteen or so, primarily as a student in Blessed Sacrament Grammar School, which was  
19 associated with my church, as I said. Again a fairly typical childhood, had a very good

1 time, when I wasn't studying. I was a pretty good student, actually one of the better  
2 students in my class. But I had a good time on weekends and what not, just playing as  
3 kids do, either in make-up games or playing semi-organized sports. We didn't have  
4 much in the way of serious organized sports, we just made up our own games and played  
5 in school yards and vacant lots and in the street.

6 SM: Well I was curious, another gentleman that I've talked to recently, talking  
7 about going, as he put it, he called in alley exploring, did you ever do anything like that?

8 MM: No, didn't have, we had alleys, which was just the space between two  
9 apartment building, but there wasn't much in them so we didn't explore much. Most of  
10 our exploring if you will, was in the vacant lots of which there were many in the  
11 neighborhood. They were a lot more interesting because they were wild, they had rocks  
12 and puddles and trees and swamps and places you could hide and make up games. So  
13 most of the time, we were in the vacant lots or just out in the street playing the classic  
14 New York City games, stickball and punch ball and stoop ball, all of which are described  
15 in other places, but that was it. One things that comes to mind is there were seasons it  
16 seemed like for everything. It seemed like on a certain day in the spring, everybody  
17 would put away a certain toy, whatever it was, and the new one would come out. So the  
18 bicycles might go away for a while and the skates would come out and then it seemed  
19 almost on signal that two months later, or a month and a half later, the skates would go  
20 away and the ball gloves would come out. And there seemed to be a pattern that we  
21 followed without really realizing it. Play was a large part of our life when we weren't in  
22 school or at home doing our homework, or what have you, particularly on weekends, I  
23 guess or in the summer when they days were longer and we were out of school and back  
24 in those days kids were out of school for a longer period in the summer than they are  
25 today, I think. We had pretty much three full months, which they don't get any more.

26 SM: Now I noticed on one of the questionnaires you filled out, your paternal  
27 grandparents came from the United States from Italy.

28 MM: Yes, that's true.

29 SM: Did you have much contact with them as you were growing up?

30 MM: Yes, the family, my dad had one, two, three brothers and a sister, all of  
31 more or less the same age and they all lived reasonably nearby say in the early days,

1 within thirty minute subway ride and probably [never] more than an hour from some  
2 central point and that central point, especially when I was very young was frequently my  
3 grandparents place. Which was just a tiny little tenement apartment on Lincoln Avenue  
4 in the Bronx, but it was packed with people when we all got together, and that was fairly  
5 frequent for dinner and what not. Probably once a month or so, and it was just packed  
6 but nobody ever seemed to get in anybody's way and the kids did their thing while the  
7 adults did theirs and all I can remember of it, or what I generally remember of it is we all  
8 had a very good time, nobody ever got mad at anybody and it was just a lot of fun, so I  
9 did have, to answer your question, yes, I did have contact with them. My grandmother,  
10 paternal grandmother was very typical Italian immigrant housewife, spoke almost no  
11 English, spent most of her life it seemed in the kitchen. My grandfather of course went  
12 out and earned a living, he did several things but primarily he worked for a piano  
13 manufacturing company, Singer pianos. And of course he learned English so he was  
14 easier to communicate with, unfortunately never knew his real story and it's too late to  
15 find it now. But looking back, it seemed to be a well-educated man, loved the opera, big  
16 old standard radio that everybody had, console radio on Sunday afternoons the operas  
17 were always on and that was a big interest to him. I remember him, he lived long enough  
18 to see me graduate from college and get commissioned and of course I was the first in the  
19 family to go to college, so that was a big thing for him and I do remember him, up to  
20 those years, unfortunately never sat down and had a real long talk with him, sort of like  
21 this, and found out who he really was and what he'd really done and why he immigrated  
22 and all those sorts of things.

23 SM: You read my mind, that's what I was going to talk to you about. Okay, so  
24 you're not certain about the circumstances surrounding why he immigrated?

25 MM: No, except that an awful lot of Italians were, he came from the Southeast  
26 part of Italy, near Bari, just hordes of Italians were immigrating. I've seen a few movies  
27 about that time period in Italy, things were very bad economically and that's still today,  
28 as Italy goes, a poor part of Italy. So I imagine it was economic, there may have been  
29 some political overtones as well because there was still a king back then in Italy. One of  
30 the few countries in Europe that had a really powerful king still, but I don't know. I wish  
31 I did, I wish I knew what the reasons were.

1 SM: Just out of curiosity, do you know about any of the hardships or difficulties  
2 he had when he got to the United States?

3 MM: No, I never got the impression that things were too difficult. He moved to  
4 an Italian neighborhood, had friends and acquaintances and probably a few cousins who  
5 had preceded him. They sort of took care of the new guy and I think he found work  
6 quickly, the economic circumstances were never great, but they lived well. I think the  
7 apartment probably was six hundred square feet if it was that big, it was not big at all and  
8 on about the third or fourth floor of a building, a typical tenement building. But I don't  
9 think we ever knew we were poor, we didn't suffer from it anyway, because everybody  
10 we knew was in the same boat. No, I don't think there was any serious hardship for  
11 either of them, I think they got here and hit the ground running and things got  
12 progressively better. Their children got good jobs, although never finished college any of  
13 them, and raised good families, and their grandchildren mostly did go to college so it was  
14 a good progression and I think they were very satisfied.

15 SM: When you left high school, did you know immediately that you would be  
16 going straight into college?

17 MM: Yes, from grade school I went, as I said I was pretty good with the books,  
18 and I was selected, there's a process in New York City. There's a Jesuit high school  
19 called Regis High School, it's on 84<sup>th</sup> street I think, near Central Park and that school run  
20 by the Jesuits used to pick to two top academic kids from basically every grade school in  
21 the city of New York and would collect them together in this one high school tuition free.  
22 And the education was very, very good, of course the academic standards were extremely  
23 high. I went there for three years and at the end of my junior year, the principal called  
24 me in, and basically said, 'Mike, you're not making it here, nice try but you're just not  
25 handling, particularly Latin', third year Latin killed me. So he politely suggested that I  
26 go somewhere else and I did, I finished my fourth high school year at Cardinal Hayes,  
27 which was the Catholic high school in the Bronx where everybody went if they went to  
28 Catholic high school. So I graduated from Cardinal Hayes, in what '57, so I was still  
29 fairly young, but by then I was still pretty good academically and it was pretty clear that I  
30 was going to at least have a shot at college, which I did. I was only just eighteen I guess,  
31 that summer before I started college and really didn't have a clue as to what I wanted to

1 do, which is typical for a kid that age so I started in Engineering school at New York  
2 University, which is what they call the uptown, what they call the uptown campus in the  
3 Bronx, intending to go into Aeronautical Engineering, and that's kind of a funny story.  
4 After a year there, I went to the dean this time, Dean Cunningham, I'll never forget it and  
5 I told him I was going to quit. I said I just couldn't take it and he asked my why and he  
6 says, 'You're not burning the buildings down, but you're not flunking out either', he  
7 says, 'You're doing okay' and he says, 'Why do you want to quit?' And I told him, I  
8 said, 'I just can't stand it', what I couldn't deal with is that everything was graded on a  
9 curve and so if you walked into a Physics class and took an exam and the mean grade was  
10 a 20, you got a C but to my mind I only knew 20% of what I was supposed to and I just  
11 couldn't deal with that. So I told him that and he said, 'Okay, I understand, anything I  
12 can do for you?' And I said, 'If you'd just call the dean down at the Business school,'  
13 which was downtown in Greenwich village, 'I'd sure like to go there starting next  
14 semester', and so he did and I did and I graduated. I know I'm jumping around a bit, but  
15 I graduated four [three] years later, which was difficult because I had to make a up a lot  
16 of credits in the Business school, you know credits that I had taken in the Engineering  
17 school in the first year, didn't really play into the curriculum in the business school, so I  
18 had to really double up, I think there were times I was taking twenty-one credits. As a  
19 matter of fact, several semesters probably, which today people don't believe, but it's true.  
20 Twenty-one credit hours to get caught up and still graduate in four years, which I did.  
21 But probably the most significant thing is that, yes, this is another funny story, while I  
22 was still at the uptown campus, just again a green kid wandering around in a daze. They  
23 were passing out the class but with the class cards and of course if you were going in a  
24 certain path, you had to take this and you had to take that and you had to take this, and  
25 you had a choice between one of two things. One of those choices, there was a girl  
26 student working to make a few dollars at the end of the table where they were passing out  
27 these class cards and when you got to the end, she said to me do you want PT or ROTC,  
28 and I said to myself, I know what PT is, that's running across the campus sweaty after a  
29 shower and athlete's foot and trying to get from one class to the other. I said I don't  
30 really need to do that, what's this ROTC, and she said well, it's some sort of a military  
31 training thing and that's all she knew and I said, that sounds good, give me the card. So

1 that, believe it or not, is the extent of the thought that went into my thirty-year military  
2 career, because that's where it began, it's an honest to God true story. I took the card and  
3 she said go over there, there was a little hill, there was a building on the other side of the  
4 hill, there's a tailor over there, tailor shop, you go in there, and they give you uniforms.  
5 Then you show up at your class as the card indicated and you'll be on your way. So that's  
6 how it all began and of course, when I transferred downtown I just stayed in ROTC,  
7 because I was enjoying it. It had a lot to offer, it was interesting, something I hadn't done  
8 and free airplane rides and things like that on occasion with the instructors. So slowly  
9 but surely it grew on me I guess, to the point where, oh I guess by junior year it was a  
10 definite career option. I was qualified to be a pilot, physically and mentally and that  
11 looked like a good thing to do, looked like a fun thing to do and so basically evolved into  
12 it. At graduation it was graduate and be commissioned and still qualified so I had orders  
13 to wait through the summer, which would have been the summer of '61 and then report to  
14 pilot training in October of '61 which I did. I know I leaped through that pretty rapidly,  
15 but that is kind of a comical story because it's absolutely true.

16 SM: Now did you have any regrets in the end in terms of your switch to  
17 business?

18 MM: No, it was, at that point, to be perfectly honest, it was just a way of getting  
19 a degree for me. I don't really think that I had any great desire. Let's pretend for example  
20 that the military thing had fallen through, let's say I had something physically or what not  
21 had gone wrong toward the end and I didn't get pilot training. I don't know if under  
22 those circumstances if I'd still gone in the military. I think not, so at that point I would  
23 have had to use my degree, which was an accounting degree, and just go into the  
24 accounting world in New York City. I would have done it, I probably would've been as  
25 happy as the next guy doing it, but it certainly wasn't anything I had a burning desire to  
26 do, particularly after becoming acquainted with the military thing. The idea of a coat and  
27 tie and riding the subway for twenty, thirty years every day to the same office, or same  
28 general area didn't hold a lot of attraction to me. So I got the degree because you needed  
29 a degree to be an officer, it was a good degree but never really used it until much, much  
30 later in my life, after I retired, thirty some odd years later.

1 SM: How far into ROTC did you realize that that was the point where you were  
2 going to make military a career?

3 MM: Oh probably about the beginning of junior year. I would say it started to  
4 look, first of all, you could begin to see the end. You knew you had two years of college  
5 left and at that point you start to take physicals and exams and the indicators were all  
6 saying, hey you can do this. Of course you start to get encouragement from the staff as  
7 well, and so it all sort of comes together, or at least in my case it did.

8 SM: Now, when you were going through ROTC, what kind of instruction did you  
9 receive in terms of military history, what did they talk about in terms of well, wars in  
10 particular, did they talk about the Korean War or 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, which did they  
11 emphasize more, that kind of stuff?

12 MM: That's a good question. I don't think we studied, there's no way to know  
13 any more, but my recollection is that we didn't literally study wars as wars. I think we  
14 studied some political science with a bias toward war in general and by that I mean  
15 political science going way back to the beginning, maybe some Roman philosophy and  
16 Chinese philosophy of politics as it effects war and war as it effect politics. So I think it  
17 was a broader look at the subject than to just study a war. I don't think we talked about  
18 war much at all. The faculty, the ROTC faculty were veterans of the Second World War  
19 in at least one case, there was a Colonel named Desper, D-E-S-P-E-R, Dale, I believe was  
20 his first name, who was a World War II vet of course World War II wasn't that far distant  
21 back then. And another one or two of the other professors of Air Science, the younger  
22 guys, maybe captains might have had some Korean service but it wasn't something that  
23 was talked about, specific wars weren't, at least not in my recollection. We studied  
24 military organization, we studied military protocols and what's the word I'm groping for  
25 here, tradition, military traditions and things of that sort but not specific wars, as I recall.

26 SM: Did you, as a young man growing up, and as a boy growing up, were you at  
27 all interested in that type of stuff?

28 MM: Not intensely, but that's an interesting question too. In later life I've asked  
29 myself that question, was there something else in my upbringing that may have pointed  
30 me in that direction unconsciously. And there may have been one or two things, I'll tell  
31 you what they are and they again are kind of amusing. I was given a book on my ninth

1 birthday, by I think one of my uncles and you'd have to understand that's 1949. So the  
2 Second World War is only over a couple of years and there were a whole series of books  
3 coming out for boys back in those days, kind of action, adventure books and one of them  
4 was about a Naval aviator out in the Pacific, *Red Randall at Midway* is the name of the  
5 book. I remember that book just fascinated me and I probably read it a dozen times, to  
6 the point where actually just recently I got on the Internet, there's a site called Alibris, A-  
7 L-I-B-R-I-S, which I think in Latin means from the library of or some such thing. They  
8 sell old books and I was actually able to find and buy an almost mint copy of the old  
9 book and I have it at my desk. It's amazing. There may have been something there,  
10 here's another one, [my folks], when I was real little, maybe five or six, I remember as a  
11 present I got one of these toys. It's a big toy, it's a riding toy that you may not even be  
12 familiar with but usually they come in the form of trains or fire engines or what not and  
13 the little kid sits in it and pedals it and makes it go down the street. Well, mine was an  
14 airplane and it had little stubby wings and the propeller went around when you pedaled it  
15 had a couple of little guns up on the front. And I remember enjoying that thing to the  
16 point again where I got on the Internet to see if I could find one, and I actually found one  
17 in antique shop in the state of Washington. Some crazy named town like Washomish or  
18 some such thing, but believe it or not mint condition, but ten thousand dollars. It's  
19 probably the only one left in the world, but I got some pictures of it at least off the  
20 internet, so who know what influences you. LaGuardia Airport wasn't that far from  
21 where I lived and when I was a teenager we used to drive out there, myself and my  
22 friends and watch the airplanes take off and land. But nothing intense, there was no  
23 aviation background in the family, or anything of the sort, so there may have been one or  
24 two little things, but hard to say, I won't say yes, I won't say no.

25 SM: Now did you have relatives that served in the military during the Second  
26 World War?

27 MM: The only one was one of my dad's younger brother, my uncle Jerry, or  
28 Jerome was his real name, but actually Geralimo in Italian, and then Jerome and Jerry.  
29 But yes, he was in the Navy during the war and was a clerk because that was the kind of  
30 work he had done in civilian life, just getting started really, but he worked in an  
31 advertising agency and so he was a clerk type, typist and what not and at least for part of



1 his service I know was on the Battleship Missouri. May have been after the war actually  
2 that he was on the Missouri and I've seen some pictures of him in Paris so I know he got  
3 around a little bit. But no action to speak of, that he ever talked about anyway, but he  
4 was the only one. The rest of them, of course my dad was at the Navy yard, so he was  
5 considered essential in that job and one of my other uncles was a machinist I think at an  
6 aircraft plant out on Long Island and what have you.

7 SM: Another essential?

8 MM: Yes, I think so.

9 SM: Now, while we're on the subject of family members in the military, did your  
10 brother ever go in the military as well?

11 MM: My brother served a couple of years, just Army, he enlisted and served,  
12 what time frame would that have been, that's a good question, it's a long time ago. It  
13 was pre-Vietnam, I'm guessing that he was in the service during my early service days as  
14 well, so maybe '59, '60, '61 somewhere in there, but I really don't remember. He was  
15 young, I mean he was just a kid out of high school and he did two years and got out.

16 SM: So your junior year in ROTC you're at that point, or your junior year in  
17 college, excuse me, you're at the point you can choose, you've gone two years and you  
18 don't have to continue and you . . .?

19 MM: I chose to continue because I could start to see that at least it was interesting  
20 and I was involved. In fact at the end I was the cadet commander of the detachment, in  
21 my senior year. And in fact was the, what would you say, I guess what would you say, I  
22 guess the reviewing cadet at the graduation parade which was up at, they combined the  
23 two campuses for the ROTC graduation. So the graduation was up at the uptown  
24 campus, the Engineering school campus and I was the senior guy there, senior cadet  
25 actually. Which helped me get, I was actually distinguished graduate as well from the  
26 ROTC program, which was useful because it accelerated the transition from a reserve  
27 officer to regular officer once I went on active duty. And that turned out to be useful for  
28 promotions and other things years later, because back in those days there was a real  
29 distinction between a reserve officer who was sort of looked on as a, not fully committed  
30 kind of a guy, I don't think that was fair, but that's the way it was, and a guy who they  
31 could more easily just send back home if requirements diminished. But once you were a

1 regular you were kind of fully onboard, so I got my regular commissions fairly quickly,  
2 partly as a result of that distinguished graduate thing. It's funny in an interview like this,  
3 the things that spring to mind that you haven't thought about in ages.

4 SM: Now, at that point when you graduated from college, which was?

5 MM: June 7, of '61 if I'm not mistaken.

6 SM: Some interesting international events have taken place and as a college  
7 student you hopefully, maybe were aware of these things. The fall of China, that was of  
8 course earlier, before you were in college, but the lead-up to the Communist threat, the  
9 lead-up to the Cold War and the major events in the '50s like the launch of Sputnik, were  
10 these things that you were cognizant of?

11 MM: Yes, cognizant of all of those, a little bit, you know how college students  
12 generally are, they were sort of vague, distant things that adults dealt with and I don't  
13 think we really saw ourselves as adults quite yet, we were more interested in girls and  
14 beer and graduating to be perfectly honest. Yes, we were aware of them, and again back  
15 to a previous question you asked, another thing that we did study pretty intensely in the  
16 ROTC program was the various political systems and of course, Communism was much  
17 more of a, what shall I say, an accepted threat generally in the population than it was later  
18 on. So we did study it pretty intensely to the point, well almost to the point I think we  
19 were probably propagandized, but I think we knew it and said that's fine.

20 SM: Interesting, you as cadets as students would talk about, this is kind of  
21 extreme or how did that come out?

22 MM: Let's see, well extreme no, I mean I don't even know if we used the phrase  
23 then, but the current phrase would be Mickey Mouse, come one guys, you know I'm  
24 older than that, you don't have to spoon feed this stuff to me. I suspect that there were  
25 times where we felt that way, but you put up with it, it's easier to put up with it than  
26 argue. The one thing that I do recall, again, you sort of stimulated my thinking was of  
27 course the civil rights thing was starting to be big and particularly on the college  
28 campuses and NYU was no exception. Some of the more radical groups and all the  
29 groups were represented on the campus, NAACP and what not. But the ones that I  
30 remember as being the more radical Core was one Congress of or on, I'm not sure which,  
31 racial equality and some of those were fairly radical and vocal. We, as I think frequently

1 happens rather than create harmony or anything, I think the radicalism of those [just  
2 drove wedges] between people who ordinarily wouldn't have had wedges. But some of  
3 the black kids, and there were a few back even in those days in the ROTC program, not  
4 the numbers that you would get today, because there weren't that many black kids in  
5 universities back then. But I would say to be honest that whereas prior to the appearance  
6 of those organizations on the campus, a black guy would just be another guy, once those  
7 organizations got there and started espousing their own philosophies, it was like okay,  
8 that's your philosophy and if you want to go that way it's been nice knowing you. It  
9 really did, I think drive some wedges, at least between some people.

10 SM: So in your experience the more radical groups tended to polarize?

11 MM: Oh, yes no question about it, in my mind anyway. They certainly weren't  
12 and I think that's probably still true today, they're not conciliators, they tend to polarize  
13 things.

14 SM: Now I'm curious, what was the size of your Corps of Cadets?

15 MM: You know, I don't remember. I can give you roughly, it started big because  
16 of the fact that everybody had to either do the PT or the ROTC. So I would say, the  
17 freshman group downtown, which I have a better recollection of, numbered in the  
18 hundreds certainly, but when we graduated, my best recollection is the senior class was  
19 two numbers are in my head, eleven or thirteen, it was somewhere in that neighborhood.  
20 So of that several hundred who came in the door so to speak, as freshmen, we only  
21 commissioned, say ten or eleven guys. So it shrunk considerably as you suggested at that  
22 mandatory to non-mandatory point between sophomore and junior year and then it shrunk  
23 some more, just by attrition physicals and things like that, as you marched towards the  
24 actual commissioning date. But several hundred anyway, and I think when we put the  
25 whole thing together for graduation up at the Washington Heights which was the uptown  
26 campus, oh, I'm just trying to picture it, but it was five hundred people, maybe more than  
27 that, altogether I'm trying to picture the graduation parade and it was a large number of  
28 people.

29 SM: Now just as you were getting close to graduation, Kennedy was elected  
30 president and took office, did that have an effect on you?

1           MM: No, none whatever that I can recall. Again, we were pretty much, politics  
2 wasn't a big thing on the campus, even though we were in a major city and in fact in  
3 Greenwich Village and a lot of times after hours, after class or on a Friday night or what  
4 not, we'd wind up down in the village in one of the more famous old places where there  
5 was a lot of, relatively speaking at least, a lot of radical thought and that sort of thing.  
6 But again I think we tended, folk music was becoming a big issue, not an issue, but a  
7 factor back in those days, and I think we were more interested in the atmosphere than in  
8 the substance. We'd rather go to a place where maybe a young Joan Baez was singing  
9 and nobody had ever heard of her, but there she was, or Woody Guthrie or you know,  
10 some of those folks or go to a night club and listen to a comedian like Woody Allen who  
11 was a nobody, an unknown back in those days and have a few beers than really take  
12 anything seriously. On that note, I think when the civil rights thing started to really get  
13 active, I think it was a little bit, actually maybe a shock to us, that these people were  
14 serious, where we were just sort of having a good time, the attitude was almost like hey,  
15 lighten up, relax and enjoy life, what are you getting all excited about, of course we didn't  
16 understand their point of view. I guess I'm painting a not too pleasant picture of what we  
17 were, I guess we were just kind of scatterbrained college kids having a good time, but  
18 that's probably pretty accurate.

19           SM: Just out of curiosity, you mentioned some folk singers and stuff; did you  
20 ever see or hear of Phil Ochs?

21           MM: O-C-H-S?

22           SM: Right.

23           MM: Yes, the name rings a bell, I'm not sure I could put him in context though.

24           SM: Well, the message of a lot of the folk songs and stuff, was kind of contrary  
25 to the military, did that not?

26           MM: Well, not in the college days because the Vietnam War wasn't on yet, It was  
27 just beginning, there was, you're right, there was beginning, it was more of the anti-  
28 Nuclear back in those days, Vietnam was not an issue but you're right.

29           SM: Yes, not anti-Vietnam, but anti-military, anti-war.

30           MM: Anti-war for sure, and on campus there were probably, and again, being a  
31 New York City school, fairly liberal and we shared the campus with the Liberal Arts

1 school as well. There were probably some people that looked at us like we were a little  
2 strange, but if they did, they were in a world different than ours, and it was just sort of a  
3 live and let live thing, it wasn't antagonistic. We didn't hang around with them anyway,  
4 so it was kind of irrelevant as to what they thought. It was in the early stages back in  
5 those days, it was still almost friendly and pleasant. The music wasn't really strident,  
6 except for the Core Congress, etc. They got pretty strident pretty early and again that was  
7 more of a shock to us than anything else, the other thing, in the other cases it was sort of a  
8 live and let live kind of an attitude. And we'd go down and listen to the anti-Nuclear and  
9 anti-war folk singers and enjoy them as much as anything else. It wasn't a bother; it  
10 wasn't a conflict kind of thing. Am I making any sense?

11 SM: Absolutely.

12 MM: Okay, good I wasn't sure.

13 SM: So as you neared graduation, you knew you were going to be going active  
14 duty, what did your family think of that?

15 MM: You ask some good questions. Okay, well see my dad wasn't crazy about it.  
16 My mom was, she's just a housewife, whatever happened, happened. She wasn't gonna  
17 have a very strong opinion, one way or the other, if she did she never expressed it. But  
18 my dad of course, was becoming, well by that time he was probably a middle kind of a  
19 guy, maybe a GS-9 or 10 or so at that point, again in the Engineering department there at  
20 the Navy yard. And in the context of his job, he had more than once gone out on aircraft  
21 carriers on shakedown cruises, where they would, he was in refrigeration and air  
22 conditioning engineering. So after they'd put the system in, you'd always have to go out  
23 on the ship, on a real cruise and turn the thing on and find out what you forgot and what  
24 you did wrong, and where you put things in the wrong place and all that sort of thing and  
25 make modifications, so in the context of doing that he'd had several cruises on carriers  
26 and had watched a lot of Navy pilots whacking their airplanes into various parts of the  
27 aircraft carrier. So his impression I guess of military flying was that, and he was nervous,  
28 I'm sure, maybe even more than nervous. Maybe even a little bit frightened about it, and  
29 I would say he probably let me know that, but not in a way where I was going to feel  
30 guilty or anything. It was just, he was worried and I knew it and I was going to go do it,  
31 and he knew it and so it was an accommodation that never turned into a problem. But he

1 was worried, yes and in pilot training, he and my mom I think came down to Alabama  
2 more than once just to visit and watching his little baby kid with all this gear on,  
3 strapping into this monster machine and actually flying around in it. I don't think he ever  
4 really believed any of it was happening and we'll jump ahead. But to finish the thought  
5 you know when I went to Vietnam, that was a big scare, but we got through it, it never  
6 became a problem for the family, it's just I knew they were worried and that was it.

7 SM: So, why don't you go ahead and describe your entry into the active Air  
8 Force.

9 MM: Okay, the last summer after graduation, of course I had basically nothing to  
10 do and I went to work at a beach club in the Bronx that I had actually worked at every  
11 summer, I think from my thirteenth year. So I'd worked there eight summers, as a  
12 lifeguard primarily but I'd done some other things too, I'd helped manage the cafeteria  
13 for a while. Helped with the electrician and various things, mainly I was a lifeguard and I  
14 did that my last summer, and then came the date. Now, the orders came and said report  
15 to Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Alabama on, I think the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October of '61, which I  
16 did. I jumped on an airplane out of New York as I recall, I think it was a Constellation,  
17 one of those three-piece tail airplanes that you see in History books now. And flew down  
18 to Atlanta which was a little tiny, relatively at least, a little nothing town back in those  
19 days and then caught a connecting flight to Montgomery, Alabama. And then I think I  
20 took a bus from Montgomery to Selma, matter of fact, I know I did, and got to Selma in  
21 the middle of the night, and culture shock, it wasn't the last time but it was the first time  
22 to get off a bus at, not that late at night, maybe nine-thirty at night in Selma, Alabama.  
23 And literally the streets were rolled up, standing there looking around, it looked like a  
24 deserted town, but I found somebody who helped me get to the base, which if I recall was  
25 maybe five miles outside of Selma. So, basically I made my way down there, just a  
26 twenty-one year old kid out on his way to see the world and got to the base, and standard  
27 procedure, checked in and was assigned a room and as I recall, it's probably a little bit  
28 vague in my mind, but as I recall now, it's coming back. I got there and was assigned a  
29 room in a long, one of these old style long barracks building where the bachelor officers  
30 were, my class was in one building, the bachelors in my class were in one, most of the  
31 guys were bachelors but there were several married. I was given a room, and as I recall

1 now there were guys who had gotten there a day or two ahead of me, just kind of  
2 wandering around and we sort of introduced ourselves and dropped our bags and figured  
3 out who we were and where we came from and talked about what we thought the future  
4 was going to hold and that sort of thing. But within, go to be just a day or two I think, we  
5 got right into the program, they didn't waste a lot of time with just sitting around. We got  
6 right into academics and flying, best I recall, almost immediately, maybe a week or two  
7 of academics before we started flying, but it wasn't much and we were off to the races  
8 there in pilot training. And that's every situation you get into has a set of stories  
9 associated, people and stories, most of them funny. Fortunately I've always said the  
10 human mind seems to forget the bad ones and remember the good ones, or the funny ones  
11 at least, but pilot training to me was, it was days of hard work. The academics were  
12 never a problem for me, some guys had real fits with the academics, and every body is a  
13 college graduate, which I guess surprised me a little. For me the academics were a  
14 breeze, well back up a step. The program then I think was generally laid out in three  
15 paths. They had what they called academics, they had what they called leadership or  
16 officership and then they had the flying, the academics were easy as I said, the  
17 leadership/officership, I was junior so it really hardly had an effect on me, the more  
18 senior guys, there were a couple of captains who had been in the service for some years,  
19 and had applied and gotten accepted for pilot training, so they were the class leaders.  
20 They had more of a set of responsibilities and had some problems to deal with from time  
21 to time. They were kind of the go-between, between most of the students and the faculty,  
22 because they were officers with some experience and in the class. So they sort of acted  
23 as a buffer, and they did, they had some serious functions to perform, but for the ordinary  
24 guy you just basically kept your nose clean and the officership part of the program wasn't  
25 difficult either. Then you get to the flying and of course everybody has their own skills, I  
26 would say I was not the most skilled pilot who ever came down the pike. They talk about  
27 guys with golden hands and I was not one of them. I did fine, how would you describe it,  
28 I was, I'm trying to think of an analogy like if I were a painter I certainly wasn't a Van  
29 Gogh but I could do a decent painting, I guess. I got along, I didn't make any mistakes, I  
30 did things right, I didn't have any flair for it and that reflected in where I finished up in  
31 the pile, somewhere about in the middle. I wasn't a bad pilot; I wasn't going to be a

1 fighter pilot either. Only a few guys washed out of the class as I recall from the  
2 beginning batch, most of them I think, S.I.E. which is a term you're probably familiar  
3 with, self-initiated elimination. Just means, the guy quit, I don't think the program  
4 actually took too many guys aside and said you're just not making it. It was fun, every  
5 day was a little different and usually split up into at least three parts, we'd have  
6 academics in the morning and then fly in the afternoon or vice versa and there was a  
7 pretty active athletic program, intramural athletic program, between the various classes  
8 that were in various stages of progression there at Craig. And I don't remember how  
9 many, but I think they probably brought a new class in every two months, it may have  
10 been every month, you may have had, actually on the base as many as, I don't think it  
11 would have been twelve, but maybe ten classes working their way through from the very  
12 beginning to the end. It may have been eight, I honestly don't remember, but we had a  
13 very active intramural program and just a very active physical fitness and physical  
14 training program, so between those three, your typical work day, plus studying in the  
15 evening, at least a little, your day was full, you got up early, you went to bed, not very  
16 late because you had to get up early again and it was a full day. On the weekends on the  
17 other hand, it got crazy, we were just young and fearless and flying airplanes and so we  
18 did crazy things on the weekends and Selma, like any other town, provided anything you  
19 wanted. A lot of drinking, probably drank a lot more than we should have, and driving  
20 with a lot more beer in us than we should have, but we survived it, there were clubs  
21 around where you could go and get a decent meal. Some of the guys dated locally, some  
22 didn't, one or two guys even married locally, before the program was over. In my case  
23 casually, I actually, funny again, there's another thing pops into your head, I dated a  
24 couple of girls in town, nice girls, very casually. If there was a party at the club and I  
25 needed a date, I'd call one of them up, that kind of a thing. There was, I think the name  
26 was Torrenson, that's at least decent pronunciation, Colonel Torrenson was a commander  
27 on the base. I don't recall his exact function, he may have been the base commander, he  
28 may have been the flying wing commander, I honestly don't remember, but he had a cute  
29 daughter who was just a little younger than me. They were Catholics and I guess I met  
30 her at church or something and she was real cute and nice kid, so we dated a little bit,  
31 nothing serious, but we were busy enough with flying and all of that, where that wasn't a



1 big issue for most people, but one way or other on the weekends we managed to have a  
2 good time and unwind a bit and then get ready for Monday morning again.

3 SM: Now how many men were in your class?

4 MM: I'm going to have to say something just over fifty; I wouldn't give you an  
5 exact number, around fifty. I think we probably started with fifty-two or fifty-three and  
6 ended up with something in the mid-40s, forty-four, forty-five, when it was all over, had  
7 several Germans in our class, seven of them I believe. All probably ahead of us in that,  
8 before the German government sent them over to get the American pilot training, they  
9 had all been run through a program in Germany of glider flying, and so they at least had  
10 quite a bit of experience flying gliders solo. They were pretty bright guys, they hit the  
11 ground running, they had no problems which brings me to another thing. Back in ROTC,  
12 another thing, jumping backwards, there was a program called FIP, which you got into in  
13 your junior year, flight indoctrination program I think is what it stood for. Basically what  
14 it was, was the government paid the juniors who were qualified to go forward to pilot  
15 training to go to a local airport, a local flying service and get a private pilot's license and  
16 the idea of course, was to, at a relatively low cost compared to pilot training, to see if you  
17 really had the interest and/or the ability so, I wound up, as did the other guys who were  
18 qualified at Teterboro airport, which was in New Jersey, but not very far away, not far  
19 from Newark airport. A place called Safair, I think, Flying Service, and was able to get a  
20 private pilot's license flying Piper Cubs over there in my junior. I think it went on over  
21 into senior year as I best recall, so even we, when we went to pilot training had some  
22 flying experience, including solo and some cross country flying in at least a light  
23 airplane. We weren't totally green.

24 SM: So when you did get to military flight school, what was the most difficult  
25 thing for you?

26 MM: I don't recall anything difficult. The most difficult thing was certainly, well  
27 you know what the hardest thing for me was, and probably always was, because I don't  
28 have a mind for it, was memorizing procedures. Even later when I was flying transports  
29 and what not, I had the devil of a time, really getting emergency procedures, particularly  
30 what you're supposed to know just literally, almost by instinct. Getting them down and  
31 years and years in the same airplane, I just never was very good at that, so that is one

1 little thing certainly, but that was about it. Again, in the various flying skills I wasn't the  
2 best in the class, but I don't really feel like I had difficulty in any of them, you know  
3 formation flying, I wasn't the best formation pilot in the class, but I could fly formation  
4 and things like that, but memorizing procedures was never good for me.

5 SM: What about the celestial navigation training, did you receive that there, or  
6 was that later?

7 MM: None, well wait a minute, I shouldn't say that so quickly. I think we  
8 probably in our navigation training had an introduction to celestial to the point where I  
9 think one night we actually did go outdoors with some equipment and do some sighting  
10 and some computation. But it was a cursory look, almost as fast as you did it, you said  
11 well, that's interesting if I ever have to do it, I'll study up on it, but it was almost in one  
12 ear and out the other, I would say, because we knew we weren't going to have to do it.

13 SM: What about as a back up though, an emergency back up?

14 MM: Well, most of the airplanes weren't equipped for it and any airplane that  
15 was, like the transports that I flew had usually two navigators on board and that's what  
16 they did. I used to do it, now that I think about it, when I became an aircraft commander  
17 in the C-133 which is down the road here a ways, but I would take a shot every once in a  
18 while, just for the heck of it, but it was not a serious pursuit, never was.

19 SM: So in flight training, how competitive was it, as far as for the pilots?

20 MM: That's another good question that I hadn't thought about. It was, that's a  
21 better question, even than I thought. It was very competitive, because there were certain  
22 personalities being what they are, there were some guys who came into that class,  
23 particularly the guys who had more real Air Force background, really intending to  
24 compete actively for the best job. Guys like me, I think sort of just wandered in the door  
25 and were a little bit clueless for a while, that there even was a competition in progress.  
26 You figured it out after a while, and some guys were [more and] less competitive, I'm not  
27 a particularly competitive guy to be perfectly honest, I just try and do the job and let the  
28 chips fall where they may. But the thrust of your question is a very good one, because  
29 there were some guys there that very definitely came to pick up all the marbles and of  
30 course the way that was done, was at the end, when we graduated a bag of assignments  
31 came down and it was a big hoopdy-do process, very exciting. I think they made it

1 exciting intentionally, where we had a meeting one morning and the commander said,  
2 okay, guys here it is. Here's what Air Force has sent us in the way of assignments and of  
3 course the big question was how many fighters, because the guys who were real  
4 competitive and the best pilots wanted to get into fighters. I really had no desire to do  
5 that, it wasn't like I wouldn't have taken one, but I had no great desire to be in a fighter,  
6 but some guys did and the question was, are there one, are there three, are the five of the  
7 thirty –some odd, not counting the Germans assignments. And then how many of the real  
8 bum ones, which of course were helicopters, nobody wanted to fly a helicopter, so the  
9 last guy in the class, of course that's in '61, today it might be different for various  
10 reasons, but there's a future in flying helicopters on the outside among other things, but  
11 the last guy in the class invariably got the helicopter. So the last guy meaning low score,  
12 when they put all three the academic, the flying and the officership together, I mean that  
13 was the helicopter. So there was how many helicopters and how many fighters was the  
14 first question and then in between there were various things that were viewed by different  
15 people in different lights, transports, B-52s, nobody wanted to go to SAC because SAC  
16 had a terrible reputation of just beating people up, physically and mentally, well not  
17 physically, well somewhat physically because of the alerts and the long missions, but  
18 more psychologically because of the constant alerts and things like that. So nobody  
19 really wanted to go to SAC in a B-52 or anything of that sort, a B-47 which I think were  
20 still around then. So, the competition was very fierce among the top four, five or six guys  
21 in the class, because they didn't know how many fighters there were going to be in the  
22 bag. As it turned out I got the transport, I wanted, well I won't say I wanted, that sounds  
23 very intense, I would have preferred a transport in the northeast because it was near  
24 home. You know at McGuire Air Force Base would have been my ideal, as it turned out  
25 there was one, I think I recall, a C-118 and a guy who was ahead of me in the pecking  
26 order took it and I wound up taking the transport at Travis Air Force base in California,  
27 figuring well California sounds pretty good, never been there and so I picked that when  
28 my turn came. I was about in the middle of the class as I recall, I think I was number  
29 nineteen, that's just a guess, so I got to pick, it looked like a pretty good deal, it was a  
30 transport which is what I really was preferring to fly and California sounded good, so I

1 was pretty happy with what I picked, when I picked it and of course, subsequently, it  
2 turned out okay.

3 SM: Why don't you go ahead and tell?

4 MM: Well there are millions of them, but this one story for example, we were  
5 flying around the traffic pattern, just doing takeoffs and landings and there were some  
6 Iranian students also, not in our class but in another class and there were several of them  
7 in the traffic pattern. And one of them, his canopy came unlocked on his airplane and he  
8 called the control, it wasn't really the tower, the tower didn't control us, there was a  
9 separate control for the students, called and said what do I do, and the controller on the  
10 ground said, land as soon as possible. This guy, well the long and the short of it is, we're  
11 sitting there, we're all hearing this because we are all on the same frequency and after a  
12 while the guy doesn't appear of final approach and he's not landing and so the tower guy  
13 calls him once or twice, no answer and then he's calling all of us and saying, has anybody  
14 seen him, did anybody spot him and we're all saying, no we don't see him out here  
15 anywhere and finally, one guy pipes up and says, 'uh-oh, I think I found him'. And the  
16 tower says, well where he is, and he says, 'he's down below me', and the guys says,  
17 thinking a couple hundred feet or five hundred feet, 'how far below'? Well, he's on the  
18 ground and what the guy had done, literally is pull the power back on the airplane, landed  
19 it straight ahead in the field.

20 SM: Well, that's what he was told to do.

21 MM: But again, if you gave me a couple of beers and we had all night, there are,  
22 as you well know, you've done this, there are hundreds of these stories and they're all,  
23 almost all true, but I think you're right, probably a good place to stop.

24 SM: Let me go ahead, end this officially real quick, this will end the first  
25 interview.

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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Michael Morea  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
December 12, 2001  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Mike  
2 Morea. This is the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, year 2000 at approximately 8:45 Lubbock time. I  
3 am in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Morea is in Palm Harbor, Florida. All right sir, would  
4 you please begin today's discussion with, go ahead and talk about your transition from  
5 pilot training to your first duty assignment which was to be a C-133 pilot in Travis Air  
6 Force Base.

7 Mike Morea: Left Craig Air Force base in October of 1962 upon graduation and  
8 after having as I discussed in the last interview, after having selected a C-133B transport  
9 airplane at Travis Air Force Base in California as my assignment and en route to Travis,  
10 driving by myself, stopped off at Stead Air Force Base near Reno, Nevada for the Air  
11 Force Survival school, which was located there. And as I recall that was about a three  
12 week process, a lot of academics, various aspects of survival in various environments,  
13 medical, how to live off the land, navigation in the woods, those kinds of things, very  
14 interesting school, very enjoyable, also went through a mock prisoner of war camp while  
15 we were there, I think that was about a three day affair, again extremely realistic, just  
16 short of physical beating. A lot of verbal abuse, a lot of difficult physical conditions,  
17 cold, wet, gloomy, some introduction to, I won't say torture techniques, that would be too  
18 strong, but torment techniques, being stuck in little boxes for hours on end and things like  
19 that, excellent, excellent training. The prisoner of war experience culminated in a staged  
20 escape, where we all escaped into the mountains and then had to make again, as I recall, a

1 three or four day trek from the prisoner-of-war camp to a place that we had been  
2 designated to rendezvous, and so I spent four days in the mountains, making my way  
3 across the Sierras and thoroughly enjoyed that because I had always enjoyed the outdoors  
4 and the mountains and it was a, for some people a grim experience. It was just like a  
5 little mini vacation for me, wandering in the hills, until we finally got to the rendezvous  
6 point and that was the end of the school. The only other significant thing about that  
7 school was that it happened to be occurring at the same time as the Cuban Missile Crisis  
8 and we were so isolated at the school, and so intensely involved in our training that we  
9 literally missed the whole thing. We got there before it started, graduated after it ended  
10 and really had, to the best of my knowledge, weren't even aware it was happening, which  
11 is really something kind of strange when you look back on it, but true. In any case, went  
12 from Stead, just a short drive, few hours to my first assignment at Travis Air Force Base  
13 and went through the normal checking in and report procedures. I was assigned a BOQ  
14 room, again in a barracks very similar to the one that we had at pilot training, a long, thin  
15 building typically, with a whole bunch of doors, and was assigned an apartment with a  
16 roommate. A fellow by the name of Carter Neil, went by Chris, he was a navigator in  
17 another squadron at Travis, a C-124 squadron and strangely enough I met Chris not too  
18 many weeks ago now at a Forward Air Controller reunion at Fort Walton Beach, so we  
19 had a good time together but, that's way down the line for this story. In any case,  
20 reported to the C-133 squadron and began my training there. There was no transport  
21 training school in the Air Force at the time, you went from pilot training, which was  
22 basically fighter jets to your unit and then you were trained at the unit so my first  
23 experience in a four-engine transport was when I first climbed into one and strapped it on  
24 and started listening to the instructor. But adapted to it reasonably well in fairly short  
25 order and started my career, many, many years in that aircraft, starting out at the bottom  
26 level, which was as a second pilot. The levels being, starting at the top: flight examiner,  
27 instructor pilot, aircraft commander, 1<sup>st</sup> pilot, and 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot, so the 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot was the green  
28 bean, the new guy and all it meant was that there were certain restrictions on what you  
29 could and you couldn't do. When you could take off and land the airplane, under whose  
30 supervision and things of that sort, but it was a way of working your way into the airplane  
31 and developing skills and experience. So for my first four years at Travis, I did just that.

1 Most of our missions, from '62 to '66 were out into the Pacific from Travis, a typical  
2 mission, Honolulu Wake Island, Guam, Clark Air Base in the Philippines, perhaps into  
3 Thailand, perhaps into Vietnam, well not so much later days, I think my first trip to  
4 Vietnam was actually in early '63 when the situation was very different than it became  
5 later. Then coming out of Southeast Asia we would have gone normally up to Kadena  
6 Air base in Okinawa or Tachikawa Air Base in Japan and then on home via Midway  
7 Island and into Travis again, a trip that theoretically should have taken six or seven days,  
8 but because of the mechanical inadequacies of the C-133, frequently took two weeks or  
9 more. Again I was a bachelor, didn't care, matter of fact, just as soon have been out in  
10 the Pacific flying and seeing the sights as being back in California. Let's see somewhere,  
11 in about 1964, there was a situation where the airlines were beginning to transition very  
12 rapidly from propeller driven airplanes to jet, particularly the Boeing 707 and for that  
13 reason, they were looking for transport pilots four-engine qualified pilots. Many, many,  
14 many of the guys in my squadron, which by the way was the 84<sup>th</sup> Air Transport  
15 Squadron, ATS, were completing their first four year commitment from pilot training and  
16 were getting out of the service to take those opportunities with the airlines. I was  
17 approaching my four years, wasn't quite there yet, and in any case really had decided that  
18 I didn't want to fly New York and Kansas City for the rest of my life and would prefer an  
19 Air Force career, so I wasn't really interested in getting out. The point of making that  
20 point is that I was approached by my squadron operations officer to go to Squadron  
21 Officer's school which is the first of three formal Air Force schools that are conducted to  
22 sort of, oh we called it re-bluing. Just get you up to speed on the latest philosophies and  
23 processes and programs in the Air Force, and just professional development kind of a  
24 school. I was not eligible, I was too junior even to go to that first school, but no one else  
25 in the squadron was taking the slot that came down for the school because they were all  
26 planning on getting out. So I was asked if I would like to go and I said yes and actually  
27 went on a waiver because I was again, too junior. Great school, at Maxwell Air Force  
28 Base in Alabama, run on a seminar basis so I think about a dozen guys in each seminar  
29 got to be very close, again, lots of athletics, lots of parties, lots of good academics,  
30 speaking skills, reading and writing skills, planning exercises, leadership development  
31 exercises, little scenarios that they threw at us to see how we reacted. Just a great school

1 and the long and the short of it is that when I graduated from that school, I think about  
2 three months later, it's much, much shorter now. I think, but back then it was about a  
3 three month TDY, I was pretty well fired up and the Vietnam War was starting to  
4 accelerate a little bit at least, and so the long and the short of that is when I got home to  
5 Travis, not too long afterwards I volunteered to go to Vietnam. This would have been I  
6 guess, best I remember mid-65, I suppose, maybe even Spring of '65 I guess I should  
7 have a better handle on that date, but I don't right off the top of my head, somewhere in  
8 Spring of '65. I think and it wasn't too long after that, that an assignment came down,  
9 you know, assigning me to Vietnam, let's say late summer perhaps of '65. The  
10 assignment orders, said that I was going to be flying an airplane called an O-1, and kind  
11 of amusing story, I thought to myself, gee, that's interesting, never heard of an O-1 of  
12 course. And so I thought wow I had volunteered for C-123s, transports, figuring my  
13 skills would translate most directly there, and I thought that there was actually a typo in  
14 the message and I had been assigned to A-1s, which are old Douglas fighter-bombers  
15 from the Second World War era, but which were being used to good effect in Vietnam,  
16 but I found out that no, there really was an O-1 and that's what I was going to fly. So in  
17 the course of time, transitioning from the receipt of orders to the report date, finally left  
18 Travis late in '65 and reported to Hurlburt Field near Fort Walton Beach in Florida for  
19 training in the O-1. A little more than the airplane, actually training in the O-1 training in  
20 counterinsurgency warfare, the COIN school was there, counterinsurgency school was  
21 there, training in close air support procedures, so the whole package of what we were  
22 going to have to anticipate in Vietnam was being presented to us there at Hurlburt.

23 SM: Before we get too deeply into the training you receive at Travis, I wanted to  
24 ask you a couple of questions about the training earlier. Now, the survival training you  
25 received prior to going to Travis, at the time did you find it to be effective?

26 MM: Yes, it was tremendous, as I said extremely realistic, of course it had, just  
27 as a matter of interest, even though I was going to Vietnam, it had a SAC focus to it, it  
28 was primarily designed for SAC bomber crews in anticipation, as we know today and of  
29 course I think back then it was probably a big secret. But a lot of their missions were one  
30 way, they were going to go into Russia, they were going to drop something and they were  
31 going to bail out or crash land, or they were going to get shot down in one place or an



1 other, so the focus really was on a SAC kind of a survival thing. Being shot down in  
2 European style terrain, having to deal with Western European kinds of people, maybe  
3 winding up in a Russian or Eastern European prisoner of war camp and that sort of thing,  
4 but to answer your question directly yes, I thought they did a terrific job there, the  
5 instructors were top notch, the philosophy that they taught under was great, interesting  
6 story, the commandant whose name is probably in the history books somewhere, I don't  
7 remember, was an Air Force Colonel who had actually been shot down in Korea and had  
8 crawled out of North Vietnam [Korea] to South Vietnam [Korea] [I said Vietnam, but  
9 Korea is obviously correct], some hundred and fifty, two hundred miles, an amazing trek,  
10 had lost both his feet to frostbite, and he walked if you didn't know it then you'd never  
11 notice. But he walked without any cane or anything on two wooden feet that he sort of  
12 swung on hinges, the only way you could tell I she had an odd gait because he had to  
13 swing the foot back and forth every time he took a step. But just an amazing guy and a  
14 lot of the instructors were similar. A lot of the enlisted men were like mountain men  
15 guys from West Virginia and Tennessee and what not, that really knew the outdoors and  
16 what not, but everything considered, unarmed combat, we had the Air Force karate  
17 champion was assigned there, I remember a young black fellow, very pleasant guy but a  
18 really good instructor and his staff were the unarmed combat instructors, so everything  
19 was just first rate, well then and even to this day my recollection is that it was just a  
20 terrific school.

21 SM: And how about the training you received just prior to getting your orders in  
22 terms of the staff training that you received with the school.

23 MM: SOS, very good, a lot of fun, as I said, it was seminar so we got to be very  
24 tight with one another, a lot of the guys were married and the wives were there. So it  
25 seemed like there was a party every night, somewhere after class, athletics were very big,  
26 we played a couple of Air Force invented games, one was called flickerball. It was kind  
27 of a soccer, basketball combination, which I don't know if they still play it or not, and  
28 soccer, basketball, football, all three rules mixed together in the field game. We played a  
29 lot of regular soccer, a lot of softball, there was a program called something Ten, I can't  
30 think of the name of it [It was 10 BX], it was kind of an obstacle course, a really  
31 complicated obstacle course brain game thing. You show up somewhere with a ladder

1 and a coil of rope and then your task would be to accomplish something, get across a  
2 stream which appeared to be impossible with those two tools, but we put our heads  
3 together and figured out how to do it, and I guess that brings the point up, that a lot of it  
4 was teaching cooperation, working together. But again, first class seminar leaders, a  
5 great curriculum, tremendous guest speaker program. All top notch people, you want to  
6 talk personnel, if we were studying the personnel system we got the chief of Air Force  
7 personnel would fly down and give us a two hour blurb and two hours of questions and  
8 answers in what we called the big blue bedroom, which was a big blue auditorium. But  
9 terrific and again it fired me up enough to where when I got home I volunteered to go  
10 Vietnam so I guess they did their job pretty well.

11 SM: And the, again the training you received about three and half, four years,  
12 previously, survival training that is, did you find again the emphasis seemed to be SAC or  
13 was it TAC or good units?

14 MM: It was SAC, but again I never had to use it so I was never able to make a  
15 field evaluation of my training, but my impression was certainly that it certainly would  
16 have, both in terms of real knowledge and in terms of survival attitudes would have  
17 certainly been useful had I had to use it, yes.

18 SM: And the Squadron Officer School was again, a SAC emphasis?

19 MM: No, much more, no the whole Air Force, no we'd have SAC week and then  
20 we'd have TAC week and then we'd have air training command week were we studied  
21 each of those. It was a broad brush of the whole Air Force.

22 SM: Well, when you received your orders, to go to Vietnam, what did you think,  
23 were you happy?

24 MM: Yes, I certainly was, I was curious at the same time as to what the O-1  
25 training and the job was going to be like, but I wanted to go and I think the fact that I was  
26 going into an airplane other than a transport probably was exciting to me, because I knew  
27 that the transport job, relatively, was going to be benign. Although some of the 123 guys  
28 flying Ranch Hand and the aerial defoliation missions and flying support missions later  
29 into places like An Khe certainly wouldn't have said it was benign. But generally,  
30 particularly in those days it was going to the larger air fields and simply hauling people  
31 and cargo, so it looked like it was going to be a more exciting job, which again, for a

1 twenty-five year old young guy, was fine. I had no apprehension or anything, just really  
2 wanted to go see what it was.

3 SM: What did your family think?

4 MM: Well, we discussed that a little bit the last time. Obviously, apprehensive,  
5 my dad particularly having been associated with the Navy and seeing directly some  
6 operational stuff on aircraft carriers was very concerned. He had also, again as I  
7 mentioned last time, worked at the Navy Yard in Brooklyn there during the Second  
8 World War and of course the stories coming back from the war and films and all of that  
9 sort of thing weren't that far away in his mind. So he was quite concerned and my mom  
10 too, but I was going to do it and this may not be the time, it may be a little premature, but  
11 as long as we're on it, I actually downplayed the whole thing considerably in letters home  
12 and all of that sort of thing, you don't have to tell them everything.

13 SM: Absolutely and that's certainly something that's consistent with a lot of  
14 veterans. Now, you said you weren't sure at first when you received your orders, they  
15 said that you were going to be flying an O-1, you thought maybe it was a typo or  
16 something, what went through your mind when you finally learned that yes, this was the  
17 aircraft was what it was, a single engine.

18 MM: No problem, it sounded very interesting, I was getting out of airlift into  
19 tactical operations and both from a purely interest point of view and from a career point  
20 of view where diversity has always been considered positive, it looked like a good idea to  
21 me so I was quite pleased.

22 SM: You weren't at all concerned, that here you're going from a nice, good-sized  
23 aircraft, multi-engine to a single prop, slow low flyer?

24 MM: No, again remember I had also said that during college they had run us  
25 through that FIP program and I had a private pilot's license, actually. Matter of fact by  
26 then it was probably upgraded to commercial, in small airplanes and occasionally had  
27 been flying small airplanes right out of the Aero club there at Travis. So I was very  
28 comfortable in a light airplane, and even a, what we call a tail dragger, the older style  
29 with a tail wheel, which are a little more difficult to control on the ground, but that was  
30 all I had flown so I was perfectly happy with that, and got happier as I went through the  
31 training at Hurlburt because it was really exciting.

1           SM: Why don't we talk about that, what were the most important things that you  
2 thought they covered at Hurlbert when you went through the counterinsurgency and the  
3 flying training?

4           MM: Well, the counterinsurgency thing, probably the least interesting because I  
5 think I'd probably had enough of it by then, one place and another was sort of the  
6 political underpinnings of counterinsurgency and guerilla warfare and all of that. I'd had  
7 a lot of that at Squadron Officer's School and I was getting pretty tired of the guerilla war  
8 philosophy and all of that. Not that it wasn't valid, but just I'd heard it all but the  
9 procedural things that they taught, the methods used by fighter pilots, their limitations,  
10 their capabilities, the limitations and capabilities of the varieties of ordnance that we were  
11 going to use, all extremely important because I was basically clueless about those kinds  
12 of things. So that was very important that we be taught that a fighter can't necessarily  
13 drop a bomb from a certain altitude at a certain glide angle, they have parameters that  
14 they have to meet. I guess I sort of knew that, but it was certainly hammered home at the  
15 school.

16           SM: Just a real quick question, did you find that the fighter capabilities and the  
17 bomber capabilities were more restrictive than you initially thought, or less restrictive?

18           MM: More, I thought, I guess naively by that time, that fighters almost could do  
19 anything and it just isn't the case. It's not close actually, both in terms of weather and  
20 speeds and angles and time that they need to get set up to do various things and fuel  
21 considerations, all kinds of things that had never really entered my head because they  
22 didn't have to, now certainly did because I had to be sensitive to all of those things if I  
23 was going to employ them correctly, so the school was very good in that regard. We did  
24 get a couple of rides, believe it or not, in A-1s, again because they were also training  
25 there and my first ride in a, I guess a real fighter with real guns and real bombs was in  
26 those couple of rides we took in the A-1s, again to get a feel for what it was really like for  
27 those guys to have to deliver ordnance so that was both fun and instructive at the same  
28 time. I guess we got three or four rides each, with A-1s out on the gunnery range, there at  
29 Hurlburt, but that and some very, very basic engineering and checklist kind of training,  
30 regarding the O-1 were the essence of our ground training, I mean the O-1 was so simple  
31 to fly, that basically just had a few hours for most of us and we were there.

1 SM: Could you elaborate on what you mean by engineering training?

2 MM: Just how the airplane operates, what kind of engines it's got, where the fuel  
3 pump is, and where the oil pan is and that sort of thing, how to change spark plugs if you  
4 have to, very basic stuff on that airplane obviously. But the flying side, if you want to  
5 hop to that was again, in a way simple and in a way not. Basically we flew for a few  
6 hours, most of us with an instructor just to get them comfortable that we could handle the  
7 airplane and then generally our training after that was solo in and around the Eglin-  
8 Hurlburt complex where there are any number of auxiliary air fields that you can go  
9 practice landings and takeoffs at, and ranges where you could practice shooting rockets  
10 and throwing smoke grenades which were our two primary marking tools. Fly as low as  
11 you wanted to, which was kind of fun. They had, as I think I mentioned in that written  
12 that I sent to you, they had set up on the ranges various things that you were expected to  
13 go out and try and find, trucks hidden under trees and little buildings and foxhole  
14 complexes and what not, just to train your eye I think to start looking for those kinds of  
15 things because that was a big part of the job once you got to Vietnam.

16 SM: And this was part of your VR training?

17 MM: VR training, exactly, visual reconnaissance, VR training. It's funny, I  
18 noticed on one of my flights for example, I was looking at my Form-5, which you know  
19 is a [Air Force] flying record, the actual records of all you're flying missions and time  
20 and all of that sort of thing. And I was looking at Hurlburt and one day, I think in a six  
21 hour flying day, I logged forty-six landings, believe it or not, so we were really practicing  
22 pretty hard, the takeoffs and landings to get our skills down and it was good that we did,  
23 because over there the conditions were quite primitive in some places and you really had  
24 to know what the heck you were doing with the airplane and what it would and wouldn't  
25 do.

26 SM: And just to make sure, you also received training at this point, in firing the  
27 FFAR?

28 MM: Right, a little bit of training, which again was pretty rudimentary, you very  
29 quickly, people used different techniques, there was no gun sight on the airplane, a little  
30 grease pencil X on the windshield was as good a sight as any, although actually  
31 depending on speed and angle. The X wasn't always in the right place, what you really

1 learned after a while was that if the target wasn't moving on your wind screen, in other  
2 words it wasn't going left, right up or down, then you were basically going right at it and  
3 if you were going right at it, and you fired your rockets it would usually hit quite close.  
4 Within, hard to say, but say within twenty yards or so when there would have been a  
5 decent shot at the most conditions, so we learned that very rapidly and then it was just a  
6 matter of practice until you got very comfortable with it and could do it very quickly, in  
7 other words snap the airplane from one heading to another. Maybe change altitude very  
8 rapidly, but still control the airplane so you are on target and the rocket went where it was  
9 supposed to. Harder probably was actually learning to throw the smoke grenades, which  
10 we literally just held out the window and pulled the pin on and then dropped, but to try  
11 and control the smoke grenades, nominally at least fifteen hundred feet and have it fall  
12 very close to a target on the ground, took a little more learning. So we probably actually  
13 spent more time trying to get that down, then actually firing the rockets, which again, sort  
14 of came easy after a while.

15 SM: How about Skippy bombs?

16 MM: Meaning what?

17 SM: The Skippy Jars, did you cover them up?

18 MM: Well, they didn't encourage that at the school, that was a trick we learned in  
19 Vietnam, no that was not taught there. Skippy jars was a very dangerous thing,  
20 depending on how you did it. It was dangerous in any case but if you actually pulled the  
21 pin and put the grenade in a jar and then put the lid on, and carried those in your airplane,  
22 if you ever took a bullet that broke the Skippy jar you had, depending on the fuse, three to  
23 five seconds to say your prayers and then it was going to explode in the cockpit. If you  
24 did it the smarter way, not necessarily smart, but smarter, you held the jar outside the  
25 airplane, like a smoke grenade, then pulled the pin, then screwed the lid on and then  
26 dropped it without ever bringing it inboard of the airplane, once the pin was out. It  
27 worked, it could be somewhat effective, but the effective burst range of a hand grenade,  
28 twenty-five yards or so. So again you had to get awful close to do some damage with it. I  
29 don't recall that I ever did it, to be honest with you. I had other weapons, which I used,  
30 over there, which I found more effective than Skippy jars.

1           SM: Just out of curiosity, did you ever hear of anybody having an accident like  
2 that you described?

3           MM: No, not literally, it probably happened but I don't have a story where I  
4 could actually say I actually heard of somebody who either kicked one over or stepped on  
5 it or had a bullet break it. Someone probably in the course of time did, but not any direct  
6 knowledge.

7           SM: Was there anything else that was covered, that you found helpful when you  
8 got to Southeast Asia?

9           MM: The only thing I think, and it's important is that they loosened up on the  
10 rules quite a bit, basically they said, look you guys are going into a combat environment,  
11 it's time to forget Air Force regulation 60-16, which is the basic flying regulation for the  
12 whole Air Force. Basic philosophy on flying and flying safety and so they said, look,  
13 you want to fly at fifty feet, fly at fifty feet, you want to fly the airplane slow, fly it slow.  
14 You want to go down to Fort Walton Beach and land it on the beach, go ahead. You may  
15 have to do that someday and better you try it here than when you have to, so we did. I  
16 made several landings on, not at the public beaches, but there's a lot of beach along the  
17 outer barrier islands in that area, say between Pensacola and probably Panama City. And  
18 a lot of it is actually, well is inaccessible to the public because there were Air Force  
19 installations out there, mainly radar either looking at Cuba or watching the fighter  
20 training area which was out over the water and kind of scoring and keeping track of  
21 things in the big training area, the jet fighter training area, out over the Gulf, so you could  
22 pick a piece of beach and fly down it, just above it and kind of assess the hardness of the  
23 sand. If you tried this you've got to land close to the water because the sand is harder  
24 there, because it's been wet and, get the airplane real slow and see what you can do with  
25 it, and those kinds of things, were I guess, I won't say officially encouraged. But people  
26 certainly said, you need to get the feel for the airplane, you need to see what your own  
27 limitations are and here's the place to do it, those kinds of thoughts, and so we did. Out  
28 in the range where there was nobody around you could try landings on little short dirt  
29 airfields, just see how low you could get the airplane and how slow before you stalled it,  
30 and what kind of a landing roll you could achieve. How short a landing roll you might

1 achieve, if you really push the airplane a little bit and we found out things that came in  
2 very handy later, at least I did.

3 SM: Were there any incidents where damage to aircraft?

4 MM: No, not in my class, not that I can recall. A lot of guys who hadn't flown  
5 tail dragger airplanes before were ground looping them, are you familiar with a ground  
6 loop, do you know what it is?

7 SM: Yes, sir.

8 MM: Guys would ground loop in the airplanes with pretty good regularity until  
9 they got the hang of it and usually the worst you did with a bad ground loop is you might  
10 drag a wing tip and scratch it up a little bit, more embarrassing than anything else.

11 SM: Was that a washout offense?

12 MM: No, they weren't washing anybody out at that stage, I mean you had pilots  
13 with four to five, six years under their belt, more in some cases, going through this  
14 training and it was just a matter of okay, you've never flown one of these, you've got to  
15 learn to really keep the rudders wiggling to keep the airplane straight and once you learn  
16 that, you're okay.

17 SM: I guess, when you left Hurlburt to go to Vietnam, did you feel like you were  
18 prepared?

19 MM: Yes, you're not sure because you know you're going into combat, you  
20 know you're going to war. You knew you were going to one that was of a different style  
21 than we had really ever fought before and that it was accelerating in intensity fairly  
22 rapidly by say, early '66, which is when I got there. So healthy apprehension I would  
23 say, I wasn't afraid but I was certainly, you might say keyed up, would be a better phrase,  
24 really anxious to see what it was like and aware at least that this was a no fooling around  
25 thing, that you were going to have to pay attention and not make any mistakes because  
26 any mistakes you made that were unnecessary were just going to increase the odds in the  
27 wrong direction, so I think healthy, healthy respect for the situation I think.

28 SM: When you got there, after you started your operational flying, was there  
29 anything that you came to wish they had covered better at Hurlburt?

30 MM: Let me think about that a minute, I've never thought about that? Not really,  
31 no I guess not. I guess it was very different, I guess what I'm trying to say, they could



1 not fully duplicate the situation, but they did the best they could. Particularly I guess the  
2 thing that struck me was once you got there, and got to your assignment location the  
3 feeling of being alone and on your own was intense, I mean you were it. There was no  
4 instructor to turn to, no classmates, no Squadron Ops Officer who was older and more  
5 experienced, no instructors, you could say, hey I'm not working this out too well, how  
6 about you give me a ride and show me how to do it. You were alone and that I guess was  
7 my real first impression and yet, how they could have prepared you for that, except for  
8 maybe mentioning it, you're going to feel this, you know, I don't know how they could  
9 have prepared you for that, but that was distinctly the feeling was wow, here I am, what I  
10 brought with me in terms of training and just experience is what's going to get me  
11 through this because I'm on my own.

12 SM: So when you got there, I guess we should probably discuss the trip over?

13 MM: Trip over, yes, we can. I'm not sure I remember it.

14 SM: What happened when you finished your training and went over?

15 MM: Very quickly, after training I was there for Christmas of '65, and I honestly  
16 do not recall if I zipped up to New York to see my family one last time or not, I'm sure  
17 that if I could I did, but I don't remember. In any case, either from Hurlburt or from New  
18 York I went back to Travis, by then let's see, where was I, I had actually moved twice in  
19 those four years. I left the base, which most guys did when they could because the living  
20 conditions were better downtown in a nice apartment. I got me a roommate named Fred  
21 Sanford who was a pilot in my squadron and Fred and I roomed together in an apartment  
22 down in Fairfield which is the other town that's adjacent to Travis, for quite a while.  
23 Then Fred got married and I moved back to Vacaville with a couple of guys from the  
24 squadron in a house, a real house that one of the guys had bought. He was just  
25 financing it basically by having two or three other guys move in, but we were all pilots in  
26 the same squadron. So I think I went, I know I did, I went back there and stayed there for  
27 a few days I guess and sort of put my affairs in order. Again, as I indicated in my written  
28 narrative, I was a pretty avid reader at the time, and I stuck a box of mostly spy novels,  
29 Helen McInnes and Eric Ambler and James Bond and a million others in an enormous  
30 box, actually a console television had come in it. I stuck them up in the attic and I think  
31 they're still there, I never did retrieve them. But I put my affairs in order for two or three

1 days and then basically caught my flight right out of Travis again, carrying the absolute  
2 minimum, a couple of light bags of underwear and shaving kit, and a couple of uniforms,  
3 not much else over there, a jet transport, Continental or Brannif or one of those who were  
4 all operating contract airlift out of Travis by those days. Simply moving troops and  
5 probably made a stop or two, Honolulu, [Guam] but absolutely a lost trip in my mind,  
6 totally uneventful just got there in the course of time and that was that.

7 SM: You mentioned reading material earlier in your, I guess you enjoy spy  
8 novels and things like that?

9 MM: I did then, my tastes have changed slightly since, I'm into now science  
10 fiction good stuff and science fantasy, *The Hobbit*, things like that. And a good, what  
11 they call a good English country house mystery, you know a good Agatha Christie  
12 something like that, but I still read an enormous amount. I probably still read a book a  
13 week or more and back in those days, I was probably reading two or three a week, so I've  
14 read a lot of books in my time.

15 SM: As you were getting ready to go into Vietnam, did you expand your reading  
16 into areas concerning Vietnam?

17 MM: No, I didn't at all. I think I felt that the training had prepared me, between  
18 again SOS and Hurlburt itself. I have to believe that I thought I knew everything there  
19 was to know in the sense that everything that was out there had been presented to me at  
20 some point in the recent past so I didn't do anything additional. Didn't grab a language  
21 book or anything like that and turned out I didn't need it. I think somewhere, now that  
22 you mention it, either at Travis as we got on the airplane, probably that's the case, they  
23 gave us a little pamphlet type book, it was probably four inches by four inches or three by  
24 five or something like that, maybe a quarter of an inch thick and it was a guide to  
25 Vietnam. Basic, in fact the Air Force I think or the government, probably the Air Force  
26 back in those days had a whole series of these if you were going overseas, you could get  
27 one on Turkey or Germany or wherever you happened to be going, a little bit of the  
28 history and customs and how to behave and I guess a very basic, pointy talky kind of a  
29 thing in the back with language. I do remember that because the front cover of it had a  
30 picture of a Vietnamese peasant women with a pointed straw hat working in a field, that  
31 was what was on the cover. Funny the things you do remember, when you're prompted

1 by questions, again you know I could talk any one of these phases I could probably talk  
2 to you for three weeks on any one of them, depending on details and what not, just yes, I  
3 do remember that little book, so I guess I read that on the airplane on the way over.

4 SM: Now, what did you think was going on in Vietnam when you left?

5 MM: When I left, what did I think was going on in Vietnam? I thought it was  
6 basically a civil war, that there was a civil war in progress with aid on one side from the  
7 North Vietnamese Communist government, and I think in '66 that's probably pretty close  
8 to accurate. I wasn't totally naïve because I had been flying in there in the 133 as I hinted  
9 since '63, very early '63. I knew that the government that we were supporting was in  
10 many ways corrupt, very typical of at least mainland Asian historical government  
11 approaches. Which again in, my little notes, I said the peasants were just trying to bring  
12 in a crop of rice and watching one side romp across their farm from South to North, and  
13 the other side romp across their farm from North to South, trampling the rice and that had  
14 probably historically been the lot of the Asian peasant. Whether it's Chinese or Burmese  
15 or Vietnamese or Cambodian since forever. The government was in the hands of a very  
16 wealthy, elite, previously French supported ruling class, basically a, well not quite a  
17 monarchy, I guess an oligarchy is closer. A feudal system, the province chiefs, not  
18 province chiefs, the corps areas, I Corps, II Corps, III Corps and IV Corps were run by a  
19 Corps commander who basically operated like a Chinese warlord. He owned that area  
20 and as long as he made the appropriate physical and financial bows to the government in  
21 Saigon he was allowed to do what he wanted pretty much in his area and within his area  
22 he had province chiefs and they were the petty warlords, very medieval, feudal kind of  
23 system, almost and I knew that. I don't think it bothered me much, I thought that again in  
24 '60, you have to understand the political philosophies, Korean War was just barely ten  
25 years over, in fact was never over and still isn't over, technically. The idea of the domino  
26 principle and the Communism attempting to dominate the world step by step was very  
27 real in our minds and we believed it. I think it's true that that was the philosophy, they  
28 just never were able to execute it, so I knew, or at least believed that I was going into a  
29 situation where the effort was probably worth it. Even if the individuals that we were  
30 going to save weren't, at least at the top. The peasants are always peasants and they're  
31 always worth saving, but the best thing you can do for them is get away, or go away.

1 SM: Now, that's what you thought before you left, did your opinion change over  
2 time?

3 MM: I actually think I got better, by the time I left I think my opinion was better  
4 all the way around. I had a better opinion of the Vietnamese who I had met at every  
5 level. I think it's fair to say that after a couple of coups, the leadership that was in place  
6 when I left in Vietnam, was a better leadership than the one that was there when I got  
7 there. Probably not by great orders of magnitude but I think they were more interested in  
8 actually fighting a war then they were in lining their pockets, not entirely but let's say  
9 more. The Vietnamese officers and enlisted men who I knew, were I found very  
10 dedicated soldiers and a lot better fighters than most people gave them credit for. In any  
11 case considering the fact that some of them had been at it for their entire life with the  
12 French, Japanese, us, God knows who else. So I had a much higher opinion of them, the  
13 Vietnamese people, the ordinary people I liked quite a bit, they were like most people,  
14 just decent people. The farmers that I ran into, and even people in Saigon that shot  
15 people and people in restaurants and bars and what not, were all decent people. So I  
16 think my opinion of the people certainly was higher than when I got there. My opinion of  
17 the war, at that point I think I thought we were winning and could win, but again that was  
18 February of '67, before the big problems that came, starting with Tet of '68 then running  
19 on into '70 and beyond. I guess the truth of it now that you mention it and you think  
20 about it, I think most of us had a much lower opinion of our leadership at home than we  
21 did of the people in Vietnam. I think we thought our leadership were weak and wimpy  
22 and overly cautious and nervous and overly involved in the war fighting effort, people  
23 like McNamara and what not and even Lyndon Johnson. I don't think we had then, nor  
24 do I today have much of an opinion of them, at least in regard to how the war was  
25 prosecuted.

26 SM: At the time, as you were getting ready to go over to Vietnam, a couple of  
27 important events domestically as well, with a lot of civil rights activism, and of course  
28 the assassination of President Kennedy, how did those events affect you?

29 MM: Assassination of Kennedy didn't affect me much at all, simply because I  
30 was so busy at the time, just trying to, a whole new life for me, he was assassinated  
31 somewhere in '63 wasn't it?

1 SM: Yes, sir.

2 MM: Yes, so October wasn't it, I don't know?

3 SM: November.

4 MM: Yes, so I was fairly new in the airplane, new in terms of making a real  
5 paycheck and running my own life I guess, and those sorts of things. So it obviously  
6 affected me like it affected anybody else, but not in any real sense, more emotionally than  
7 in any real sense and life goes on. The government continues and Johnson moves on so it  
8 didn't have much of an effect, the civil rights thing, I think at that point was still fairly  
9 low key, the hippies down in San Francisco were more amusing than they were  
10 dangerous. It's too strong is why I'm hesitating to say it, but the moral decadence that I  
11 think was to come in later years that began in the '60s wasn't all that apparent at the time.  
12 I think now back on the movies of the '60s, they were kind of cute immoral. The mini  
13 skirts and the sort of innuendo kind of humor that was starting to occur in the movies and  
14 what not was still sort of amusing. It hadn't picked up a true decadent sort of a nature to  
15 it, that I think started to occur as the war became less popular, maybe '68, '69, '70. The  
16 hippie movement became more of an angry anti-war, anti-country movement, you had the  
17 Chicago convention riots, you had people like McGovern running for president, which  
18 started to polarize the country, not that it's his fault. He thought the way he thought, but  
19 a real polarity in the country started to arise just slightly after my Vietnam time. I think  
20 you're seeing it this morning as we speak, the country has since those days, let's say if  
21 you look very broadly from the late '50s where we had our differences but we were one  
22 country to today where we have our differences and we really aren't one country any  
23 more, we're very polarized. I think that occurred through the '60s and Vietnam was  
24 certainly a strong element in, well encouraging isn't quite the right word, but facilitating  
25 that polarization. It may have even been the focal element, I don't know, historians will  
26 figure that out. Anyway, where were we? So, the answer is that I wasn't much affected  
27 by any of that is what you were looking for and that's the answer. I knew it was going, it  
28 didn't look all that dangerous or virulent at the time, I had my own things to do, and it  
29 was not a problem, for me at least.

1           SM: Well what led you to, you made the statement about McNamara and  
2 Johnson, would you describe a little bit more in detail, what you thought about their  
3 policies from the Gulf of Tonkin in '64, up to the time you were leaving for Vietnam?

4           MM: No, I can't because my opinions of them really are based on post-Vietnam,  
5 post my time. In other words when I was back flying the 133 and the war was still  
6 continuing and I could see it going towards failure and of course I felt like I had  
7 contributed and I knew guys who had contributed a lot more than I did, and these guys  
8 were letting those contributions and efforts go down the drain. So while I was there I was  
9 essentially content with the political situation, not sure I thought about it much because I  
10 thought we were working in the right direction. We were building up, we were fighting,  
11 we seemed to be intent on winning at least until Tet of '68, by which time I'd been home  
12 a year. Which is another story we'll get to, because by then I was really in Korea for the  
13 Pueblo crisis, but that comes later. So my time in Vietnam I didn't have those feelings,  
14 those feelings came much later, like the in '70s I think when it was obvious that we were  
15 not intending to win, that we were looking for a way out, honorable or otherwise and so  
16 that's when the negativism started to come in. That coupled with my opinion, which I  
17 still hold that the political leadership got much too involved in the details of military  
18 operations and that's never good. They can certainly set the stage, and that's their job  
19 and set the tone, but they ought not to be, deciding whether you fire to the left of fire to  
20 the right or what, and they were doing that and McNamara was a key architect of that  
21 because he actually believed I think that you could run a war on business principles. And  
22 you know that's idiotic as history and even, he has admitted, unfortunately many, many  
23 years too late, it was an idiotic idea.

24           SM: What did you think about some of the incremental policies, the incremental  
25 bombing?

26           MM: Mistakes, clearly.

27           SM: But at the time?

28           MM: Yes, even at the time, but those again came after my time, but yes those are  
29 part of those elements that began to raise a level of dismay, at least dismay and disgust  
30 with me about the leadership as the subsequent years went on. Incrementalism just  
31 doesn't work in a war, you've got to make a leap and get the other guys attention because

1 if you go incremental, he's just going to incrementally adapt, which is exactly what the  
2 North Vietnamese particularly were able to do.

3 SM: We talked about the political leadership, why don't we go ahead and shift to  
4 the military leadership for a minute. I'm curious, this may be too far out of the  
5 experience you had in Vietnam, but what about the policy that Westmoreland put into  
6 place that is the policy or strategy of attrition, was that discussed amongst you and your  
7 fellow pilots, did you agree with that at all?

8 MM: That really was just a military translation of the political philosophy that  
9 was coming down from Washington, attrition equals incrementalism; it's the same thing.  
10 But no, we didn't discuss it at that point we were too busy with what's the target for  
11 today and what's the flight call sign and what kind of ordnance they got on them. That  
12 was the level we were working at. Plus as I indicated to you, we were so isolated that  
13 there really wasn't too many people to talk with. We haven't gotten to that yet, and it's  
14 all in the notes that I gave you, but my first assignment, best I recall and again it's almost  
15 eerie because it's surreal and almost like it didn't happen although I know it did. I know  
16 there were a number of Americans at Duc Hoa, which was the first place I went and yet I  
17 only remember one, that was my old roommate, Dave Pinsky. But I think Dave and I  
18 were the only twos FACs there at the time so we were busy and there wasn't a lot of time  
19 for political discussion. The discussions tended to center more around home kind of  
20 stuff, you might talk about sports, you might talk about your family, you might talk about  
21 what you're going to do when you go back, those kinds of things. We didn't get into any  
22 heavy political discussions over there. [Note: Dave says there were others: John  
23 Postgate, Oscar Brooks, etc. I have no recall at all.]

24 SM: Well let's go ahead and get to Vietnam then, for a little bit. What were your  
25 first impressions when you arrived, that is when you're getting off the plane and you  
26 were on Vietnamese soil?

27 MM: Okay, now understand we landed at Tan Son Nhut which is the big airport  
28 at Saigon and I had been there many time so the place was familiar to me, at least it  
29 wasn't a shock which I imagine it would have been to some people. It was not a shock to  
30 me, but even saying that, the feeling that okay, I'm really here and I'm going to be here  
31 for a year if I survive was, it was real. It was like all right, fooling around is over, this is

1 not a concept any more, this is reality. I'm here and I think we all felt that, getting off the  
2 airplane. It was hot, even in February and sticky which it always was and especially  
3 getting off an air-conditioned airplane, it just about whacks you when the door opened.  
4 My recollection of the process is vague, but I think accurate. I think we were simply  
5 guided across the ramp, a short distance, maybe a hundred yards to some buildings that  
6 were very close to the ramp area, reception area where we were greeted and processed  
7 fairly quickly. I think we were issued a sleeping bag and a few odds and ends, the first  
8 day and we were told where the Officers' Club was and told what we had to do the next  
9 day. And we went to a building that basically looked, my mind says was like a hangar,  
10 big but with no walls and just full of cots, not cots, but bunk beds, and we basically just  
11 sort of hung around that first day because they didn't have anything for us. Found a bunk  
12 and dumped our stuff and wandered over to the Officer's Club, had a few drinks and see  
13 if you could spot anybody you knew, kind of a thing. On the airplane going over I think  
14 there were at least one or two guys that were from my Hurlburt class and we sort of ,  
15 clustered together, had a couple of drinks and dinner and wandered around Tan Son Nhut,  
16 sort of got the lay of the land. Then the next day was in-processing which was a little bit  
17 more regimented, shot records and we were issued some basic gear. I think some  
18 firearms we were issued at that point an M-16 and .38 revolved and some ammunition, a  
19 very small amount, twenty, thirty rounds of ammunition. Fatigues, we were issued  
20 fatigues and basically told you can roll up your 1505s which was the Class B uniform at  
21 the time, the tan uniform and keep them if you want, or throw them away. Most guys  
22 find they don't use them while they are here and some basic personnel processing, next of  
23 kin kind of things. At some point we were told to select a code word that we were going  
24 to use if we were shot down or taken prisoner so that we could verify who we were. I  
25 remember mine was blue carbuncle, which was a title of one of Sherlock Holmes short  
26 stories. So if they wanted to really prove it was me, it was supposed to me and a safe that  
27 that then went into and the only people who knew that word until it became necessary to  
28 use it. Some transportation scheduling to get us to our units, very, very basic and again  
29 very vague in my mind as you can tell by the way I'm sort of mumbling, but we were  
30 there for I think two days, a day and a half, not much more and I got on a bus at the  
31 appointed time and was driven over to Bien Hoa Air Base which wasn't very far. An



1 hour drive probably, maybe not even that much and that was my first look at, at least part  
2 of the real Vietnam. That is to say a Vietnam outside of a military base which had  
3 always been my experience in the past, even flying in previously or downtown Saigon  
4 being a big city, not quite the same as the boondocks. So we got to see a little bit of the  
5 countryside on the way over to Bien Hoa and that was somewhat of a surprise to me, but  
6 not much either because again I'd been flying in Asia for four years and I knew what  
7 poor Asia looked like, whether it was Taiwan or rural Japan or Thailand or whatever. I  
8 knew what to expect, dirt roads and open sewers and houses made out of whatever and  
9 people who looked like farmers and didn't wear shoes and that sort of thing. So not a  
10 great shock but interesting clearly, because this was going to be where we were going to  
11 be for a year so I paid attention on the bus ride on over and then they dropped me at my  
12 unit which was the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS, Tactical Air Support Squadron. And the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS, and I  
13 never bothered getting myself too acquainted with the structure because it didn't matter  
14 to me, but now as an aside, as I think you know, I at least volunteered to do the 19<sup>th</sup>  
15 TASS portion of this FAC book that we are going to try and write as a result of the  
16 reunion that you were at. So I'm going to get more into what was the structure and who  
17 was the leadership at different periods of time, but basically it was just a small building,  
18 the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS administratively, and I guess to some degree operationally controlled all  
19 the forward air controllers in the III Corps area. And I was going to be in the III Corps  
20 area as it turned out, so that's where they sent me and indoctrination there again was  
21 quite brief. I think I only spent one night, maybe two there at Bien Hoa, again in a  
22 transient barracks, very basic sort of a thing. Spent some time at the club at the bar, had  
23 dinner, ran into interestingly, one of the guys I had lived with in Vacaville. Actually the  
24 guy who owned the house that we lived in, Bob Hilvers, Bob was there flying the U-10  
25 which is a kind of a semi-CIA kind of an airplane, a Pilatus. I think a Pilatus Porter made  
26 in Sweden or somewhere Finland, Sweden I believe but he was flying, it was a  
27 propaganda kind of an airplane. It had loudspeakers on it, it could drop leaflets, things of  
28 that sort and he came limping down the street because he had taken a couple of pieces of  
29 shrapnel during a mortar attack about three days before on Bien Hoa. So we talked for a  
30 few minutes, he was going some place, had to be there, and I was going some place and  
31 had to be there so we only talked a couple of minutes and I never saw him again as it

1 turned out. The indoctrination there at the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS was again, very basic, you know  
2 making sure you had what you needed, the right uniforms, fatigues, the right weapons, all  
3 the paperwork had been filled out correctly, you understood where you were going, what  
4 you were going to do, who the boss was and what their function was and that sort of  
5 thing. I don't think they even gave me a check-flight, I don't recall one, they had  
6 airplanes there, but I don't even recall anybody saying, can you just show us if you can  
7 fly the airplane. I guess they assumed that and this was before the days of the in-country  
8 FAC school, which I'm sure you've heard about. Just before that so I did not go to that,  
9 wasn't there. I think it probably came just months later, but I did not go to that, I just  
10 went straight, after we figured out that I wasn't getting anything done at Bien Hoa that  
11 needed to be done. They said well, where you're going is Doc Hoa, and I said that's  
12 interesting, tell me where that is, they showed me on a map and one morning, either the  
13 second or third morning I'd been there, I don't really remember, a helicopter, Army  
14 helicopter came by, picked me up and we went wakita wakita in the helicopter out to Duc  
15 Hoa, which was, from Bien Hoa about a half hour plane ride. Couldn't have been any  
16 more than that, probably less, more or less straight west from the Saigon-Bien Hoa  
17 complex there, just a little old airfield. Somebody told me that the Japanese had actually  
18 built it during the Second World War, but that may or may not be true, in a little town,  
19 rice fields and mud and water buffalos, typical place with a very small compound where  
20 the U.S. advisors, both Army and the FACs lived for their year out there in company with  
21 the leadership of the local Vietnamese military unit, which is going to take some  
22 explaining. But before I do that, I think again in my written narrative I said when a  
23 helicopter landed on a little PSP, pierced steel, actually it was PAP, pierced aluminum  
24 planking I think, ramp that was there by the runway. The local FAC came out to meet me  
25 because he'd been told I was coming, and turned out to be my pilot training roommate  
26 Dave Pinsky, who by the way just for interest, Dave turned out to retire as a Brigadier  
27 General and I think he was the wing commander of the SR-71 wing at Beale Air Force  
28 base in California when he retired. And again I saw him at the FAC reunion so that was  
29 nice but back to the story. So Dave met me, said, 'hi, nice to see you and this is the way  
30 you're going to be for the next year' and he walked me across the ramp to a new  
31 construction. They had just started to kind of try and build this place up a little bit, the

1 runway was being improved and there was some very nice, newly painted cement block  
2 barracks, and office buildings and cement sidewalks and all of that sort of thing, nice  
3 clean trash barrels outside. Actually quite spiffy for Vietnam, looked real nice and my  
4 room was nice and clean, linoleum tiles kind of a floor. A very nice, fan going, may have  
5 even been an air conditioner, but I don't think so, nice little mess hall and what not. So,  
6 that was the environment there, the mission basically was to be the forward air controller  
7 for Hau Nghia, and that's spelled H-A-U, second word, N-G-H-I-A, Hau Nghia province,  
8 which was where Duc Hoa was located and we were to be the FACs for that province and  
9 for the Vietnamese regiment as best I understand it, of the 25<sup>th</sup> Vietnamese division  
10 which was also responsible for that province. The 25<sup>th</sup> Division, three regiments, being  
11 also responsible for Tay Ninh province which was the province to the north and Long An  
12 province which was the province to the south so that was how it was structured. We were  
13 smack in the middle of the Vietnamese structure in other words. We were not working  
14 for Americans, we were not associated with Americans, except a couple of American  
15 advisors to that regiment who also lived at Duc Hoa. But our boss was the province chief  
16 basically, or at least the man we were there to support and answered to, was the  
17 Vietnamese province chief and the Vietnamese regimental commander there. So, that  
18 was the story and basically we did, everyday pretty much, sometimes more than once a  
19 day, we would go out and fly visual reconnaissance. The terrain was as flat as a board  
20 and very swampy in Hau Nghia province. Almost no towns, most of it was free fire, if  
21 not all of it was free fire zone, it was on the west side of a river, Vam Co Dong I believe  
22 is what it was called, which means, there was a Vam Co Dong and a Van Co something,  
23 and it just means the Vam Co river east and the Vam Co river west. Anyway, it was  
24 basically and everything between that river and the Cambodian border which was the  
25 other limit of Hau Nghia province, farther to the west was just a big open swamp free fire  
26 zone with a couple of little towns. Most of them clustered along the river itself, so we  
27 went out and did reconnaissance and more or less true, with some judgment occasionally,  
28 anything that moved out there you shot at. And we tried to find VC, very few if any  
29 NVA out there, just local Vietcong, either trying to move through the area or trying to  
30 build something in the area or trying to mass some sort of a force that could harass a town  
31 or an outpost of some sort, a village outpost or what have you. So our job was to

1 basically keep their heads down I guess, in plain and simple English that was it. Keep  
2 them nervous and eliminate as many of them as we could and so we did reconnaissance  
3 and when we found targets we would pre-plan air strikes through the direct air support  
4 center also at Bien Hoa. And if we found something moving that we hadn't anticipated,  
5 why we'd try to get an immediate air strike, again communicating through our radios,  
6 either directly or through the radio at Duc Hoa to the direct air support center. The long  
7 and the short of it was I wasn't there very long. I was there, I don't really know, but I  
8 think about a month and a half and it's all very weird to me, again I know I must have  
9 met people other than Pinsky, both Americans and Vietnamese and I can't put a face or a  
10 name on one of them. So I may have been in some sort of emotional shock without really  
11 realizing it although I don't feel like I was, but I sure don't remember much about that  
12 place and what happened. There is that a pilot whose name I have recorded but I don't  
13 have in my head, down at the southern province, Long An, city of Tan An, capital of  
14 province Long An, FAC down there of whom they were two, got shot one day. Took a  
15 bullet up through his seat, to be indelicate about it and was very badly wounded and was  
16 sent home and never came back--he didn't die, but he was very badly wounded. So for  
17 whatever reason, pipeline or what not, I guess they thought they needed to send me down  
18 there. They meaning the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS and they were gouging to send somebody else to  
19 Duc Hoa, so I was told one day, jump in an airplane, Pinsky and I, and Dave's going to  
20 take me down to Long An, Tan An and I was going to be the FAC down there for the rest  
21 of my career. So we did that and Dave went back to Duc Hoa and I didn't see him again  
22 for endless years, but I was met there at another very primitive airstrip, it was really just a  
23 wide spot in the road about a thousand feet long with a PAP ramp where they had some  
24 fifty-five gallon fuel drums sandbagged. And we pumped our own fuel with a hand  
25 pump through a chamois cloth into the airplane, it was that primitive, but I was met by a  
26 guy named Pete Bernstein-- it's comical in a way. Comical isn't the right word, but both  
27 of these guys were Jewish by the way and back in those days there weren't that many  
28 Jewish officers in the military or in the Air Force, but Dave was Jewish and so was Pete.  
29 I don't know if that's relevant, but it's interesting --but Pete met me and we got to be  
30 good buddies for again, only about a month a half, two months. Pete was like Dave, very  
31 aggressive pilot, very good pilot, nice guy to know and we lived and flew together at the

1 town again of Tan An, the province of Long An, airfield I think was known as Long An  
2 as well. But I could be wrong about that and we lived in a slightly different situation, my  
3 memory of that is just a tad better than of Duc Hoa. Mission was essentially the same,  
4 visual reconnaissance, keep their heads down, find them and kill them when you could,  
5 basically. But we lived in town and the town was quite a nice little town for Vietnam,  
6 little rural town but quite nice, a couple of decent little restaurants, very primitive, but  
7 decent, a river flowing through it, some bridges, a soccer field, quite a nice little place.  
8 We lived in a two-story, I think it was two-story it may have been three, house right on  
9 the soccer field and this house was given over to the U.S. military advisory detachment of  
10 which there were for some reason more people than there were at Duc Hoa, probably  
11 because the facility was there, so there was an Army Colonel in charge of the Army  
12 Advisory detachment to the province chief who lived in a palace a just down to the right,  
13 at one end of the soccer field. And a whole range of officers advising the province in  
14 various fields, logistics and intelligence and what not, there were captains and  
15 Lieutenants and Majors and what not, but just two FACs, just me and Pete. And we lived  
16 in the house I had a room with an Army guy and we lived there, I would say quite  
17 comfortably. We had the maids and the cook and we ran our own mess. Somebody went  
18 to Saigon once a month or every couple of weeks and hit the commissary and came back  
19 with all the essentials and we made our own meals, or had the cook make them, more or  
20 less identified what they would be. Had laundry service and the rooms were comfortable,  
21 played cards at night, watched movies, just talked, drank again as is usual probably more  
22 than we should have. Not to excess I would say because you had to fly every day, but  
23 you sat and had three for four drinks every night, certainly. Talked about this and that,  
24 but again not politics, talked about home and what are you going to do and how was your  
25 day and what's going on in the province, those kinds of things. Again, the stories but a  
26 lot of the stories I remember are in that written document I gave you. Particularly for  
27 Vietnam I think I took more time to try and remember as much as I could about kind of  
28 the funny or not-so-funny stories, but in any case and maybe we can, go ahead.

29 SM: Well, I was just going to say, can I ask you a couple real quick questions,  
30 focus on a couple of issues. In your time at Duc Hoa, you mentioned that although it was  
31 a brief period, you had a lot of operational experience, lot of visual reconnaissance and

1 things like that. You also mentioned in the written document that you were able to call in  
2 a number of different types of fire, artillery, air strike, and others, did you find, what type  
3 of fire did you find more effective, did you not like to fire a particular type of fire?

4 MM: Okay, well I didn't care, if I needed to do it, I just lived with whatever I had  
5 available to me at the time, but to answer your question and it will come up again  
6 probably, the least effective was artillery in most cases. The Vietnamese artillery and I  
7 never controlled to the best of my knowledge U.S. artillery while I was at Duc Hoa, they  
8 had a few guns, 105 Howitzers, located at various more or less secure places. But they  
9 weren't bedded in concrete like a gun really needs to be to be very accurate, after they  
10 fired three or four times if they jump a foot, that foot of jumping back will equate to  
11 several hundred yards on the other end, so they weren't very accurate. They tried real  
12 hard. They were competent people. They just weren't working with the very best of  
13 equipment and circumstances. As a matter of fact I made it a point to visit them, usually  
14 a Vietnamese captain was in charge of a gun position, so that we, just face to face we  
15 knew who we were and who we were talking to, sometimes that helps, and I can look at  
16 the guns and see what their problems were in terms of how much time they took and what  
17 problems they were fighting in trying to do what I was trying to get them to do. And that  
18 was very useful, primitive maps that they were trying to use and ranging and distances.  
19 They just didn't have the skills or the training to be extremely accurate, they tried as best  
20 they could. By extremely accurate I'm talking about hitting within ten, twenty yards,  
21 with artillery which is doable, a lot of people don't believe that but it is doable if you've  
22 got the right people shooting with the right equipment, namely the U.S. Marine Corps but  
23 that comes later in the story. So artillery was not good particularly if you were trying to  
24 use high explosives against a target. Now if you used air bursts it was a little better  
25 because if you could burst a shell at a couple hundred, three hundred, four hundred feet in  
26 the air and get a spray pattern of shrapnel in that open swamp, you could do some  
27 damage and I learned that and tried to use VT, vicinity timed fuses, whenever I could,  
28 just for those kinds of reasons. Also a shell hitting in the mud, by the time it explodes  
29 has lost a lot of its power, so artillery at Duc Hoa was not all that useful. Helicopters,  
30 almost all flown by U.S. people when you could get them, provided the target was  
31 reasonably soft, were extremely effective because back in those days they were all being

1 flown by eighteen year old warrant officers who were crazier than I was, and they would  
2 just do anything. And with rockets and machine guns, literally hovering over the target,  
3 ignoring potential danger was a very effective weapon provided you were talking troops  
4 in the open or lightly defended targets, things of that sort or a small wooden bridge that  
5 you needed to knock down with rockets. They were very, very good, aside from the fact  
6 that you had to sort of keep them from killing themselves at times, they were very, very  
7 effective. The airplanes ran a range because they were all different. The most accurate,  
8 far and away was the A-1 flown either by a Vietnamese or an American. The  
9 Vietnamese A-1 pilots had been flying for years and years and years and they were just  
10 unbelievably good. They knew their country, they knew the terrain, they knew the  
11 targets they knew their weapons, everything. They were just superb and they had  
12 tremendous endurance. It was a slow gasoline fueled airplane that could linger for hours  
13 under certain circumstances if you needed them to, and they carried a ton of ordnance,  
14 depending 110 pound white phosphorus bombs, which was a very effective bomb. As  
15 you've seen in the World War II [films] with the white phosphorus smoke trail, I think  
16 they could carry forty-eight of them, as I remember. It was an enormous number, so they  
17 were very effective, their only weakness is they had fifty caliber machine guns, rate of  
18 fire very slow and not as effective as a gun, as other guns were, but all in all, I would say  
19 that if I was in a fight, my preferred airplane was the A-1 without a doubt. And I didn't  
20 care whether a Vietnamese was flying it or an American, I had no trouble controlling  
21 them, language wasn't a problem. They were good and they could linger and they could  
22 drop one bomb at a time and they could see their target because they were slow, they  
23 were the best in my opinion. Right up behind them was the F-100 flown by Americans,  
24 usually out of Bien Hoa when we were talking Duc Hoa and Long An. I think more  
25 experienced [pilots], the airplane was designed for air-to-ground operations, it could  
26 deliver ordnance bombs, napalm, extremely accurately and the gun on that airplane was  
27 CBU's as well, plus the bomb units. Extremely effective and the gun was very, very  
28 effective on that airplane, 20 millimeter cannon, very accurate at least in the hands of the  
29 pilots that I dealt with, that I flew with, or had fly for me however you want to look at it.  
30 So those were the two best, far and away and I would say that everything else came a  
31 poor second, whether it was F-5s, which were the Scoshie tigers, they were the training,

1 even today the current advanced pilot [training] trainer, quick little airplane, good little  
2 airplane, but very light load. F-4, in my opinion probably the worst airplane for the job,  
3 not really designed for close air support, not as accurate as the others with any of its  
4 ordnance, bombs, napalm, guns or anything else, never was crazy about the F-4. A-4,  
5 that's one we ought to talk about, Navy, the A-4s that came off the carrier Dixie Station,  
6 out in the China Sea were very spotty. My impression was that frequently if you got a  
7 flight of four, you'd have three green bean pilots on it, who really just didn't have the  
8 experience to deliver ordnance accurately. Usually there was one old man in the  
9 squadron and you could tell just by the voice and the control and the accuracy of his  
10 delivery, which one was which in any flight, even if he wasn't calling himself lead, or  
11 what not. So the A-4 was a very capable airplane, similar to the F-100 in that it was  
12 designed for close air support in the Navy, but for the Marine Corps, but the pilots  
13 coming off Dixie station were not always in my estimation, they were just new. They  
14 just weren't experienced so it was very spotty, plus they had some weird ordinance  
15 packages, a lot of times they'd come off the station with one two thousand pound bomb,  
16 which was not the kind of ordnance I needed. Although if I was trying to knock a  
17 building down in Berlin it might have been, but not trying to kill three guys running  
18 through a swamp so. Later in my career I also ran in to the Canberra, the B-57 used in a  
19 close air support role. Not bad, not bad at all, but that was later on when I was with the  
20 Vietnamese airborne division, but that in a nutshell really I think runs down at least the  
21 airplane types. Ordnance, napalm was very good, CBU, cluster bomb unit was excellent  
22 because there were a lot of tree lines in that area, not the hedgerows but very long and  
23 that's where the VC typically dug their foxholes and hid out, twenty millimeter cannon  
24 was good for the same reason. Bombs were relatively ineffective again, because of the  
25 mud and because you had to deliver them very accurately if you're trying to blow up a  
26 bunker that's the size of a small dining room and you miss by fifty yards or even less  
27 probably you didn't get it, so bombs were not the answer there in my opinion, so I take a  
28 breath, you ask questions.

29 SM: That was great. Let me ask you this though, did you ever find that the  
30 accuracy of some of those aircraft depended upon the pilot, that is whether he was an Air  
31 Force pilot, Navy pilot or Marine pilot?



1           MM: Not to where you could make a consistent case for that, no. The answer is  
2 yes, there were certainly times when you knew you had a guy flying the airplane who  
3 was better than the guy you had twenty minutes ago, same airplane, same load, better  
4 pilot. I mean you could see that, and that's normal but not consistently, not to where you  
5 could say, except the Dixie Station. The young kids coming that appeared to me to be  
6 guys right out of Pensacola that were on their first probably operational assignment, that  
7 was my feeling anyway, never have confirmed it. Could be dead wrong, but those guys  
8 were consistently not up to it, other than that I never noticed anything in particular with  
9 airplanes.

10           SM: What about with regard to the F-4, the reason I ask is because of course  
11 Marine pilots would have been trained specifically for close air support missions, usually,  
12 versus and Air Force F-4 pilot or a Navy F-4 pilot, their role would have been, or their  
13 training may have been different so I'm curious, did you witness a difference there?

14           MM: I think I did, I think the F-4 probably did, for example, did a hell of a lot  
15 better when it went up to North Vietnam than it did trying to do close air support in South  
16 Vietnam. Navy and Marine F-4 pilots later in my career, when I was with the Airborne  
17 Division and up in the north. Yes I think they did better but I'll tell you I just think the  
18 airplane inherently wasn't built for close air support, and another problem was legs.  
19 When an airplane comes to you from somewhere and you've got a target that you want to  
20 work a piece at a time and the guys says I'm bingo fuel and you say okay, make one pass  
21 and dump everything you've got. This is not close air support as it should be practiced  
22 and many, many times that was the case with the F-4, it burned gas like crazy,  
23 particularly when it got down low, so it just was not the right airplane in my mind. The  
24 F-100 was decent, the A-4 was decent and again, the A-1 was just supreme, it was ideal.

25           SM: In terms of the fuel and other issues about loiter time, did you ever  
26 encounter other problems? For instance I recall an interview with somebody where they  
27 discussed the problem of sometimes the fast flyers would come in, the jets would come in  
28 and they had just re-fuelled, so they were so full on fuel they couldn't really maneuver as  
29 well?

30           MM: No, didn't that have that problem, you may have been talking with  
31 somebody who was FAC-ing up in the north, and I have no clue as to what their

1 environment was, except what I've seen in newsreels like anybody else. No, I never had  
2 that problem, I never had anybody who said I've got to burn some before I can start, no  
3 not that I can remember, no.

4 SM: This ends the interview with Michael Morea.

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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Michael Morea  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
January 4, 2001  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Morea. It  
2 is the 4<sup>th</sup> of January the year 2001, at approximately 8:20 Lubbock time. I am in  
3 Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Morea is in Palm Harbor, Florida. All right sir, why don't we  
4 go ahead and pick up with a discussion of your time at Duc Hoa and Long An.

5 MM: Just to provide continuity. As I said after a day or two, as best I recall at  
6 Bien Hoa just getting oriented I was told that I was going to be assigned to a place called  
7 Duc Hoa, had no idea where it was. And that a helicopter would be available on the  
8 appropriate morning to take me out there, so that is what happened. I packed up what  
9 little gear I had, uniforms and I think a couple of weapons and flak jacket and few odds  
10 and ends and met the helicopter on the ramp at Bien Hoa and took a very short ride as it  
11 turned out, basically straight west to Duc Hoa air base. And landed on a small PSP or  
12 PAP, pierced steel planking or pierced aluminum planking, ramp probably fifty yards  
13 square if it was that. I was let off and the helicopter took off and disappeared and I was  
14 standing there alone and within seconds I saw another military guy. A guy dressed in  
15 fatigues walking toward me, and before he got to me I realized that it was my old  
16 roommate, Dave Pinsky, my old roommate from pilot training. So we had a surprise  
17 pleasant reunion there on the ramp, Dave was the only Forward Air Controller assigned  
18 there at the time, and I was to be his partner. So we quickly reacquainted ourselves with  
19 what had been going on for about, I guess four years or so, that we had been out of pilot

1 training and he got me settled in. [Note: As I mentioned previously, Dave assures me  
2 this was not the case, but it's all I remembered.] By settled in I mean this, well let me  
3 describe Duc Hoa just a little bit, very primitive place. It can be found on the map, it's as  
4 I said just west of the Saigon, Bien Hoa area on the banks of a river, the name of which  
5 escapes me. But again very easy to find on a map, a runway, maybe a thousand feet long,  
6 maybe twelve hundred feet, dirt, the PAP ramp where we parked our airplane or two,  
7 depending on what we had, also had a conex box on it where we kept our ordnance, our  
8 rockets primarily and that was about it for the airfield. Immediately adjacent to the  
9 airfield were a series of buildings, they were cement block, most of them and they were  
10 almost brand new when I got there. Matter of fact within weeks of being finished, nice  
11 looking buildings, freshly painted, tile floors, windows, fans in the ceiling, very, very  
12 comfortable, even concrete sidewalks connecting them and connecting them to the  
13 common latrine that we had and the common mess hall that we had there. We, meaning  
14 myself and Dave and a few Army advisors who were there to advise the local  
15 Vietnamese. I'm not sure if we covered this but let's cover it quickly. The military  
16 structure was this way; Duc Hoa was the airfield that supported operations in Hau Nghia,  
17 H-A-U N-G-H-I-A, province. Hau Nghia was the central province of the area of  
18 operations of the 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN division, Tay Ninh province being the northern province  
19 and Tay Ninh airfield having a similar function there with similar contingent of FACs  
20 and advisors assigned. And then Long An airfield which was in Long An province,  
21 which was south of Hau Nghia and again similarly arranged, a couple of FACs and some  
22 Army advisors to advise the southern contingent of the 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN division, which  
23 operated in that province. So my job basically was, as it turned out, was to do visual  
24 reconnaissance in Hau Nghia province, try and find what the enemy, almost entirely Viet  
25 Cong, no North Vietnamese at that time to speak of, what the Viet Cong were up to Hau  
26 Nghia province. And to interdict and interrupt their operations as best we could. I'll  
27 describe Hau Nghia province just a little bit, very flat, flat as a board actually, almost all  
28 swamp, rice paddies, some dyking to separate the paddies and provide some means of  
29 transit through the swamp. The other means of transit would have been small boats,  
30 sampans really, in the canals that also crisscrossed the area, so it was basically a rice  
31 farming area or had been. However it had been long before I got there turned into what

1 was called a free fire zone, which means that, and this may not be politically accurate, but  
2 as we understood it, which meant that basically no one lived there. No one could live  
3 there and anything that moved in that area was considered a target, be it man or beast, so  
4 in that sense it was an easy place to do reconnaissance and air operations in, easy to see  
5 things if they were there, and easy to attack them once you saw them.

6 SM: And that was the case for the whole province?

7 MM: Best I recall, it was just, you'd have to look at a map, but basically that was  
8 it. It ran all the way from the river to the Cambodian border, and even into Cambodia it  
9 was still pretty much swamp. The only legal activity, so to speak, human activity in the  
10 province was right along the river and it would have been on the east bank of the river  
11 only, there was a Nuoc-Mam factory, a rather large one, Nuoc-Mam being a Vietnamese  
12 condiment similar to soy sauce but more potent, saltier and more strong in flavor made  
13 from fermented fish. So basically if you laid a fish in the sun long enough to rot, the  
14 brown juice that drips out of it is Nuoc-Mam, or at least once you clean it up and put in a  
15 bottle it is, not as bad as it sounds actually, but very strong stuff. Anyway there was a  
16 factory for Nuoc-Mam along the river, north of us and very little else. So really our job  
17 was to prevent infiltration from Cambodia into the built-up areas of Bien Hoa, Saigon  
18 and what not and that's what we did.

19 SM: One more thing about Hau Nghia it was, just to clarify, the whole province  
20 though was considered by you as a Forward Air Controller as a free fire zone, so  
21 anything moving in Hau Nghia was a target of opportunity?

22 MM: That's right and again I may be wrong on that but I don't think I am, in any  
23 case that represents my best recollection.

24 SM: Now the intelligence briefings you received concerning that province, did  
25 They focus primarily on the presence of Vietcong units, NVA units, combinations?

26 MM: My recollection is it was nothing that formal, I don't remember ever getting  
27 an intelligence briefing, any where, either at Bien Hoa, I think I might have gotten a very  
28 general sort of description of Vietnam in general and how the war was being conducted,  
29 rules of engagement, don't fly below fifteen hundred feet of course was the major rule  
30 because that was considered the effective range of small arms fire. Basic rules of safety,  
31 wear your helmet which as I think I've said already, we never did, or at least I never did

1 and things like that, but nothing in the way of detail. Everything that I recall that I got  
2 about Hau Nghia province I got from Dave Pinsky who had been there before and knew  
3 what was going on and he probably got it the same way from somebody who preceded  
4 him. Again, filling in some blanks here, as I may have mentioned at some point, and I  
5 don't know if I'd mentioned this to you verbal, or if it's in my written thing. So I'll  
6 mention it again briefly, I know, just because it had to be that way, that there were some  
7 Army people there who were advising what I call the central regiment of the 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN  
8 division, and probably the few artillery pieces that served the province, but I honest to  
9 Pete do not remember meeting them. I have no recollection of faces or names or  
10 anything of the sort, which goes to the comment that I've made before that in many,  
11 many ways the entire experience of Vietnam, particularly the first two assignments which  
12 were short is pretty surreal to me. Sort of came and went, maybe I was in a fog, I don't  
13 know, I don't think I was day to day, but maybe in a functional long term sense I was and  
14 I remember very, very little of my probably month and a half at Duc Hoa. A couple of  
15 funny stories which are again funny now, they certainly weren't funny then, but funny  
16 stories that I've recorded in the written document. The one about the Army General from  
17 the research and development command who brought the fleshette rockets out to us, and  
18 asked them to test them and all that, but I won't go into that verbally, it's all in the  
19 written document.

20 SM: Well, just for the sake of continuity within the interview, could you describe  
21 them somewhat, so that there's a little bit and people can also refer to the written  
22 document?

23 MM: Describe what?

24 SM: That particular incident.

25 MM: That incident goes this way, Dave and I were, just one day we probably got  
26 a radio call said there's going to be an Army Brigadier General visiting you today. He's  
27 coming out in a helicopter and so we were prepared for him. He came out, I remember  
28 him being a little short squatty guy, almost round in my memory, again he couldn't have  
29 been or he wouldn't have been on active duty, but that's the way I remember him, very  
30 short and very broad, Army Brigadier from research and development somewhere. He  
31 brought with him in the helicopter, or actually I think a second helicopter followed him

1 the next day, brought with him a large supply of rockets that we had not seen before.  
2 They were the same as the ones we used, 2.75 in folding fin aircraft rocket, FFAR, but  
3 the warhead, rather than a smoke or explosive which we were used to, was a pink plastic  
4 nose cone. Inside of which were hundred, if not thousand of fleshettes, which are  
5 basically nails, I remember them being a inch and a half to two inches long with fins on  
6 them, so just like little darts and when you fired this rocket, at some point in its flight, the  
7 centrifugal force acted on the pink plastic cover, blew it off and the effect of the rocket  
8 was it fired forward this mass of fleshette rockets similar to what a shotgun would do.  
9 And made a pattern of, an impact pattern, depending on your altitude the size of it would  
10 vary, but my recollection, it wasn't too big, might have been twenty yards across at  
11 normal altitudes, something like that, but the idea was that we were to test these. We  
12 were to fire them whenever opportunity arose at human targets on the ground and then if  
13 we were to kill a Vietcong we were supposed to get on the radio and call somebody, who  
14 I have no idea, and they were going to come out and recover the body and do an autopsy.  
15 It seemed a little bizarre but it was a weapon and that was what we were up to. So we  
16 took a pretty good supply of them and did use them on several occasions, tried to keep  
17 one on the airplane all the time in one tube and both Dave and I probably killed one or  
18 two VC at least, with them. Made the appropriate radio call but in fact to my recollection  
19 we never recovered, because again it was so swampy that frequently if you did kill an  
20 enemy soldier, they would just disappear in the mud and that was the end of that. So they  
21 were still there as best I know and when I left a month and a half later, and again, we had  
22 used them, they seemed to be rather effective, but again we never did recover a body and  
23 never saw the general again, and to my knowledge never had anybody at least ask me for  
24 any follow-up on it.

25 SM: Now just out of curiosity, as a forward air controller, what did you think of  
26 this attempt to adapt the O-1 which had such limited firepower ability to try to turn it into  
27 some form of a, was this for an absolute last resort you have to defend yourself weapon?

28 MM: No, no. Well, this was really a test and I think probably intended more to  
29 be used on Army helicopters ultimately and things of that sort but we were convenient.  
30 We were probably the closest airfield to the Saigon-Bien Hoa complex that was actually  
31 in an area where this sort of test could be easily accomplished because of the swampy

1 area and what not. At least that was thought initially, so they were only given to us really  
2 to test, but to go back to your point we had already, we I think meaning all FACs had  
3 long since decided that to the degree that we could, we were going to become fighter  
4 aircraft. And there are, again in my notes, there are all kinds of ideas that people came up  
5 with. Just briefly to summarize those I mean I've talked from the sublime to the  
6 ridiculous. We used our smoke rockets as attack weapons if we had to, it was white  
7 phosphorus, it is a dangerous weapon. We used high explosive rockets, we almost  
8 always carried one or two of those. I have fired on many occasions, I think it was an M-  
9 40, it might have been M-70, but I think it was an M-40 grenade launcher, shoulder-fired  
10 weapon, like a shotgun that fired a forty millimeter grenade. I frequently used that from  
11 the airplane, rather effective into tree lines, fired the M-16 on more than one occasion to  
12 effect. People did throw hand grenades, I told you I never personally did that, I didn't  
13 think that was smart, what else? We had a side mounted M-60 machine gun in one of the  
14 O-1s there at Duc Hoa and there are pictures of it available in various publications that  
15 are still on the market. So your standard Army crew served two-man I guess it was  
16 considered a light machine gun, fired the 308 NATO round I suppose.

17 SM: It was an M-60.

18 MM: Yes, M-60 machine gun and it was mounted in the back seat of the airplane  
19 as an experiment as well, and we used it on several occasions. I didn't think it was too  
20 useful for a couple of reasons and to the end, there were I told you I think in the notes,  
21 that I had a CIA guy once who just wanted to go out and see what the area looked like,  
22 Cambodia and what not who fired five rounds out of his Colt detective special at a couple  
23 of VC, so we did it all. The M-60 machine gun as long as I mentioned it, the reason I  
24 didn't like it, it was a little awkward to operate from the front seat because you had to  
25 kind of reach over into the back seat and move what I think is called the charging handle.  
26 It really operates the bolt on the gun to get a round into it and get it set up to fire.  
27 The worst thing was that most of the spent shells wound up in the airplane and they  
28 presented a real danger of getting into places where they could foul control lines and so  
29 probably more for that reason than anything else I certainly wasn't crazy about the thing  
30 and I think I only used it once or twice. But again I have two photographs of that  
31 airplane configured that way.



1 SM: Now was the machine gun on the right side?

2 MM: Shot out of the left, whoops, oh boy, I'd have to look at the pictures, my  
3 first reaction was to say that it shot out of the right side, that wouldn't make sense. The  
4 sight was on the left strut and all it was, was a little piece of aluminum and most pilots  
5 are more comfortable for various reasons making left turns than right, so I've got to  
6 believe it was set up out of the left window, but the photograph would confirm that.

7 SM: The reason I asked was because the charging handle if I recall correctly is on  
8 the right and it's extremely hard to pull back, this is not an easy weapon to lock and load.  
9 So if it were on the right side of the aircraft that would make it even more cumbersome to  
10 try to get a charge in.

11 MM: It was difficult; it wasn't the greatest idea we'd ever seen. All right so that  
12 takes us to another sort of pause point.

13 SM: Well, I'm just curious, getting back to the fleschette rockets; those were  
14 eventually employed with the OV-10 weren't they?

15 MM: I have no idea, that was the end of my experience with them, completely so  
16 anything you know is more than I know on that subject.

17 SM: I was just curious. It seems like maybe in the context of a Forward Air  
18 Controller test environment I didn't know if maybe they were putting it on the O-1 to test  
19 it, to see if it would be effective for a better platform like the O-10.

20 MM: Well, I think yes but the OV-10 didn't even exist at the time, so I think that  
21 better platform and particularly since this general is Army, would have been the  
22 helicopter.

23 SM: Well I will ask you to describe one more story based on your time at Duc  
24 Hoa and in your autobiography, the little memoir you sent me, you talk about the only  
25 hairy mission as you call it, when you were controlling the F-100s, why don't you go  
26 ahead and discuss that.

27 MM: Okay, which one was that now?

28 SM: This was in direct support of Vietnamese.

29 MM: Is that where they started shooting the mortars, that story?

30 SM: Yes, they begin firing mortars in support as well, and you were of course at  
31 a rather low altitude.

1           MM: Yes, I was really low. Well, okay I, as best I recall, it was an afternoon, it  
2 was a beautiful day as I remember, blue sky and all of that sort of thing. And we had a  
3 small unit of the local troops, probably a company, as best I remember, out doing a sweep  
4 operation somewhere in the province, and I remember them maneuvering on the ground,  
5 everything looked pretty peaceful. I think I had done some pre-strikes just to soften up  
6 the area if there was anything there and they had moved into the area and I was just doing  
7 my circling overhead, keeping an eye on them and they did run into contact. It was not  
8 what I would call heavy contact, but the small Vietnamese units in the army, they weren't  
9 well equipped, they weren't necessarily well organized or led. Although sometimes they  
10 were, a small contact usually meant stop, they weren't all that aggressive and I can't say I  
11 blame them they've been at it for a long time with very little success. In any case it  
12 quickly turned into a standoff between the two opposing units. Another factor is when  
13 the friendlies knew they had air, and I can see it from their point of view, why go charge  
14 in there and get yourself killed, when you can just sit back, call in air and have the job  
15 done that way? In any case as I recall that's what happened, it turned into a standoff. I  
16 called for some air and I think actually before the air got there, as best I remember I was  
17 trying to locate exactly where the enemy guys were and I had gotten down very, very  
18 low, literally treetop, palms were little, and so that denies I something I said earlier, there  
19 were I guess a few palm trees growing here and there, but certainly nothing like dense  
20 foliage. And they were palm trees, now that I remember. Flying right at the top of the  
21 palm trees, probably under them to be honest at some point, so I might have been twenty-  
22 five, thirty feet in the air at some point, which is good, if you're going to get low, you  
23 might as well get very low because it's very hard to hit something going a hundred miles  
24 an hour that's thirty feet in the air, what you don't want to be is in the intermediate  
25 altitudes, five, six hundred feet. That's really the most dangerous place, but in any case I  
26 was zipping around trying to spot individual targets while the F-100s were on the way, if  
27 that's what they were, again I don't remember, if that's what I said in the memoir, I guess  
28 it's true but I don't remember. Point of the story is that at some point, a friendly unit  
29 nearby started firing mortars in support of the friendly troops that were now, they weren't  
30 really pinned down, they were just sort of taking a defensive position. And they started  
31 firing mortars fairly accurately unfortunately because they were hitting in the area where

1 the hostile guys were, which happened to be exactly where I was flying. So what is today  
2 again a humorous picture that sticks very firmly in my mind is flying over shining blue  
3 water, because it was very wet in the area, shallow, but very wet because of the blue sky  
4 and these beautiful palm trees and me just sort of lefting and righting and maneuvering  
5 around between and among them. And the next thing I knew, columns of water higher  
6 than I was exploding all around my airplane and so it was a surprise and a shock and the  
7 whole thing probably didn't last, fifteen seconds, probably not that much until I got out of  
8 the immediate area and got to circling around the general area and got on the radio and  
9 called somebody on the ground and said, find out whose shooting those and either turn  
10 them off, we have to coordinate here, either get them turned off or I'm not going back in  
11 if they're going to continue to fire, whatever. And it only lasted a few seconds and  
12 nobody got hurt, but it indicates how people do get hurt, there are stories in the verbal  
13 history. You know bar room verbal history of guys getting mortar rounds and artillery  
14 rounds through their airplane on more than one occasion I think. In fact further down the  
15 road I'll tell you a story where I was involved in one, indirectly. It wasn't my airplane it  
16 was another guys and everything worked out okay there too, but that was later up at  
17 Quang Ngai, if I forget it you can remind me because I don't think that's in the memoir  
18 now that I think about it, there's so many stories. But in any case, that was just one of  
19 those things where again, it teaches you, if you're going to violate the rules, you better  
20 coordinate or sooner or later you will get hurt and it's one of those lessons you learn, you  
21 learn them very quickly. As I said by the time I left Duc Hoa, which was only probably a  
22 month and a half after I arrived, I felt like I was very seasoned Forward Air Controller, I  
23 had probably controlled a hundred or more air strikes and had made a few mistakes in  
24 terms of the weather and fuel and approach to combat situations and a lot of other things  
25 and had learned from all of those, and I thought by then was in pretty good shape  
26 mentally to do the job. So that's really all there is to that story, as best I recall.

27 SM: Well, when we first started talking you mentioned some of the, the only  
28 briefing you'd ever received regarded certain rules and things like that, don't fly below  
29 fifteen hundred feet and certain rules that were obviously broken, that was one of them.

30 MM: Yes, you had to do what you had to do. If things were normal you tried to  
31 follow that rule, fifteen hundred feet but there were times where for one reason or

1 another, you couldn't follow it. And I don't think anybody followed it all the time, if  
2 they did they probably didn't get a whole lot done. Rules in combat are a little different  
3 than rules somewhere else anyway, they're rules of thumb I suppose, or at least that's the  
4 way most of us looked at them, to be abided by whenever possible. But you know many,  
5 many years later I had an Army officer I worked for who had a saying that said, the  
6 reason they made you an officer was to break rules, anybody can read the rule book, so I  
7 guess there was some of that attitude there in all of us, and rightly so. Again, not wearing  
8 the helmet, I think very few guys at least back in the time frame, '66, '67 very few guys  
9 wore the helmet. The only thing it could protect you from was a head injury in a crash  
10 and I think we presumed that if we got to that point, we had other problems on our hands.  
11 And it really did restrict your head movement, because of its weight, your visibility,  
12 peripheral vision, because of the mass of helmet and most of all you couldn't hear things.  
13 You couldn't hear your engine as well which told you what the airplane was doing  
14 without even looking at the instruments, you couldn't hear the wind which told you how  
15 fast you were going, you couldn't hear ground fire. You couldn't hear bombs bursting,  
16 all of those things were part of the environment that we flew in particularly in the O-1  
17 which was such an open airplane that really made you one with the whole battle  
18 environment and putting on the helmet was just like putting your hands over your ears  
19 and my hand over one eye, at least in my opinion. It took away a lot of sensory input that  
20 you needed to do the job right, so very few of us wore out, I don't even know where mine  
21 went, I didn't even carry it with me most of the time.

22 SM: Was there any other equipment that you found effective in that way?

23 MM: Yes, the flak jacket was just the opposite, the flak jacket if you could get  
24 three of them, you got three of them, you sat on one, because the seat was just relatively  
25 thin metal and a bullet coming up through the bottom of the airplane would still be going  
26 like crazy when it got to you, so you sat on one flak jacket, doubled over basically. You  
27 hung one over the back seat, not the back seat literally, but the back of the front seat  
28 which would give you a lot more protection from anything coming in from the rear and  
29 then you wore one. I usually wore it loose, again just to be a little more free in the  
30 cockpit, that is not zipped up or buttoned up. I forget which it did, I think it zipped, but if  
31 you got into a more serious situation you would want to zip that up and you felt at that

1 point that you had armored yourself rather well, considering the airplane. Whereas we  
2 were issued one, we managed pretty quickly usually to find two more and I think most  
3 guys again, would have done that.

4 SM: What about other equipment that may have been debilitating in some  
5 fashion, as far as for sensory input or perhaps physical restriction?

6 MM: Nothing I can think of, every thing else was pretty comfortable. We flew in  
7 comfortable clothing; the airplane was so simple to begin with. We carried an M-16,  
8 usually I think we found some bungee cord arrangement, or we hung it. I believe there  
9 was a, what was called a C-4 light, it was a little, like a flashlight mounted in the airplane,  
10 had a white light on one end and red on the other for night, and common in almost every  
11 airplane in those days. And it was positioned to the pilot's level right just at the hinge of  
12 the door and it was convenient to hang the strap of your M-16 over it as I recall, so most  
13 guys would have had their M-16s sitting basically vertical off of their right knee and  
14 again it didn't get in the way. Well it was there if you went down, at least you something  
15 to defend yourself with, but on occasion we did use it to attack ground targets. Hard to  
16 tell how effective it was, you could tell if you hit somebody usually you didn't know if  
17 you killed them or wounded them. I wasn't going to go down and try and find out.

18 SM: While we are on the issue of equipment and weapons, were you ever at a  
19 loss for anything that you wish you had had something, but you didn't have it on hand?

20 MM: Not directly, only indirectly and it's well worth discussing. When I...now  
21 see that brings another, you ask some good questions, Steve because it triggers memories.  
22 At some point either it had to be at Saigon because that's where it was, I did get a  
23 briefing in the TACC, the Tactical Air Control Center, which was the center that  
24 controlled close air support for the entire country and the direct air support centers in the  
25 IV Corps worked subordinate to the TACC. I did a get a TACC briefing, I guess before  
26 going to Bien Hoa, that would have been that one day I spent in Saigon and the one thing  
27 I do remember. Aside from the general this is Vietnam, this is the geography and this is  
28 how we do business, which I pretty much knew already, was we got a briefing on  
29 ordnance available and in those early days, say February of '66, things were pretty bad in  
30 terms of the ordnance that was most effective. I wouldn't want to be quoted, but I guess I  
31 will be, but my recollection to be honest is that in country, in all of Vietnam, there were

1 maybe twenty-five hundred pound bombs, it was an extraordinarily low number and the  
2 emphasis in the briefing was on that fact because we were told, they're coming. They're  
3 making them, they're building them, or getting them out of depots as fast as they can, but  
4 we're using them faster than we can get them, because it was pretty much the standard  
5 weapon, five hundred pound bomb and there were very, very few. There were some  
6 others that were also in short supply, but that's the one that really sticks in my head. In  
7 general, my impression was that the good stuff was in short supply and there was a lot of  
8 stuff that you would rarely use that they had enough of. Some of the weapons were, two  
9 thousand pound bombs, they're great for knocking down six story buildings but they  
10 weren't good for what we were doing out in the swamp and some of the wire guided  
11 missiles. I think there was one called a bullpup, it was like a bomb but it was actually a  
12 missile and it was guided by a trailing wire and the thing was frequently terrible. The  
13 wire would break and the pilot would lose control of the missile and lots of times you  
14 were pretty much where it was going. I can remember one F-100 guy yelling, look out  
15 FAC, it's gone ballistic and I could see the missile just kind of corkscrewing down at me.  
16 Of course it went in the ground, a good enough distance away, so that I do remember if  
17 you're talking shortages, that's the only shortage I can think of. We had enough  
18 airplanes I think, the equipment was good, the maintenance was good, supply was good.  
19 Everything was – the rockets, okay the rockets when we were first there, there were two  
20 kinds of white phosphorus rockets. One had an warhead that was what I would call slick,  
21 in other words the contour of the rocket just smoothed to a point and it was ballistically  
22 more accurate than another one which we were using in the early going which had kind  
23 of a bulbous warhead on it that I was led to believe was actually a warhead from an Army  
24 recoilless rifle round. And it just wasn't as ballistically accurate as the one that I  
25 mentioned previously, we were given them, we were sort of told look, they're in the  
26 inventory, you've got to use them up, the faster you use them up, the sooner we'll be  
27 using just to good ones. So take them, shoot them, get them out of the inventory and we  
28 did. They weren't that bad, if you could put a slick one within twenty yards of your  
29 target on a good day, you might have put this one within forty or so, so they weren't that  
30 much worse but they were worse ballistically, I do remember that.

31 SM: What aircraft did you prefer coming in, in support?

1 MM: The A-1 definitely, closely followed by the F-100, those were definitely the  
2 two best.

3 SM: No shortages of napalm, plenty of that?

4 MM: Not that I recall, napalm was in pretty good supply and a very useful  
5 weapon where we were. When you have troops hiding in tree lines and nothing but  
6 swamp on either side, the treeline becomes a very obvious target to the fighter pilot and  
7 because it's linear, it's an excellent target for napalm and we used a lot of it, an awful lot  
8 of it, yes.

9 SM: But based on what you said earlier, sometimes that you hit enemy with your  
10 own fire whether it be from the M-16 or whatever, did you ever get any kind of ground  
11 confirmation of enemy killed or enemy injured?

12 MM: I have to think about that, I don't think so. I'm trying to think, no, not that I  
13 recall.

14 SM: But you would have to submit reports up the chain of command?

15 MM: No, we normally didn't to tell you the truth, no. Again, in those early days,  
16 an after action report was required, things changed very rapidly I think after this time  
17 frame that I'm describing. We were still in the cowboy days, to use the term more  
18 loosely than I probably should, very free to do what you wanted to do, very little to no  
19 supervision. Once I left Bien Hoa that was it, it was just me and another FAC. We did  
20 what we felt like, so after-action report was required every two weeks and they were  
21 extremely brief. I think we were asked to keep them to one sheet of paper so it basically  
22 was number of sorties flown, maybe flew ten sorties in two weeks, how many flights of  
23 fighters controlled, forty, fifty, whatever it was. Numbers and types of ordnance used  
24 and results, twenty killed in action, three wounded, five bunkers destroyed, whatever it  
25 was, very, very skeletal information and unless you had some major action to describe,  
26 that was it and a major action would probably have been more accurately described in an  
27 award write up than in an after action report. As a matter of fact, I know in my case one  
28 or two that came later events, where I did get an award, I don't think I sent a report on  
29 them at all, it was just the award write-up that somebody else did that would recover that  
30 information.

31 SM: Did you receive an award for anything that happened at Duc Hoa?

1 MM: No, air medals, one for every twenty flights, I think that was it because I  
2 didn't really do anything particularly exciting at Duc Hoa. A lot of just what I would call  
3 onesies and twosies, you'd spot two or three Vietcong out in the swamp building  
4 something or trying to move, and it'd be a simple attack. You'd get up and fly in the  
5 morning and find something hidden under some trees that wasn't there the morning  
6 before and you'd get a fighter and blow it up and things like that, very simple stuff.

7 SM: Now there were hazards to using napalm that aren't typically understood,  
8 especially when you're dealing with air breathing aircraft, and you had an incident early  
9 in the time that involved napalm, that's a pretty interesting story, why don't you go ahead  
10 and talk about it?

11 MM: All right, again, the details I don't remember what it was, it was at Duc  
12 Hoa. I was controlling I think F-100s again, almost sure it was in this case, and we were  
13 using napalm on some pre-planned targets, probably tree lines, things in tree lines and I  
14 was very new at the time. Probably had been there a couple of weeks I would guess and  
15 for whatever reason was again flying pretty low, probably my guess three hundred feet at  
16 this point, making a pass just trying to see what the effect of the previous napalm can had  
17 been. And I flew [the airplane] in, fortunately I was in a dive and leveled out of the dive  
18 at three hundred feet and was starting to climb again when I flew through the remains of  
19 the napalm burst and all I remember is very, very hot still. There was no flame or I don't  
20 think I'd be here to tell the story, but smoke, a very thick black smoke with a very  
21 distinctive napalm smell to it, and very, very hot in there. Only for a matter of a few  
22 seconds I think, but the engine quit, the engine starved for air and as I think I said in my  
23 memoir, I remember very distinctly being in an up swoop with a fair amount of air speed,  
24 which was good because I had to restart the engine in flight which was a fairly simple  
25 procedure. But again, as I mentioned in my memoir the one thing I do remember very  
26 distinctly is looking at the propeller standing straight up and down, motionless, with the  
27 manufacturer's label very readable on the back of it. I thought to myself, this is, it's  
28 much more quickly than it takes to tell the story, I think the thought that went through my  
29 head was something like, you've just killed yourself and very quickly got, I don't think  
30 the fighters actually ever even knew it happened. I didn't say anything, I just retracted it  
31 and you wind up, that's one of those occasions where you wind up shaking like a leaf all



1 over, when it's over, not during the incident. But you know a minute or two later, you're  
2 shaking all over the place, realizing how close you came, but we do stupid things every  
3 once in a while. But again I think I did all my stupid stuff within the first month at Duc  
4 Hoa and when I left there I don't think I had too many really stupid moves left in me, at  
5 least not unconscious stupid moves. Every once in a while you had to do something that  
6 you knew was dangerous, but at least you were doing it consciously.

7 SM: So that wasn't something you were briefed on, prior to Vietnam, that you've  
8 got to be careful because napalm absorbs all the oxygen?

9 MM: No, well I think the answer to that would have been, anybody would have  
10 thought you'd have been smart enough to know that on your own.

11 SM: Well, it would seem that your time at Duc Hoa then, given the area that you  
12 were covering, very close to the Cambodian border, that the purpose for your being there  
13 was to perhaps interdict any kind of infiltration activity through Cambodia into South  
14 Vietnam from North Vietnam?

15 MM: Well ultimately, yes, from Cambodia where there were North Vietnamese I  
16 suppose, operating, but again in those days much smaller numbers, than became later.  
17 But yes I think just to keep them, you know to keep them honest at least in that piece of  
18 territory, make it difficult for them to use that territory as an infiltration route to Saigon  
19 and Bien Hoa, which were major cities and it was the closest approach. So in that sense,  
20 had we not been there it would have been useful to them.

21 SM: How effective do you think you and other American and Vietnamese, that is  
22 South Vietnamese military activities were in that province?

23 MM: I think it was effective, very effective, not necessarily because of us, by  
24 which I mean that it was a relatively simple job because of the terrain. It was literally  
25 impossible I would say, for anyone to get from the Cambodian border across Hau Nghia  
26 province in a night. So, anybody who made the attempt, no matter how he tried it was  
27 going to be exposed at some point during the day and if you made the reconnaissance  
28 daily, which we did, it was going to be very, very difficult for somebody to get across.  
29 So I think we were very effective, but against an enemy which was probably small in  
30 numbers and had a lot going against it, particularly in terms of the terrain that they would  
31 have had to operate in. There was no way they could build anything of any size at all

1 without us seeing it, a road or a depot or bunkers or nothing, there was just nothing that  
2 could be done without us seeing it and destroying it the next day. So it was a wasteland.

3 SM: Now, you mentioned earlier that the only area where legal traffic was  
4 allowed was on the river; I assume the river came down from Cambodia?

5 MM: No, it was more north/south than that. I think it just came probably down  
6 from the central highlands and emptied out into the Mekong Delta, probably became part  
7 of the Mekong river at some point, I could look up, tell you what that is. It was Vam Co  
8 Dong or Vam Co Lam, the words meaning, Vam Co whatever meant the river to the east,  
9 the Vietnamese language is extremely simple language by the way. As I understand a  
10 created language, it wasn't a real language, it was created by the French or somebody, but  
11 Vam Co Dong meant the river to the west and Vam Co whatever the other one was,  
12 meant the river to the east, and they were two rivers that ran parallel to each other fairly  
13 close together and the one I'm talking about was the one that was west. Like I said  
14 Nuoc-Mam, the sauce that I was telling you about, Nuoc was the Vietnamese word for  
15 water, so water was Nuoc, Nuod-da was ice, which means water frozen and Nuoc-Mam  
16 meant water fish, very, very primitive language, so again the river was just the river that  
17 is west and again, it's easily found on a map.

18 SM: Did you ever receive orders or authorization to fire on targets of opportunity  
19 on the river, that may have been enemy boats?

20 MM: No, can't imagine why we would have. The river was considered free  
21 commerce, now if we found something on the west bank, theoretically at least it was a  
22 target. You had to use your head about something like that, but the river was free  
23 commerce.

24 SM: Do you think that the Vietcong, the NVA exploited that?

25 MM: Oh, absolutely because they would just mix in with all the commercial  
26 traffic, fishermen and people going to the grocery store and all that sort of thing. Yes, I'm  
27 sure they did, but they had to be coming from someplace in country and going someplace  
28 in country in order to do that, but I'm sure there were plenty of them there.

29 SM: Well is there anything else you want to talk about with your time at Duc  
30 Hoa?

1           MM: I can't think of anything, no, just again to reiterate that it would have been  
2 sort of a cozy little hole to hang out in for a year, kind of a nice little place with a few  
3 guys that had a job to do. The physical comforts were not bad at all but beyond that, I do  
4 have photographs of it that Dave Pinsky has subsequently sent me from his time frame,  
5 aerial photographs of the air fields and photographs of the buildings and what not and the  
6 ramp and all of that and some of the guys that were there later, with him, but, no that's it I  
7 think for Duc Hoa.

8           SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Michael Morea on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January  
9 2001.

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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Michael Morea  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
January 25, 2001  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Michael  
2 Morea. I am in Lubbock, Texas; Mr. Morea is in Palm Harbor, Florida. It is the 25<sup>th</sup> of  
3 January 2001, approximately five minutes after nine, Lubbock time. Mr. Morea, why  
4 don't you go ahead and discuss what happened when you left Duc Hoa.

5 MM: Okay, I think as I said last time, but just for continuity I was at Duc Hoa,  
6 just really getting my feet on the ground and got a phone call from the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS one  
7 evening, saying that I was to report very quickly to the southern sector of the 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN  
8 divisions' area of responsibility which would have been Long An province and the  
9 airfield there, for reason I don't know was called Tan An. Really just a wide spot in a  
10 highway about a thousand feet long with a very small PAP ramp and some sandbags and  
11 some fifty-five gallon drums that we used to re-fuel our, normally two airplanes that we  
12 kept there, but I'm getting a little ahead of myself. [Note: Transcript is accurate, but  
13 runway was actually 2100 feet long.] So with that introduction at some point in time I  
14 did in fact pack up, I don't remember how I traveled, my recollection is I flew down, no,  
15 I do recollect, Pete Bernstein who was the other FAC down there, flew up and got me.  
16 That's right, a very short flight, flew up, picked me up and took me back to Long An and  
17 to go back again, just for a moment, I think I mentioned, but the reason I went there is the  
18 other FAC who was there with Pete had been very severely wounded and evacuated back  
19 to the States and I don't think ever returned to Vietnam, although he did survive. So my  
20 job was to go down and be the other FAC with Peter, and that's what I did and again, as

1 in the case of Duc Hoa, I anticipated at that point that this would be my home away from  
2 home for the remainder of my tour in Vietnam. It didn't turn out that way which will  
3 come later. So, about Long An, what kind of a place was it? It was certainly a nicer  
4 place than Duc Hoa had been. In that although we flew from the little airfield just outside  
5 town on the road, we lived in town in what I would call rather comfortable  
6 circumstances, I'll try and describe it for you. We lived in a two story, and I have a  
7 photograph of it, a two story villa, certainly a large home, much better than normal  
8 Vietnamese standards, no question about that, we called it a villa and that's where we  
9 lived. When I say we, I mean the entire advisory detachment that was there, of some  
10 reason I have better memories of the Army people there than I do of the folks at Duc  
11 Hoa. I guess maybe I was recovering from the shock of entering combat, I don't know  
12 what it was, but I do have better memories of the people and the situation. The villa was  
13 a two story building as I said, fronted I think facing north, wouldn't bet my last dollar on  
14 that. But fronted on the town's soccer field and across the soccer field, some fifty yards  
15 away were some shops as I recall, toward the left end of the soccer field was a road that I  
16 think went over a bridge. A little river ran through town, I think the Long An river and  
17 took us among other places to the airfield, short drive. At the right end of the soccer  
18 field, looking out from the building again was the province chief's, we called it the  
19 palace. And it was certainly an upscale thing for Vietnam, it was a very large villa on a  
20 good size piece of land with a walled and iron railing fence around it as I recall. It looked  
21 like a small embassy in some foreign country, it looked like what the U.S. embassy might  
22 be in some moderately small country, quite a nice place. So that was the geography of  
23 our situation. The logistics of our situation there was sort of like this, the advisory  
24 detachment was commanded by an Army Colonel, and again as in the case of Long An,  
25 we were nominally, I wouldn't say under his command because that would be certainly  
26 inaccurate, but under his direction, let's say. We were there to support the Vietnamese  
27 through him, I think that's the fairest way to put it and again he didn't give orders and we  
28 didn't say no when he asked us to do something and it was a good working relationship  
29 and that's the way it usually works best in my mind. That's how it worked out. When I  
30 say him, I think there were actually two Colonels. I think there was one just leaving  
31 when I got there, I remember nothing more than a short, wiry thin sort of a man followed

1 by a very large, blustery sort of man kind of on the Schwarzkopf model, both full  
2 Colonels, Army guys, both good people, no problem. My roommate was an Army  
3 captain, I think he was, he may have been a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. I think he was a very junior  
4 captain, black kid, again kind of thin and wiry, don't remember what his specialty was, in  
5 terms of why he was there, what his advisory role was, but we roomed together, up in a  
6 room on the second floor of the villa, quite comfortable, beds, dressers, mirrors,  
7 bathroom down the hall. Very nice place and we got along great, I do not remember his  
8 name, the only thing that sticks in my mind is that he had the same name as a black  
9 basketball player who was famous at the time. I think a college player at NYU which is  
10 interesting, but meaningless, I guess because I just don't remember his name.

11 SM: What time period were you in Long An again?

12 MM: Okay, we're talking now probably mid-March of '66 would be about right.  
13 I got there early February, mid-March maybe first of April, I honestly don't remember  
14 exactly when I made the move.

15 SM: When did you leave?

16 MM: Well, we're going to be leaving about mid-May, so I was only there about a  
17 month and a half, again.

18 SM: Were there any significant operational differences between what you did at  
19 Long An and what you did at Duc Hoa?

20 MM: No, nothing that I can recall, it was essentially the same mission, visual  
21 reconnaissance, keeping the head of the Vietcong down, probably, well there were a  
22 couple of differences now that I think about it. We probably had fewer ground operations  
23 now that I think about it, and we did more air attack of opportune targets, that would be  
24 point one. Point two, I think it's fair to say that the VC controlled most of the province,  
25 but probably the most significant point is it was not, as in the case of Duc Hoa, Hau  
26 Nghia province, Long An province was not a free fire zone. It was agricultural at least in  
27 good part, had been banged up and bombed and shot at for so long that it was pretty well  
28 beat up, but there was still ordinary folks in large numbers out there, farming, trying to  
29 make a living off the land and trying to avoid the Vietcong and us both, I guess would be  
30 the fairest way to put it and just get on with their lives, which wasn't easy.

31 SM: So you had to be more careful?

1           MM: Yes, I had to be more careful on your target selection. The Intelligence was  
2 more important. We did spend some time up at the province chief's villa going over, not  
3 so much plans as strategies I guess, what do we bomb, what don't we bomb, where are  
4 the good guys living, where are the bad guys living, so that we didn't make those kinds of  
5 mistakes. So yes, there were differences, again much more populated, as I said the town,  
6 I sort of glossed over that, but the town was a thriving little Vietnamese town, a market  
7 town, I guess if you were British you would call it. And we got along pretty well with  
8 the local folks, didn't have a lot of contact with them, but we'd go out and play soccer on  
9 the field and we'd shop for little things downtown and that sort of thing. It was a fairly  
10 secure town, as towns went but again out in the countryside, things got different, once  
11 you left the confines of the immediate secure areas.

12           SM: Were there many young men in this town?

13           MM: Yes, good question. I was going to come to that, actually the town was  
14 what was known as a Chieu Hoi center. It was a place where when the Vietcong  
15 accepted the amnesty offers, usually in the form of leaflets and we dropped a lot of those  
16 in the area too. If they came in with a Chieu Hoi leaflet it meant they were defecting  
17 back to their country and out of the VC and there was a center there for rehabilitation and  
18 trying to give them job opportunities and what. So there were a lot Chieu Hois running  
19 around town, driving pedicabs, which was the little bicycle taxi cab kind of a thing and  
20 doing other functions in town. So there were more young men in that town I suppose,  
21 than in most because it was a Chieu Hoi center.

22           SM: Well, did the American personnel, you and other Americans that lived and  
23 engaged in activities with the Vietnamese civilian population; did everybody get along  
24 fairly well?

25           MM: Yes, those you contacted or connected with, you got along fine with and  
26 those you wouldn't have gotten along fine with you never contacted, it was kind of that  
27 sort of thing.

28           SM: I didn't know if there was perhaps any kind of concerns?

29           MM: In town?

1 SM: Well, yes concerns especially if you get a population of young men,  
2 Vietnamese young men, are they going to want a bunch of Americans hitting on their  
3 women, those type of issues?

4 MM: That wasn't a problem, very little hitting on the women to tell you the truth,  
5 to my knowledge none, I'm sure it went on, but no. Later in Saigon it's a different story,  
6 when I get to the Airborne division part of the story, but not in that town, no. I don't  
7 know that anybody ever said lay off the women, but we did, it just didn't happen. Had a  
8 few young girls in the house of course, we had to run a household and we did, it was a  
9 cooperative mess kind of a thing, very informal. But we'd all chip in a certain amount  
10 every month and somebody would run up to Saigon once or twice a month and hit the  
11 commissary and bring back what we needed and we just had a sort of a communal  
12 kitchen, dining thing and a couple of fairly young Vietnamese girls. Who I remember  
13 one of them by as fact Co Lei, which just means Miss Lei, L-E-I, I think who was one of  
14 the girls who worked for us and worked in the house, she was hands off, she was a very  
15 nice young girl and if anybody had tried anything with her, he'd have gotten beaten up by  
16 the rest of the guys so it wasn't a problem. That certainly wasn't a problem; no we never  
17 had that problem.

18 SM: And how about prostitutes?

19 MM: Not in that town. I'm sure again they must have been in one or two, but not  
20 in that town, no, didn't happen. Again, Saigon whole different story but we can come to  
21 that.

22 SM: You mentioned leaflets, did you guys ever get issued ammunition or  
23 waterproof magazine bags that had Chieu Hoi messages on them that you could then  
24 discard after you changed out your magazines?

25 MM: No, that doesn't ring any bells at all. I can tell you a funny story if I hadn't  
26 told you. It's in my memoirs I think.

27 SM: Go ahead and tell it.

28 MM: About dropping leaflets, I was flying up and down the canals one day  
29 dropping leaflets. I was very low in altitude, maybe four hundred feet if I had to guess so  
30 you could tell right away, I guess I never followed the fifteen hundred foot rule. It seems  
31 that way anyway, dropping leaflets. I had a box of them in my lap or somewhere or in



1 the back seat and reaching back and grabbing hands full of them. In any case I had both  
2 windows open and I'm flying up and down the canals and throwing these leaflets out by  
3 the handful but the thing I didn't realize, another one of those things you learn from  
4 experience, there was a light rain, very light, misty rain wasn't bothering me. But as time  
5 went by, maybe forty-five minutes I started to feel like the airplane wasn't flying right, it  
6 was flying very sluggishly and the controls weren't responding correctly and I thought,  
7 what the hell is going on here. This airplane's so simple, what could be wrong and the  
8 typical looking around in the cockpit, looking for something wrong, looking left and  
9 right. Finally I looked back over my shoulder and what I'd done is a lot of the leaflets  
10 were sticking to my tail surfaces and I was in a sense creating a big ball of papier mache  
11 on my particularly on my elevator surfaces and so I was losing control of up and down,  
12 pitch. I was just very slowly encasing my controls in this wet paper. Fortunately I didn't  
13 get to the critical stage and I just stopped throwing leaflets and went home and cleaned  
14 the airplane up, but I think that one's in my written memoir, maybe it isn't.

15 SM: I don't think we've talked about that yet.

16 MM: No, we haven't talked about, but it may or may not be in the written  
17 document, but it's another one of those crazy true stories.

18 SM: Now, when something like that happens, did you guys write up some kind of  
19 a lessons learned after-action report that circulated so that other guys wouldn't make that  
20 mistake?

21 MM: No, unfortunately nothing that formal. We might get on the radio, we  
22 talked at night on the radio net amongst the various sites. Probably, not in the entire 19<sup>th</sup>  
23 TASS, that was too big, but lets say maybe the western side of the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS adjacent  
24 areas would talk to each other at night. Our radio operators would usually do the talking  
25 and we'd just chit chat and we'd tell them if there was something we wanted passed, or if  
26 there was some information we were looking for and they'd try and get it for us. So you  
27 might say hey guys, I made a big mistake today, you might keep this in mind next time  
28 you try it but again. A year later I'm sure the answer would have been different, but this  
29 early phase '66 and just into '67, the thing was just getting going, it wasn't formal. The  
30 FAC School wasn't up and running although it was about to be, the in country FAC  
31 school, so it just wasn't that formal, we didn't have the procedures.

1 SM: And you were still flying the O-1 there?

2 MM: Yes, still flying the O-1, I never flew anything else, different models, E's  
3 and F's and G's, but there are very minor differences to those, just how the propeller  
4 works, basically.

5 SM: In terms of other differences between Long An and Duc Hoa, does anything  
6 else come to mind?

7 MM: There's one thing that comes to mind that I guess I should mention for  
8 historical purposes and again it's in my memoirs later when I talk about being with the  
9 Airborne Division and going up to the 1st Corps Area, because there was a semi-  
10 revolution in progress up there with the Buddhists and the Corps commander and what  
11 not. There was always a nagging suspicion I would say, in the back of our minds, when  
12 we got a target from the Vietnamese particularly, about whether this was really military  
13 or was it political. Or was it even, sort of political, meaning coercive, to be specific if  
14 you got a target that didn't look right it was perhaps – and we bombed villages all the  
15 time. We tried to, by that I mean villages that were collections of buildings usually with  
16 some trees around them, that was the typical configuration, surrounded by open fields.  
17 We would bomb villages, we made a considerable effort to determine that they were  
18 empty and what we, at least the intent was, is we were destroying infrastructure. We  
19 were destroying places where the VC did live on occasion, had lived, had fortified, but at  
20 least in my case and I think in most cases, if I saw what looked like ordinary people  
21 walking around, and you could tell, children certainly, even women and probably they  
22 were VC. But in any case if you saw that kind of people just moving around in what  
23 looked like routine habit patterns for a small village, I wouldn't bomb it and I don't think  
24 most people would have. The ones that we did bomb were empty, lots of obvious  
25 entrenchments and gun emplacements inside the village and under the trees and that sort  
26 of thing and those are the kinds of things that we did attack pretty regularly.  
27 Unfortunately, of course in the process of doing that we were decimating the countryside  
28 and driving what loyal ordinary people there were out there completely crazy, I'm sure  
29 but that had been going on since forever. But back to the point, the point is that every  
30 once in a while you'd get a target that was from the Vietnamese and you'd fly over it and  
31 it just didn't look right, it looked too populated. It looked too prosperous, it didn't have,

1 there was almost like a sinister atmosphere that after a while you got to feel about a place  
2 when it looked like it should be a target and these places wouldn't have that look and  
3 you'd have to wonder about it. Did they not pay their dues to the province chief that year  
4 and he was retaliating? So it was something that was always I think in the back of our  
5 minds, something we were very sensitive to, to the point where I tell you one story, and I  
6 don't think this is in my memoirs, it might be, the written ones, again. In this province,  
7 in Long An province I was out one day visual reconnaissance and I spotted a flight of, I  
8 think four, Vietnamese A-1s up and down, most of these villages were long and thin, they  
9 were built along a road or a track or a canal or something and they would just, the four of  
10 them up and down this one village bombing the hell out of it. And number one, there was  
11 not supposed to be any bombing in the province unless me or Pete was there, Vietnamese  
12 or no. Well it was their country I guess they could do whatever they wanted, but  
13 theoretically we were supposed to be there, and secondly I knew the village and it wasn't  
14 supposed to be a target. So I got on the radio real quick, took me two or three minutes to  
15 fly over there, but got on the radio and called control back at Long An and told them  
16 what was going on and asked them to find out what the hell was happening up at the  
17 direct air support center at Bien Hoa, which theoretically controlled all the air and who  
18 these guys were and how they got this target and how come there was no FAC. And  
19 meanwhile because I just didn't feel right, I just basically dove down to the village and  
20 flew up and down the village at very low altitude, kind of figure eights so that basically  
21 they couldn't drop any more bombs because I was in the way and they could see me.  
22 They went away and that was the end of that, but when I got back, we got some wishy-  
23 washy answer that never really satisfied us and we were suspicious that this was one of  
24 those political retaliation things that I think did occur in Vietnam.

25 SM: And what kind of aircraft what this?

26 MM: They were Vietnamese A-1s.

27 SM: A-1s, just bombing this village?

28 MM: Yes, sad story but true. That's the way it works especially in that kind of a  
29 war.

30 SM: Were those aircraft clearly marked enough to tell that they were Vietnamese  
31 Air Force and not American Air Force.

1           MM: The U.S. Air Force did not fly A-1s, at least not to my knowledge. The  
2 only time you would see a U.S. Air Force guy in an A-1 is sometimes there would be,  
3 well not sometimes, there were U.S. Air Force advisors to the Vietnamese A-1 units.  
4 And they would sometimes fly as one of the flight of four, and sometimes you'd know  
5 that because if there was some verbal confusion between you and the flight leader who  
6 was always Vietnamese, every once in a while, an American voice would come out of the  
7 flight and say, 'This is Gold-3, I understand what you want, hang on a second, we'll get it  
8 sorted out'. We didn't normally have the language problem and that didn't happen often,  
9 but every once in a while the guy would just chime in to let you know there was an  
10 American in the flight.

11           SM: Later in the war, they did, maybe not in '66?

12           MM: News to me, could well be, I didn't know that. U.S. A-1 squadrons.

13           SM: We interviewed a guy just a few days ago that was an A-1 pilot in the '70s.  
14 He was in '70, '71 down there, but I'm curious because even though those aircraft were  
15 probably flown by Vietnamese pilots, Vietnamese Air Force pilots, could someone from  
16 the ground looking up tell?

17           MM: Yes, well someone from the ground, I see where you're headed.

18           SM: Especially peasants, are they going to know that this is their own people  
19 doing this, or are they going to think why are the Americans bombing us?

20           MM: No, I think they know. That would have been my guess. They had been,  
21 this war had been going on for a long time and I think the local Vietnamese knew what  
22 kind of airplanes the local Vietnamese flew and which were the American ones.  
23 Probably, if my guess was right, that was exactly the message that was supposed to be  
24 sent, sadly. And I could be wrong but . . .

25           SM: Either one would be effective because then the province chief would be  
26 able to say, this is what I can bring down to bear on you, whether it's Americans flying  
27 those missions or Vietnamese flying those missions.

28           MM: That's true and he had that power, as I think I mentioned earlier, these  
29 province chiefs, the whole system over there was basically, at least in my mind, the entire  
30 political system was Chinese medieval, an emperor who was the president in Saigon and  
31 four major warlords who controlled provinces and then little sub-warlords who had

1 districts and what not so, four corps and the sub-districts, provinces and beyond. So, not  
2 too surprising, that's the politics over there, always has been and in many ways still is.

3 SM: Now when you were flying your missions out of Long An, what was the  
4 aircraft support you would receive to bomb those, whether they be suspected enemy  
5 villages or infrastructure?

6 MM: Basically the same as at Duc Hoa. A lot of Vietnamese A-1s, a lot of U.S.  
7 F-100s because they were at Bien Hoa which was close. A lot of Navy coming off Dixie  
8 Station, A-4s primarily, those would have been the three primary airplanes I think that I  
9 would have expected to see down there.

10 SM: And what would did you bring in, preferably to take out a suspected enemy  
11 village, conventional bomb, napalm?

12 MM: Napalm to burn down the trees and the buildings, white phosphorus bombs,  
13 hundred and ten pound white phosphorus bombs which the A-1 used primarily but they  
14 could carry a ton of them as I recall, twenty-four of them. A very effective bomb, small  
15 hundred and ten pounds but just the old World War II scene of the white phosphorus  
16 trails. It looks like a flower, very effective weapon, and ordinary five hundred pound  
17 bombs, those would have been the three, and then guns, always, twenty-millimeter guns.

18 SM: In those operations did you ever come under fire from the ground?

19 MM: Occasionally, not often. It was not like up north or later, after Tet '68; they  
20 did not have heavy weapons. When I came under fire it was always small arms, Ak-47,  
21 nothing bigger than that.

22 SM: And you mentioned villages, how about other infrastructure like bridges or  
23 things like that?

24 MM: Again, they would try to build bridges over toward Cambodia and we'd be  
25 more careful, the whole thing was more careful. If you saw a bridge, it could have easily  
26 been a farmer, because we're talking a couple of twigs and a couple of planks when we  
27 talk a bridge. It could have been a farmer just trying to create way across a canal  
28 between one field and another and so we didn't attack willy nilly like we did in Hau  
29 Nghia province because we just didn't have the same authority, number one. And we  
30 didn't have the same situation, so you had to be a little more careful. You'd go back and  
31 say, here's what I saw and somebody would say, no let's don't do that because the

1 situation in that part of the province is okay and it's probably the farmers. So you  
2 wouldn't just automatically attack them, which is what we almost basically did in Hau  
3 Nghia. That question prompted another thought. What we did more often, Pete and I, we  
4 used to do what we use to call dawn patrol. We'd get up very early in the morning and  
5 crank the engines just before daybreak and get airborne just as the sky was getting light  
6 and we'd fly up and down the province. We'd pick a section of the province everyday  
7 and we'd fly up and down very low. I'm talking fifty, sixty feet over little towns and  
8 villages and our purpose was two fold, number one we were trying to send a message for  
9 whatever psychological effect it was worth, that we were there, and so about the time the  
10 Vietnamese are getting up to start their days work we'd come zipping over their houses at  
11 fifty or sixty feet, a couple of towns, or three or four towns every morning, different ones.  
12 The other things was that you could see a lot that way, you could really get at that  
13 altitude, early in the morning when ordinary people in Vietnam are out doing their  
14 ordinary thing, you could get a sense again, of is this village a functional, ordinary village  
15 or is there something strange going on here. You could get that very quickly just by  
16 going down the street, seeing what was happening, the kids out running around. Are  
17 people carrying produce around, or does it look very quiet and do you spot a line of  
18 trenches off on the backside of the village somewhere? We did a lot of that, trying to get  
19 a feel for what really was going on because we had to know that more than we did in the  
20 previous place in order to discriminate between what you did and didn't do.

21 SM: What was Pete's last name again?

22 MM: Bernstein. B-E-R-N-S-T-E-I-N. As I said I think he was a very quite guy,  
23 but very effective. I think he came from a very wealthy Jewish family up in Shaker  
24 Heights, Illinois if I'm not mistaken and I have not been able to contact him, I wish I  
25 could. I've made some efforts but he seems to have disappeared. [Note: Transcript is  
26 correct, but Shaker Heights is in Ohio.]

27 SM: How many villages were in your aerial area or operations, can you  
28 guesstimate?

29 MM: Oh, my God, hundreds.

30 SM: So, you wouldn't be able to do this over the same village very often?

1           MM: Well, in an hour's flight, you might catch twenty or thirty of them; I'm  
2 talking really little tiny places.

3           SM: So over the course of a week, you might be able to get a full spread?

4           MM: A couple of weeks, you might. Yes, a couple of weeks let's say.

5           SM: A couple of weeks, full coverage, go back again?

6           MM: Right.

7           SM: When you would conduct these, what did you call them again, dawn raids?

8           MM: No, dawn patrols.

9           SM: Dawn patrols, when you conducted your dawn patrols, what was the typical  
10 response of the people on the ground?

11          MM: You could see them.

12          SM: Would they stop and stare?

13          MM: They would look up, they didn't seem to be frightened, they didn't run  
14 away.

15          SM: Okay, they didn't scramble.

16          MM: No, not normally, if they did, they were smart enough if they were bad guys  
17 and they scrambled that would be a signal so they didn't. They just sort of looked up,  
18 kind of a curiosity thing, you didn't get any shaking fists or anything either, it was just  
19 sort of an oh, but we still had our purpose in doing it.

20          SM: I was curious, you mentioned one of the big differences between Long An  
21 and Duc Hoa is the more strictly enforced rules of engagement and restrictions and the  
22 fact that you couldn't just, it wasn't like Hau Nghia, which was more of a . . .

23          MM: It was [essentially] a complete free fire zone.

24          SM: Free fire zone. Here in Long An, you've got a significant civilian population  
25 that needs to be taken into account, and of course I'm sure you've heard the comments  
26 and the arguments that one of the problems about fighting the Vietnam War was the  
27 restrictive rules of engagement, but it seems that with your experience in Long An, those  
28 were necessary.

29          MM: Yes, I would not have called them restrictive, necessary, sensible, whatever  
30 word you choose. If you really thought that you were going to win this war someday,  
31 which back then we did, then the whole concept of converting the people to the

1 government's side was viable and if you were going to try to do that, obviously beating  
2 them up unnecessarily was not going to achieve that objective so I think we took it  
3 seriously.

4 SM: So it did not frustrate you?

5 MM: No.

6 SM: Or your fellow pilots achieved.

7 MM: No, I don't think so, no, we selected targets based on what we thought were  
8 real and those we attacked and the others we didn't so I don't think there was frustration.

9 SM: In the same regard, I was curious what you thought about, if you even  
10 thought about the internal inconsistency between your experience and the necessity as  
11 you appropriately stated of having restrictions on your activities in that particular  
12 province, with the overall strategy employed by the American commanders of attrition,  
13 killing our way to victory.

14 MM: I understand the question and your preface was probably accurate. I don't  
15 think, again in '66 I don't think we thought much about that. Everything was kind of  
16 new, I think we still believed that the effort was to win and that we could. I think all of  
17 that probably changed about '68 with Tet and new administrations and when what's his  
18 name got in.

19 SM: Abrams?

20 MM: No, I'm talking on the political side.

21 SM: Nixon?

22 MM: No, Johnson's Secretary of Defense.

23 SM: McNamara.

24 MM: McNamara, there you go. Those days, I think that's when, because I was  
25 home by then and those were the days when I think everybody started to get the sudden  
26 realization that our real intent here is to minimize casualties and get the hell out of here  
27 as quickly as we can, which took years, but still I think at that point it was obvious that  
28 that was our intention.

29 SM: Again, in your area of operation and in Long An itself, did you know that  
30 the standard tactic employed by U.S. ground forces was the search and destroy, the  
31 seeing clear or whatever they want to call it?



1 MM: Didn't have any U.S. ground forces there, so again it wasn't relevant. The  
2 locals did some of that, although I think, and I don't know why, there was less of it there  
3 than there was in Hau Nghia and I think maybe the reason was the higher population  
4 density and the higher difficulty of actually defining where the enemy was.

5 SM: In Long An, versus Duc Hoa, which was a free fire zone.

6 MM: Right, exactly, so I think there was more surgical is not the right word,  
7 because it wasn't that good, but it was more surgical let's say, than Hau Nghia was in that  
8 we did look for specific targets. They had more artillery down there, the Vietnamese did,  
9 105 Howitzers and they used that occasionally to fire on targets. There was one other  
10 things that's of interest that I ran into down there and that was the Phoenix programs, you  
11 familiar with that?

12 SM: Yes, sir.

13 MM: Yes, okay that was a, I won't call it a center, maybe it was, there was a  
14 Phoenix outfit there, very interesting operation, they lived nearby in town, but apart from  
15 us. I gave you a thumbnail description of what I remember of it. It was commanded as I  
16 recall by a slim, trim, taller than average, Vietnamese captain. Story was that his family  
17 was politically out at the time, whoever was running Saigon at the time, his family had  
18 been with the previous government. I think Diem perhaps, I think his family was  
19 connected with Diem, who of course was assassinated and Thieu I think was in at the  
20 time. Although I could be completely wrong on that, and so if that's correct than this kid  
21 was kind of a Diem family and out of power and out of favor in Saigon so as a result he  
22 had to go find something else to do and I guess they told him why don't you go be a  
23 Phoenix unit commander, so he was. His troops were, it was a small unit, if I had to  
24 guess I'd say he had maybe thirty people, I could be wrong. The story is that he did a lot  
25 of his recruiting at the Saigon prison, basically would go down there and I actually went  
26 with him once, and he would just talk to the prison keepers and say have you got any  
27 likely candidates, young tough men in here and he'd talk to them and make them an offer.  
28 How would you like to be out of here in five minutes? I can give you a uniform and a  
29 gun and three square meals a day and a place to sleep. But here's the other side of the  
30 coin, and he would just yank them right out of the jail and take them back to Long An  
31 and train them and they were pretty good. They were very loyal as best we all

1 understood, to him and to the program and they did their job. The only other thing I  
2 remember, I did go out on one patrol with them, one night. You know what their mission  
3 was, it was euphemistically called counter terror, but what it was is we were supposed to  
4 assassinate the VC leaders before they assassinated the few remaining friendly village  
5 leaders. That was I guess the essence of it, went out on a patrol with them one night and  
6 didn't make any contact, we were looking for some guy but we never found him and that  
7 was that. The only thing I remember is I was carrying a Swedish K submachine gun with  
8 a silencer on it and I'd never carried one before and the thing that stuck in my mind was  
9 how heavy the silencer was. It must have weighed five pounds, just the silencer, it's not  
10 like in the movies. The only other thing I remember is that there was an American  
11 advisor with them who was not military. Again as I recall, big bluff Irish cop looking  
12 guy, and I think that's what he was. I think he was a retired policeman from Chicago or  
13 some such thing and he was their advisor. He did live in the advisory detachment villa  
14 with us, but the Vietnamese captain did not, and again this is all best as I recall it. It may  
15 be eighty percent accurate, who knows.

16 SM: And the other side of the coin, as you put it was their mission, which was  
17 Viet Cong infrastructure neutralization, either capture or kill?

18 MM: Yes, that's what I understood, yes. I'd never read any of the books about it,  
19 but that was my understanding at the time, yes.

20 SM: Did you ever witness them, actually bringing back prisoners?

21 MM: No, never. Again, I don't think prisoners was the objective normally,  
22 although it may have been at certain times, but in any case, no.

23 SM: When was the first time you actually heard this referred to as Phoenix?

24 MM: There. It was the only experience I had with it.

25 SM: Any other Americans rotate into that unit while you were there?

26 MM: The Army guys were in and out, and again I just have vague recollections  
27 of people. Pete and I did our thing all day, we were preoccupied is almost the right word,  
28 with the airplanes and the maintenance and the fuel coming in and what our mission was,  
29 and timing and backing each other up and that sort of thing and getting three square  
30 meals and some sleep in between. The Army guys, at night we'd have dinner and chit  
31 chat and have a beer to two, never got close, I don't have any recollection of any close

1 relationship with any of them at all, they kind of were preoccupied with what they did.  
2 We sort of came and went in the building and not a lot of deep socializing.

3 SM: How did the villagers seem to get along with that Phoenix unit?

4 MM: No contact that I was aware of. If there was, no, never made that  
5 connection. Did they know it was there, what did they think about it, never made that  
6 connection?

7 SM: How did you handle maintenance for your aircraft?

8 MM: Maintenance was very simple. We had a crew chief, I think who lived  
9 there with us and it was his job to go out may have been two to tell you the truth, I don't  
10 know, and the radio operators, same thing. A couple and their job was to go out either  
11 with us or just a little bit ahead of us and prep the airplane, make sure it was fuelled, give  
12 it a pre-flight which wasn't very complicated. Standby to untie the airplane or pull the  
13 chocks for us if necessary, pump fuel, very routine, very limited maintenance was  
14 possible if you has a brake that was low on hydraulic fluid and therefore a little mushy or  
15 what not. They could unscrew a cap and pump some more hydraulic fluid in there and  
16 put the cap back on. But on the other side of the coin the airplane was very, very simple  
17 so there wasn't much that it needed. They could do basic stuff, mainly they were there  
18 just to pre-flight and kind of support us with very basic mechanical and ground service  
19 kinds of thing, although we could do it by our self for that matter to, pull the chocks and  
20 start the engine, hold the brakes and taxi off all by yourself, untie it and fuel it and  
21 whatever. Really the maintenance system in a nutshell was that the airplane was to be  
22 rotated back to Bien Hoa every hundred hours for serious maintenance and the airplanes  
23 as best I understand got a pretty thorough going over there. And then you'd get a fresh  
24 one and as you approached a hundred hours, you'd call them up and they'd tell you, come  
25 one, bring it on up and we'll give you another one. Well, sometimes they'd give you  
26 another one. Usually, you had to wait for it. I think I mentioned that because we had  
27 quote our own airplanes and if you had to wait for it, usually it was an overnight stop at  
28 Bien Hoa. Different when I was in the airborne division again, because of Gene  
29 McCutchaon's connections and just his personality, we never waited. When we got there  
30 we dropped one, picked up another one and left, but that's later. I think, not to rush us  
31 along, because I'm not doing that at all, but I think that you're going to find that my, that

1 for whatever reason, just the rapidity of the way things were happening, things were  
2 happening and changing so fast to me that I don't remember a lot about these first two  
3 assignments when it comes to detail, you would think I would remember some of the  
4 Army guys and what not, but I just flat don't.

5 SM: I completely understand, it's a long time ago.

6 MM: Well, it's not the time so much, I don't think I would have remembered it  
7 six months later.

8 SM: Like you said, you were very busy.

9 MM: Yes, and moving fast and then the Airborne division thing I was there  
10 longer, and then more settled and I do remember names and faces there.

11 SM: Well let me, just a couple more questions about your time at Long An. Back  
12 to your village operations, when you would bring in air strikes or artillery or whatever,  
13 into one of those villages, any secondary explosions?

14 MM: Rarely, I don't think they had that level of munitions at the time. I think  
15 what you were really dealing with was small units organized on the village level and  
16 probably armed with individual weapons and that was it. Maybe a few, they had a fairly  
17 effective Russian shoulder-fired rocket, kind of a bazooka kind of a thing, that the VC  
18 had significant numbers of, they may have had a few of those laying around, but even  
19 that's a very light weapon. They may have had a mortar or two, but nothing in the way  
20 of stockpiled munitions at any level at all. You were basically just trying to keep them  
21 disorganized and if they were setting up something that looked like a military camp or a  
22 defensive position, you tried to ruin it for them. It was really about that simple.

23 SM: So, no significant caches were?

24 MM: No.

25 SM: How about the presence of vehicles, anything?

26 MM: In the towns that was about it, in the towns.

27 SM: How about the villages you bombed though?

28 MM: No, I was going to say rarely, in fact to my knowledge never. By vehicle I  
29 mean even something like a cyclo, nothing. No, that's an interesting question, I never  
30 thought about that, but no I don't think I ever saw a vehicle, you would see the vehicles  
31 of any description, and even those were primitive, only in the larger government

1 controlled towns. What they used outside was strictly the water buffalo, hitched to a  
2 primitive but effective plow, that was it.

3 SM: And while you were at Long An did you ever receive any feedback after a  
4 bombing run, where the Vietcong or, primarily the Vietcong but maybe even PAVN,  
5 were trying to use that particular incident for propaganda purposes to try to turn the  
6 population against you, against the American presence?

7 MM: Not specifically, I suppose we were generally aware that that could happen  
8 and probably did happen, but specific instances, no.

9 SM: What kind of briefings would you receive while you served at Long An?

10 MM: Casual, be careful with that word, but they were casual. We would sit  
11 around either at the villa or up at the province chief's place and just in general go over  
12 how have things been, what have we done, how effective have we been, where are we to  
13 be focusing our efforts. Sometimes something fairly specific, but it was not, I guess I  
14 never thought of this way, but it's obvious in this conversation here that it wasn't a very  
15 specific kind of a place. It was a very general, the place was fairly homogenous as a  
16 province and the mission was pretty much find out what's going on, try to locate those  
17 places where there really is VC activity, which was generally trying to build up  
18 infrastructure, defensive and ultimately offensive infrastructure and destroy it without  
19 destroying the local population that wasn't involved in that. And I think as it turns out it  
20 was probably about that simple and I never thought about it that way, but it seems to be  
21 the way it's coming out.

22 SM: Did you ever get confirmed enemy kills that you would send down to Long  
23 An?

24 MM: Down there, not many, again it was only a month and a half, some I think  
25 those that I could reasonably confirm, I probably confirmed myself rather than somebody  
26 later on. On the rare occasion where I did see someone and there were two or three  
27 occasions where there was obviously caught somebody in the act, so to speak of building  
28 a bunker or digging a trench and was able to confirm just visually that we had killed him,  
29 but it was rare, not often. I think more often we were bombing empty villages that either  
30 had been or were being fortified. That was probably our main target.

1 SM: When you were doing your visual reconnaissance how long would it then  
2 take you, if you spotted suspicious activity or a suspicious village, how long would it take  
3 to you to bring ordnance?

4 MM: Oh if we really hurried, if there was no doubt in my mind something was  
5 going on and I made the call back through the channels and I'm not going to describe the  
6 system to you, I know you understand that silence is acknowledgement system which we  
7 had.

8 SM: Well, why don't you explain it for readers later?

9 MM: I will, that was the standard classic system, but using that system, I could  
10 probably have air on station, it depended, if there happened to be somebody near by,  
11 maybe twenty minutes, if not, maybe forty, inside an hour, I could almost always have  
12 something working inside an hour.

13 SM: What would you do in the interim?

14 MM: Try to refine my impression of what it was that I was looking at, just fly  
15 over it, fly around it, see if I could generate any activity either good or bad. If I could  
16 generate civilians then I'd just call it off. If I could generate guys trying to sneak away  
17 into the bushes then it would just intensify my impression that I had a serious target. So  
18 that's a fair description, just try and refine in my mind what it was I was looking at and  
19 how I was going to deal with it.

20 SM: Why don't you go ahead and describe real quickly the process of getting  
21 approval to fire on a target?

22 MM: If I can remember it. Well we had two systems, the pre-planned system and  
23 the immediate system. The pre-planned system basically worked this way, boy you're  
24 really calling on my memory now. I would make a request to attack a target at a given  
25 time with a given, well I would request at least a given airplane, given ordnance for a  
26 given target at a given time. And that request would go in parallel up two chains, it  
27 would go up the Air Force chain, meaning my radio operator to the direct air support  
28 center at Bien Hoa to the TACC in Saigon which controlled all the air in Vietnam and the  
29 request would be dealt with and I would either get an approved or a disapproved or an  
30 approved modified somehow. Maybe, approved it but can't so it until this time, and  
31 you're not going to get F-100s you're going to get something else, or whatever. And I

1 would get the word back down through the same channel that here's your approved air  
2 request, be there at this time and this is what's going to happen. At the same time, that  
3 request was going up through Army channels, and there was a parallel agency at every  
4 level, so at the DASC there was an Army liaison and at the TACC there was and of  
5 course at my working level there was. And that request would go up in parallel, the  
6 significance of that being that at every level, the Army guy could say to the Air Force  
7 guy, yes, we know what your Air Force guy down there is requesting our guy knows  
8 what's going on, they understand it, they approve of it down there and so do we and so it  
9 was a coordination thing, and it worked quite well. It also worked on the Vietnamese  
10 side, usually our Army guys would work the Vietnamese side for us. Well not usually,  
11 always, Army side, so really in a sense it was going up three channels, Air Force channel,  
12 U.S. Army Advisory channel, and the third channel being the Vietnamese Army channel,  
13 and it was that simple. The immediate system worked essentially exactly the same way,  
14 except that if I made a request, well depending on where I was, usually I would go  
15 through my radio operator as I was always in his range and then he would go directly to  
16 the Direct Air Support Center at Bien Hoa and ask for an immediate strike. Which would  
17 mean either a launch of an airplane on alert or a diversion of something that was on a  
18 lower priority and that was near to me and seemed to have the right characteristics to fit  
19 the situation. The difference in the immediate system was very simply that in order to  
20 expedite it, you did not require approval at each level, the only thing you could do at each  
21 level was call a halt. So silence was considered approval so if my Army guy who was the  
22 Army radio operator who was with my Air Force radio operator chose not to tell his boss  
23 that I was requesting an immediate air strike that was essentially approval at that level of  
24 my request. Or if he told his boss and his boss said sounds good to me, he did not have to  
25 chime in officially with that, he just said nothing and it was approval and that procedure  
26 was true all the way up.

27 SM: To include the province chief?

28 MM: Yes, to include him. I never thought about him to tell you the truth, except  
29 that he was the Army Colonels guy and he didn't have the communication, so I guess the  
30 answer to that is if the Army Colonel chose not to mention it to him, then the answer was  
31 yes. If the Army Colonel chose to mention it to him, and he said nothing then the answer

1 was yes. I think to be honest most often the Army Colonel chose not to mention it to  
2 him, unless he sensed something big enough. He probably took that on himself, probably  
3 in fact, the Colonel probably wasn't involved that often. It was probably whoever the  
4 duty operations officer was, who was probably some Army Captain or maybe a Major.

5 SM: What about Vietnamese personnel that were probably monitoring those  
6 exchanges and activities or were they intentionally in the loop, that is a Vietnamese radio  
7 operator listening in for that type of stuff so they can inform the Vietnamese civilian  
8 hierarchy?

9 MM: No, if they were, they weren't officially there. They would have been there  
10 just spying on us, which may be. They may have had people with enough command of  
11 English, radio people listening in on our nets so they could keep track of what we were  
12 doing. I was never aware of that; I don't think they did, particularly not at the tactical  
13 level. If they were doing that, they were probably more interested in what was going on  
14 in Washington. So that's a good question, never thought of it, but no, I don't think they  
15 had a system like that. I've lived in other countries that I won't mention here where I  
16 know that the host government, very friendly host government was very definitely  
17 listening and if I had been them, so would I have been, but that's another story.

18 SM: Anything else that you recall from your time at Long An?

19 MM: If you're interested in just a couple of amusing stories.

20 SM: Absolutely.

21 MM: Okay, I can remember, I'm a very heavy sleeper and we had a defensive  
22 plan for our villa, which was a good idea because if the town got overrun we were going  
23 to have to defend ourselves. And in fact in the front window of our bedroom, my  
24 roommate, whose name I can't remember and I had a Browning Air Cooled, which is the  
25 barrel with the holes in it, thirty caliber machine gun from God knows when. But it was  
26 mounted on a table basically so that it would fire out the front window of the villa. Our  
27 filed of fire in other words was the soccer field, and he was the shooter and I kept the  
28 belted ammunition flowing smoothly. He was the shooter I guess because he was Army  
29 and he was senior to me although I was a better shot than he was. So that was interesting  
30 that we were set up that way, and the rest of the building was defended in various other  
31 ways, anything from passive, barbed wire and things like that, to active defenses that we



1 had located around the building, which is not the point of the story. The point of the  
2 story is one night we did come under mortar attack, the village in general and I think us  
3 and the province chief's place in particular and it's comical because the mortars were  
4 exploding on the roof, light mortars, 60 mortars or something about that size. They were  
5 literally exploding on the roof of the building and I slept through it. My roommate  
6 literally had to shake me awake and get me out of bed and over to the machine gun. He  
7 then explained to me, that hey we're under attack and the plan calls for you to be here,  
8 not in bed so that was kind of amusing, but I have always been a heavy sleeper and not  
9 much bothers me once I go to bed.

10 SM: Did the village only get shelled that once while you were there?

11 MM: Yes, again it was only a month and a half but it was just that one time.

12 SM: Any casualties?

13 MM: No, it was over, just one of these brief flurry things. It was over before you  
14 could think about it almost, there was no ground assault there was just mortar. The other  
15 thing that was kind of amusing, in a way is I have a degree in accounting and I was fairly  
16 fresh out of college back then. My roommate had among many other additional duties,  
17 he was like the unit bookkeeper, he was supposed to keep track of the mess funds and  
18 what not. I saw him one night out in the hall, there was a little hallway behind our  
19 bedroom, there was a little desk out there with a lamp on it. He was obviously pulling his  
20 hair out trying to figure something out and I didn't know what it was, so I said to him, I  
21 said what's going on, what are you doing? And he's showing me these books, it was the  
22 house books so to speak and he said I can't understand it, and I've got to explain it to the  
23 Colonel, we've run out of money. We don't have any money to go to Saigon and buy  
24 any food and he said, I don't understand it. I've been filling out this, and he knew  
25 nothing he was working from the Army how to be an accountant manual, put this number  
26 in this box, add it to this box and that was about all he knew about accounting. But he  
27 said I've been filling this thing out, I know it's right, I've been sending them into the  
28 Colonel, he's been initialing them, everything's okay, all of a sudden we're out of money.  
29 Well, the long and short of the story, which was obvious to me, I looked at it, it took me  
30 about two seconds. He had been very dutifully at the end of each month, putting the  
31 number that was the bottom line in parentheses, which is what the book said to do under

1 these given circumstances. If A is larger than B, subtract A from B and put the answer in  
2 parentheses and parentheses, and parentheses in accounting means it's a loss, so for  
3 months they had been actually spending more than they'd been charging each of the guys  
4 dues, so to speak and they had been slowly but surely operating in the red and running  
5 out of money. But it took up till this month for them to run so far out of money that they  
6 really didn't have any cash reserve to run up to Saigon and actually make the next months  
7 purchase. So I explained it to him, we had a good laugh over it, and then he said, 'Will  
8 you go in and explain that to the Colonel because he will kill me if I go in?' So I went in  
9 and explained to the Colonel that the Captain hadn't done anything wrong. It was the  
10 fact that to be, and I didn't put it that way, that both of them were ignorant of what they  
11 were looking at, the Captain and the Colonel, they didn't understand the parentheses and  
12 I said, 'You haven't been charging enough so here's what you've got to do, you've got to  
13 assess everybody a few bucks to build up the pot again and then you've got to start  
14 charging a buck or so more every month to stay that way', and that was the end of that  
15 problem. I always remember that was kind of amusing, just another bureaucratic thing,  
16 you're the unit accountant, all you've got to do is follow these rules and everything will  
17 be okay and of course it isn't, but that's about it. I don't remember much else about the  
18 place, the friendly atmosphere, I remember that, the Army guys were great, the food was  
19 good.

20 SM: What was the total American presence there, approximately?

21 MM: I don't know.

22 SM: Was it up to a hundred?

23 MM: Oh, no nothing like that, I'm talking maybe fifteen guys.

24 SM: That's it?

25 MM: Yes, it wasn't much more than that.

26 SM: Besides that mortar attack, how about occasional sniper fire, any of that kind  
27 of stuff?

28 MM: Nothing, no. Town was pretty secure as I said. It was a pleasant little  
29 town.

30 SM: What was the, how about the ARVN presence?

1           MM: In and out of town. The Vietnamese I think intentionally kept their soldiers  
2 out of their towns. The soldiers didn't get paid much, they were inclined to steal, just  
3 petty theft, like soldiers anywhere, they go have a couple of drinks and get in a fight.  
4 Nothing unusual about them, they're perfectly normal, just like anywhere else and I think  
5 they were kept away from town, not too far away but away. I'm talking three or four  
6 miles outside of town in a garrison area of some sort.

7           SM: Were there any other particularly memorable operations, that is villages that  
8 you bombed or operations that you engaged in?

9           MM: No, it's a very routine place in that sense, very routine. So, what happened,  
10 to set the stage for the next time, is this. About a month and a half into my assignment at  
11 Long An, I got a message, verbal or whatever, one night, from my radio operator saying  
12 that the Colonel up at the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS, whose name I've forgotten although it's on, I think  
13 one of my OERs, short name like Fisher or Thomas or Thompson or some such thing.  
14 The Colonel had called and he had a new job for me. I was supposed to go to Bien Hoa,  
15 post haste and I was going to be part of the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS infrastructure at Bien Hoa and I  
16 was going to be instructing Vietnamese pilots in the O-1, for the duration of my tour. I  
17 really reacted to that, was not what I wanted to do at all. I'd been to Bien Hoa, it was just  
18 dusty, it was like an old cow town, it was just a dusty place, not much going on, lot of  
19 guys. Just too many people around and it was non-combat, although certainly things  
20 happened there, but basically it was a non-combatant place, did not want to go there and I  
21 made that very clear. I got on the radio and I talked to the Colonel and I told him, I think  
22 I told him initially I'm not coming, to which he said, yes you are and then I calmed down  
23 and I told, hey I volunteered for this, I didn't volunteer to be an instructor in some  
24 garrison for the rest of my life, not what I came for. He understood and he said, well look  
25 he said, somebody's got to do it. You haven't been here that long, so we can get some  
26 longevity out of you in the program, he said you're it. He said, unless you can find a  
27 replacement, somebody who would rather do it and you can have his job, I don't care is  
28 basically what he said. So what I did is I got on the radio that night and I called around  
29 the 19<sup>th</sup> TASS area, I don't think I went outside the TASS and I called all the sites and  
30 basically said, here's the deal, is there somebody that would like to go do this, and I'll  
31 come do your job. I don't care where you are and I got a taker, I got a guy who was with

1 the Vietnamese Airborne Division, Advisory Detachment and see here now my memory  
2 starts to get better, Detachment 192, based in Saigon, collocated with the ARVN  
3 Airborne division which was based in Saigon and we'll get into those details later, but  
4 this guy, very frankly he was a captain. [Note: 192 is correct vs. the transcript, but it was  
5 actually 162.] I think I remember his name but if not I'd rather not say, and he very  
6 frankly said look, I got a wife and two kids at home. He said I am Red Marker Four, the  
7 last two Red Marker Fours within the last six months were killed. He said I'm getting  
8 shot at all the time, I'm not having a good time, I don't want to do this and he said if you  
9 want to come do it and let me go be the instructor, I'd be tickled to death to do that, so I  
10 said sounds good to me and shortly thereafter, I talked to the Colonel again, he said fine.  
11 And so without remembering the details of it, we made the swap and he came to Long An  
12 and worked with Pete and that was the last I saw of Pete and that whole situation and I  
13 somehow I was told by the Airborne Division Detachment to meet up with them at Tay  
14 Ninh, which was the northern as it turned out, province of the 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN division. In  
15 other words Long An, Hau Nghia, Tay Ninh, up north, they just happened to be operating  
16 out of there and the boss there, Colonel McCutchaon said meet me up at Tay Ninh and  
17 we'll bring you into the unit, basically and so I did. I forget how I got up there, maybe I  
18 went to, matter of fact I think I did, I think I went to Bien Hoa, gave my airplane to the  
19 guy who was going back to Long An and then took an Airborne Division airplane that  
20 was there and flew it to Tay Ninh to meet up with the Airborne Division guys. And so at  
21 that point I joined my third and final unit in Vietnam and one where I have probably  
22 more to say and more specific recollection of a lot of things, names and faces and things  
23 that happened and all of that sort of thing, but that's at least the intro into how that all  
24 happened and that's probably a good place to stop. [Note: This all is clearly incorrect,  
25 even if it's what I said. He went to Bien Hoa. Another FAC replaced me at Tan Ay.]

26 SM: Just to clarify, which Airborne Division was this again?

27 MM: This is the Vietnamese Airborne Division.

28 SM: Vietnamese?

29 MM: Yes, the ARVN Airborne Division, so in a sense, a very accurate sense,  
30 similar in many, many ways to the U.S. 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, kind of a quick reaction, national  
31 reserve strike kind of a thing. Light in terms of armor and weaponry but very quick and

1 it was stationed at Tan Son Nhut for reasonably obvious reasons, that was where you  
2 could marshal a lot of airlift in a hurry if you had to and move them out to wherever they  
3 really needed to be, so that's that.

4 SM: Well, if you'll hold on one second, I'll just end the interview officially for  
5 today. Thank you very much; this will end the interview on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2001.



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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Michael Morea  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
February 1, 2001  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Mike  
2 Morea. It is the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2001 at approximately 9:00 Lubbock time. I am in  
3 Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Morea is in Florida. Sir, why don't we begin by discussing your  
4 time with the ARVN Airborne Division?

5 Michael Morea: Okay, as we'll recall last time I sort of set the stage for this by  
6 describing how I wound up assigned to the ARVN Airborne Division, so we can pick it  
7 up there. Again, as best I recall, I went to Bien Hoa, probably took an airplane in there  
8 for hundred hour inspection. Dropped it, picked one up that was destined for the ARVN  
9 Airborne, we're going to use the shorthand here. The Red Marker FACs, that was our  
10 call sign, Red Marker Forward Air Controllers, we're the Forward Air Controllers that  
11 supported the ARVN Airborne Division, just Red Marker comes out quicker than the  
12 other. So I picked up an airplane as best I recall and flew it up to Tay Ninh airfield,  
13 which is where at least several of them were operating at the time, landed the airplane  
14 and asked around I guess and was told, that I think those guys are having lunch. And so I  
15 made my way to a building which was very close by, hundred yards at the most and  
16 wandered around a little bit until I found the people I was looking for. Again in my  
17 written memoirs I remember the building quite distinctly. It was very, at least my  
18 recollection of it, it was very large for Vietnam, concrete, ugliest thing I'd ever seen, kind  
19 of an ugly rusty yellow color and I described it as looking like something left over from  
20 the Maginot line and in fact although I never knew for sure, it could easily have been

1 built by the French as some sort of a semi-fortress. It was dark inside, thick walls, very  
2 gloomy dingy place as you might expect somewhere in the Maginot line would have  
3 been. In any case, I found the two people, two or three, may have been three people I was  
4 looking for and walked over to the table where they were eating, introduced myself and  
5 sat down and that's how my relationship with these folks began. I have described again  
6 in writing, my first impression, which was almost frightening. They wore the very  
7 distinctive camouflage uniform that only the ARVN Airborne Division wore. I think,  
8 again a leftover from the French foreign legion, it was not the same as what the  
9 Vietnamese rangers or Vietnamese regulars or RFPFs or anybody else as far as I know  
10 ever wore. Strictly the Airborne Division wore a kind of dull red beret, and the guys  
11 were all in the ARVN uniform which I'll explain in a moment. Joe Granducci, a captain  
12 at the time, was one of the people I met. Joe had an enormous handlebar mustache,  
13 fortunately I have a photograph of him from back in those days, which displays it  
14 beautifully. Sergeant Balasko, spelled either with an E or A, B-E-L or B-A-L, I'm not  
15 sure, I think B-A-L, was one of our radio operators. I've always described him as  
16 looking like a Mexican bandit. He was Latino, short and squat and he too had a  
17 mustache. So in the dark room and with the uniforms and the mustaches and what not,  
18 they really made an impression, as I said of walking into a Mexican cantina in a bad B  
19 movie or some such thing. And I was this clean cut twenty-six year old Lieutenant at the  
20 time, was somewhat shocked, but it didn't last very long. They were good people,  
21 actually excellent people; I got along very quickly with them, very well. On that same  
22 day, at some point the boss, who we all had Red Marker call signs, I turned out to be Red  
23 Marker Four. Granducci was Red Marker Two, but the boss who was a Lieutenant  
24 Colonel at the time, a very old man for the job, relative to other people who were in the  
25 job, Gene McCutchaon was in his 40s, may have been as old as 47 at the time, and Gene  
26 was just known as Red Marker. No number or The Marker, that was just a little pride  
27 thing with him. Gene showed up at some point during the day, he had been out on a  
28 mission and we got introduced. I don't think I flew any missions that day or in that  
29 period. I think the whole thing wrapped up, just about the time I was getting there,  
30 whatever the ARVN unit was doing was wrapping up and somehow very soon, I think  
31 maybe that same day or the next morning, we made our way back to Saigon, which as



1 I've said was the headquarters of the unit. Let me touch before we go further on the unit  
2 itself, as best I can. I think I've said before that it was called the ARVN Airborne  
3 Division, although at the time it was nothing like division size in reality. It was probably  
4 a large brigade, relative to say, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and had three full-up, maybe  
5 even robust regiments in it, but that was really as strong as it was back in those days and  
6 so although it was always known as a division and all the signs and what not in the  
7 cantonment area at Tan Son Nhut said division, at least in my time it was not. We had  
8 three combat ready regiments, as best I recall. So we can call it the brigade or division,  
9 in fact we used to refer to it both ways, just it wasn't that important, we knew what we  
10 were talking about. The unit as I've said was very similar in structure, training,  
11 equipment, and mission as the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division was and is today in the United  
12 States, that is to say parachute very light. The best of leadership, probably man for man  
13 and the best soldiers probably man for man that the Vietnamese Army had -- I'm sure  
14 somebody would argue that with me, but that's fine -- had the mission of national reaction  
15 force or national reserve which meant that if there was a problem somewhere in the  
16 country. And it could be anywhere in the country, frequently a regiment of the division  
17 was directed to go somewhere to conduct some sort of a mission. It was also, I was led to  
18 believe in conversation with the Army folks who were the advisors there to the unit, the  
19 advisory detachment, 193 I think, 192 or 193, I think 193, I can check that. [Note: It was  
20 162.] Detachment 193 had indicated to me that they were also there as kind of coup  
21 control in Saigon, they were at least theoretically and I think in fact, loyal to whatever the  
22 present government was in the interest of stability. And so they were there to quickly  
23 react should a coup arise either in town or from outside town, one of the Corps  
24 commanders or what not. That's a thumbnail sketch, the leadership I remember almost  
25 no names, although I have documents, awards that I got from them and orders and things  
26 that I could probably glean some names out of, let me stop for breath. There is just by  
27 way of information for historical purposes, a red hat organization and I can give you  
28 leads to that if that ever becomes interesting to you. This is an organization of, it's  
29 actually I think officially called the association of the Vietnamese Airborne and it is an  
30 association that's here in the United States of people who were either in, which means  
31 some of the Vietnamese managed to escape here and still live here. Or advisors to,

1 namely people like myself and others, the division. It's pretty well organized, a couple  
2 hundred members, kind of focuses around Fort Bragg, which shouldn't come as a  
3 surprise, has facilitated a couple of monuments in fact. I think one at Fort Benning, one  
4 at Fort Bragg and maybe one at Arlington to the Airborne Division Advisors, several of  
5 whom were killed in action in the course of the war. They have published a hard cover  
6 book, a little history of the division which I have a copy of, runs \$50 to buy it and there  
7 aren't many left, but I do have one, just for the record, if some years down the road,  
8 somebody is looking for one. That's about it, the advisors were also top of the line, most  
9 of them 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division people, just as a matter of curiosity. Pete Dawkins who  
10 was a very famous football player when he was at West Point, captain at the time, was an  
11 advisor during my tenure there. Barry McCaffrey who is, as we speak, well he's just  
12 resigned, but he was the drug czar under the Clinton Administration after he retired from  
13 the Army. I think he had been the commander so Southern Command down in the  
14 Panama Canal area prior to that. And General Schwarzkopf who, everybody knows  
15 General Schwarzkopf was also an advisor in the unit during my tenure, I believe he also  
16 was a Captain at the time. He may have been a Major, but I think a Captain. [Not  
17 exactly right. Schwarzkopf had left just before I arrived.]

18 SM: How much interaction was there between you as a FAC and the other  
19 American advisors?

20 MM: God question and I appreciate you leading me. I'm drifting here and I think  
21 I drifted far enough. It's a good question; the answer is that, here's the way it worked. In  
22 Saigon, very little, we the FACs, five of us, [actually four], lived in a villa, a very nice  
23 house, two-story, kind of what you might see in a middle-class Japanese family today. A  
24 two-story stone building, bedrooms, a living room a kitchen, servants quarters, a  
25 courtyard, that sort of a place. We lived at this place, the five of us, [four], when we were  
26 in town. The Army advisors lived elsewhere in a MACV compound in their own setup,  
27 so we did not have the interaction socially, or time off like we did at Long An and at Duc  
28 Hoa. At work, when we went out to the division area to do one thing or another on Tan  
29 Son Nhut, which was probably a twenty minute drive from the house through town, we  
30 did our thing they did theirs, casual contact here and there. Our only serious contact was  
31 when we went in the field, and when we went to the field, they and we, in other words,

1 the Army advisors and the FACs, would get our heads together with the Vietnamese  
2 commander, usually a regiment and it may be his operations officer and his company  
3 commanders. We would get together somewhere, at an airfield, usually and sit around a  
4 table, get our heads together and plan operations, or coordinate operations. They did the  
5 planning, I wasn't directly involved in the planning unless I saw something that I thought  
6 didn't look right, but then to coordinate what they're plan was with me, so that I could  
7 provide the most effective air support in terms of time and objectives and potential  
8 danger spots and that sort of thing, ordnance and all those kinds of things, plan of  
9 movement. So we would sit around the table and talk about what we were up to until we  
10 had a good grip on what the plan was, and they would go back into the field and I would  
11 go wherever I had set up shop and prepare to provide the support that we had planned.  
12 That interaction, it wasn't particularly exciting, it was very mundane, but it was very  
13 close interaction. Actually, in my mind at least the closest interaction we had was when  
14 we were actually in an operation, and although they were on the ground and I was in the  
15 air, that's when we talked the most. That's when, at least on occasions the  
16 communication was most intense, for reasons of contact with the enemy or other reasons,  
17 typically the latter. When I really did what I was supposed to be doing for them, namely  
18 provide them the kind of support they needed to effectively operate on the ground, so that  
19 is kind of a thumbnail sketch of what we did in one form or another many, many times. I  
20 would say that I and the other forward air controllers, and I guess I ought to name them  
21 for the record right now. The guys, when I got there, Joe Granducci, the captain I  
22 mentioned with the handlebar mustache was just about ready to leave. The guys who I  
23 worked with, we sort of all got there at more or less the same time and they were still  
24 there when I left were a Major names Paul, actually Oliver P., to be technically correct.  
25 Although he always went by Paul and preferred Bud, he certainly didn't like Oliver. Bud  
26 Fisher was a Major, fighter pilot, there was also Bill Stewart, who was a Captain. There  
27 was myself, there was Wayne Kanouse, K-A-N-O-U-S-E, and the boss, McCutchaon.  
28 When I left all of those people were still there and I never met my replacement, I guess  
29 he was coming in just a day or so, at least I don't recall. I don't think I ever met my  
30 replacement; he was coming in shortly after I left. So those are the guys I lived with, and  
31 we would rotate the duty, if a regiment went out, one of us would go with them, usually

1 only one so it made it both good and bad for us and I can discuss that in a minute. So we  
2 would stay at the house, a couple of days off if we'd just come in from the field, do not  
3 much of anything. Just take it easy, then if we weren't scheduled to go out immediately  
4 and things got slow we'd go out to the field and do paperwork, performance reports on  
5 the radio operators and the crew chiefs, or small, little things, nothing very earthshaking,  
6 after action reports and things like that. Then our number would come up and we'd go  
7 out with a regiment, typically wherever they were and whatever they were doing. So I  
8 would say on average, I was probably in the field just a tad over half the month on any  
9 given month and probably home just a tad under half a month, say twenty days out, ten  
10 days in, would probably be about right. I have my complete Form Five, my flying record  
11 from those days and if I had to, I guess I could sort of count flights and pretty much  
12 figure out at least how much effort I was putting in on any given day. It does not  
13 unfortunately indicate where I was; I wish it did because I've forgotten.

14 SM: The units that you would find yourself engaging, enemy formations, what  
15 were they principally, Vietcong, PAVN, combinations?

16 MM: Depended on, as a very general rule in the early part of my time as a Red  
17 Marker they were generally Vietcong. Toward the end we did start to make more contact  
18 with North Vietnamese units, I think largely because toward the end we started to move  
19 further north. To put it another way, my early operations and we would have gone up  
20 and back and up and back and up and back on a rotation, were in the area from Qhi Nuon  
21 north to a place called Bong Son and generally mostly let's say, east of Highway 1, which  
22 was the main north/south road. Sometimes operations into the mountains to the west, but  
23 not very far to the west. So there was a sector there in II Corps that the division seemed  
24 to have a lot of missions assigned in and so we spent months I suppose on and off  
25 individually going up there to support the units that were involved. During those  
26 operations the units that we engaged were almost entirely Vietcong. Later in the tour for  
27 both military and political reasons and again it's in my memoir there, but the written  
28 memoir, but I can touch on it at least, we went up to I Corps and we operated say  
29 generally in an area from a place called Hue Phu Bai to well ultimately to the DMZ, but  
30 not beyond. So in the context of those operations, well let me back up, when were at Qui  
31 Nhon I operated out of Qui Nhon itself. Qui Nhon city which was maybe a ten minute

1 drive from the airfield itself, a large MACV compound. Relatively comfortable concrete  
2 building, rooms with bathrooms and all that sort of thing and I kept my airplane at the  
3 airfield. I operated out of Phu Cat, which you have to be careful, in later years, well in  
4 fact while I was there it was completed. There was an airfield that was called Phu Cat  
5 which was very large American airfield, just as I recall, to the west of Highway 1. The  
6 Phu Cat I operated out of was a little tiny RFPF compound, just to the east of Highway 1  
7 and actually within sight of the new Phu Cat, very primitive place. Also operated out of a  
8 place, had so many names up north. It was called Bong Son, I think Dog Field, English  
9 Field, and it was a dirt runway that was heavily used by the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry division, U.S, 1<sup>st</sup>  
10 Cav. There was a special forces camp very close, probably also called Bong Son, it had  
11 its own little runway as I recall and I spent some time in the special forces camp  
12 operating out of there. Just because it was convenient to the things I was doing, oh  
13 maybe a week that I spent with those guys with my airplane parked inside the compound,  
14 used to taxi it through their barbed wire gate and park it and then taxi out to the airfield  
15 just when I needed to go because of security considerations, place was not safe.

16 SM: Again, PAVN or VC threat?

17 MM: Again, VC best I recall and see, I'm trying to think, during operations in  
18 that area, I know I jumped up north and then came back, but during operations in that  
19 area, that II Corps area, we did on occasion engage VC units. A lot of it I would say was  
20 typical of the way at least I saw the ground war, they were milling around, we were  
21 milling around. We were trying to find them, they were trying to either ambush us,  
22 create some casualties, some morale difficulties, some psychological effect and then  
23 disappear. In that area, to my recollection, no what you would call a pitched battle, even  
24 at the low level, company level, that lasted for very long. It was just an occasional  
25 contact, a quick fire fight, maybe some air strikes, and then the whole thing would just  
26 sort of disappear and again, very typical, at least in my experience. Just as an aside, not  
27 that it's directly relative to anything, the South Korean units which had come over during  
28 the same time frame for various political and operational reasons also had operations  
29 within the same general area that I've just described. They had a small AOR, area of  
30 responsibility, north and west of Qui Nhon as best I recall, and of course further west  
31 toward Pleiku and into the mountains north of Pleiku was the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry was more of

1 than a headquarters it was a gigantic AOR with a lot of operating locations within it. So  
2 we on occasion did operate adjacent to and in coordination with both the Koreans and the  
3 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. So, let's see where does that leave me, okay you're question, I guess I answered  
4 it, not a lot of contact occasionally, particularly when I was at Bong Son and there's a  
5 story in there about kind of in my written thing again, sad story of which there are many  
6 about killing a friendly soldier who was stealing fuel. That was at Bong Son, a local, so  
7 much to say that it's hard sometimes not to go forward on six fronts at once. That was a  
8 local regimental headquarters for that province similar to say what Duc Hoa would have  
9 been, I was there simply because it had an airfield and there was a U.S. advisor or two  
10 there and some semblance, well I won't say some semblance, good security, a place to  
11 sleep. So that was the reason I was there and, why did I bring that up, help me Steve,  
12 where am I here? I'm talking about the kinds of operations we ran into, again at those  
13 kinds of locations we did on occasion we did come under probing attack particularly at  
14 night. You almost never even knew the size of the probing force, they were typically  
15 small, they were always repelled rather easily, trip flares would go off in the middle of  
16 the night. We might see a small number of enemy on the perimeter, some shots would be  
17 exchanged and the thing would go away, so I guess that's a big long answer to the  
18 question of what the level of intensity was but I guess in the process I also covered some  
19 other things.

20 SM: Real quick, how close to the Cambodian border would you get when you  
21 operated in II Corps?

22 MM: Not close at all because we were over on the western side of the Corps.  
23 Highway 1 running pretty much up the, I'm sorry the eastern side, east coast in the  
24 coastal plain prior to where the mountains really began to rise toward Cambodia or Laos,  
25 so not close at all. When I was at Duc Hoa of course we would fly right up to the  
26 Cambodian border.

27 SM: When you operated out of your base there in Saigon, the further north you'd  
28 go from there, the more contact with potential PAVN, so I was curious how far that was  
29 from the border in terms of infiltration of the North Vietnamese into South Vietnam?

30 MM: We did not operate much in the highlands at all, and I think there were  
31 probably several reasons for that. Number one, an Airborne unit wandering around in the

1 jungle probably wasn't going to get much accomplished. The population was highly  
2 concentrated in the coastal plain. I think the effort was at least an attempt to control both  
3 that territory and that population, again we're talking '66 so the political thinking was  
4 still kind of upbeat at this time hearts and minds and all of that sort of thing. We were  
5 going to win this thing, so that's where they concentrated their effort. When we did go  
6 north, and again it's in the written memoir, but my recollection is the first time and the  
7 first reason we went north was because there were two things, and history books may  
8 prove me wrong, but this is the way I understood it at the time. There were two things  
9 going on in I Corps area that were not good. Number one, the Buddhist leadership was  
10 creating a lot of political turmoil. An uprising I guess would have been, it may have been  
11 just short of an uprising, but Buddhist monks were burning themselves to death in town  
12 squares. There was a lot of agitation within the Buddhist church against the government  
13 and so I think the first reason we were sent up there was to kind of put a lid on that. My  
14 recollection is that the unit that went up that time was just a little bit bigger than one  
15 regiment, it may have been two. Although I was the only FAC, so maybe I'm wrong  
16 maybe it was just a regiment. I remember, it was just a regiment but there were other  
17 Vietnamese units that went up as well, Rangers and what have you, but we went first to  
18 Hue Phu Bai. Kind of a staging base, got our act together there a little bit. I ultimately,  
19 and again, there's a story in my written memoir, went in a convoy from Phu Bai to Hue  
20 city, the old moated, medieval city with the moat around it and the old battlements that  
21 really look like something out of the crusades. I operated out of a small airfield that was  
22 inside the citadel, actually, inside the city and then the troops ultimately moved to a  
23 position, somewhat north and as I recall mostly a little bit west of town. The other factor,  
24 besides the Buddhists is, there was some intimation that the I Corps commander was  
25 trying to set up his own little country up there or break away from the Saigon regime or  
26 install somebody that he was more favorable to in Saigon. I don't remember the details  
27 but there certainly was this suspicion that we needed to get more national troops into the  
28 Corps than he could muster on his own and put a lid on that as well. So probably a dual  
29 mission and as best I recall it succeeded, certainly things didn't get worse and in fact they  
30 got better, quieter at least.

31 SM: How much time did you spend in Hue Phu Bai and Hue?

1           MM: That's one of those things I don't really remember, a couple of cycles, a  
2 couple of rotations perhaps, twenty, thirty days total, best guess. I sure wish I'd have  
3 written all that down, but I think I told you I tried to send letters to my mother with little  
4 hints buried in them that I could use later, and again, very untypical of my mom, she at  
5 some point got rid of them. So those are gone and she never threw anything away but  
6 those went for some crazy reason, so I've lost that chronology, I wish I had.

7           SM: Well, you mention in the written memoir that you sent to me, that there's,  
8 apparently there must be two because you mention in this written, shorter version, a  
9 larger I guess written version with pictures and stuff.

10          MM: No, the one I sent you should be, what about ten, twelve, fifteen pages, yes  
11 that is it, that's the memoir. Now I have, at home here, of course a box full of other  
12 things including photographs and pieces of paper, award citations, firearms that I carried  
13 while I was there. I've got a lot of things I've collected, but the one you have is it.

14          SM: I just brought it up because you mention in this written version that when  
15 you, I guess when you first arrived there in Saigon to work with the Airborne Division,  
16 that this was, most of the work, a lot of the work, especially I guess for the first months,  
17 was in the backdrop of a civil war in South Vietnam, I guess the Vietcong and as you  
18 spent more time there, slowly increasing amounts so, I guess, northern support, PAVN  
19 and stuff like that. I was curious if that was your perception at the time or is that  
20 retrospect?

21          MM: That's retrospective. I don't think I cared at the time, and it has to do, really  
22 with what happened after Hue and Hue Phu Bai because obviously the closer to the north  
23 you got, we were up in the Da Nang area, the air activity out of Da Nang was very  
24 intense, both in support of us and in support of other things that were going on up there.  
25 The Marine Corps had a very large presence and we were at least, generally aware of the  
26 kinds of things they were doing, and they were deeper in the mountains and the kinds of  
27 intensity of action that they were finding. Time had ticked by and I think that we were  
28 learning that there was a lot more infiltration coming in from Laos through the  
29 mountains, the western mountains of extreme northern South Vietnam to be accurate  
30 about it than we had to contend with down in the south. So there was at least a vague,  
31 probably more than vague recognition that we're closer to North Vietnamese units. To



1 be honest, although probably not accurate, but the only time I actually remember  
2 engaging an obvious North Vietnamese unit was toward the end when we finally moved  
3 out of the Hue context and moved further north to Dong Ha. Now Dong Ha was just a  
4 lovely place, it was just solid mud most of the time, was a functional runway, and it was a  
5 U.S. Marine base for all practical purposes, like a staging area, a holding area, a jumping  
6 off point an operational area. So typically when you got to Dong Ha it had more the look  
7 of a real forward operational military base that maybe a guy like me would remember  
8 from Korean War or World War II films than anything else that I had seen, which was  
9 either small but tranquil to very large and semi-stateside, am I making sense there?

10 SM: Yes, sir.

11 MM: You know what I'm saying like if you went to Phu Cat or Qui Nhon, except  
12 you knew you were in Vietnam you could have been in Arizona in terms of the danger  
13 level or the level of facilities, which were decent at least. Phu Cat, old Phu Cat, the little  
14 place I mentioned was tiny and primitive but rarely seemed to come under any serious  
15 attack, probably because there wasn't enough there to attack. But when you got to Dong  
16 Ha you got that different feeling, maybe it was just because of the Marines were there.  
17 But there was a lot of vehicle traffic all the time, like I said there was mud and rain and  
18 the airfield was busy as I indicated again in the written memoir, we did come under  
19 serious attack there, regularly, not a few sixty mortars, but 120 millimeter rockets and  
20 lots of them.

21 SM: Why don't you go ahead and discuss the events of October.

22 MM: Okay, what is October, you help me?

23 SM: October 15, this was when you were flying a patrol and basically happened  
24 upon a North Vietnamese regiment?

25 MM: Yes, and that's I guess what I was leading to, you're right October 15. My  
26 regiment let's say, was operating north of Dong Ha and there wasn't a lot of room  
27 between Dong Ha and the DMZ, a map would indicate how much it was, but I don't  
28 think it was twenty miles, and they were operating in that area. Doing search missions,  
29 trying to just control that territory and I was flying cover over them, had no, I don't even  
30 think I had any air in my pocket, so to speak, nothing pre-planned, nothing in a holding  
31 pattern anywhere. They were maneuvering and I was flying cover over them and if my

1 verbal story doesn't quite check with the written one we're going to have just, if we care  
2 to, reconcile the details. But verbally, basically they simply made contact very suddenly,  
3 very abruptly as I recall with a North Vietnamese unit, of my recollection about equal  
4 size, fresh out of North Vietnam and just across the border. This thing all occurred  
5 within a couple of hundred yards of the border of the DMZ as best I remember. The  
6 terrain is relevant, it was what I would call almost like West Texas scrub. Not forest or  
7 jungle certainly, nor was it the farmland which was more typical of the coastal plain, it  
8 was probably coastal plain, but uncultivated because of its proximity to the DMZ and my  
9 point being that the visibility was pretty decent from the air, although not necessarily  
10 very good from the ground. If you can imagine hunting deer in West Texas, you don't  
11 see very far in the scrub oak but I could see very well down into it. So they made contact  
12 and a firefight began. They were, I'll come back to this point, but they were taking some  
13 fire, I don't recall any casualties on the American side, at least not immediately but they  
14 were taking fire and there was a lot of initial confusion as there always is, as to where the  
15 fire was coming from, where the main thrust of the enemy force was. I was able to see  
16 that very readily, and to see the maneuvering. Of course by this time I've got an air strike  
17 on the way, I know, I don't think, I know that Ken Karnes was my radio operator at the  
18 time, back at Dong Ha and close enough to where he could hear my FM radio  
19 transmissions, which we've never really touched on, but from ground to air, or air to  
20 ground, we were usually communicating on the FM band because that's what the Army  
21 uses for close in coordination when they're on the ground. He was close enough to hear  
22 my FM transmissions and as soon as contact was made, he and rightly so, didn't even  
23 bother to wait for me. He called a Direct Air Support Center at Da Nang and said, start  
24 getting some air up here. A few minutes later I called him and he said, don't worry it's  
25 on the way. I said, okay or something to that effect and went back to watching what was  
26 going on, on the ground. So, the first order of business and again, it's in the written  
27 memoir was to try to get the guys on the ground to understand what the disposition of the  
28 enemy force was. I think it's in there, I used a very simple technique which I had never  
29 used before, I thought it up on the spot, but it worked like, great. I could see one of the  
30 Army advisors on the ground, I could tell who he was, and I just told him simply lay  
31 down on the ground and I made him squirm around on the ground until his feet were

1 pointing at the main thrust of the enemy. I think he had a map on his face, just so I could  
2 see which end of him was which, it wasn't that hard anyway. But I think I told him, put  
3 the map over your face and squiggle around until I tell you to stop and I said okay, you're  
4 feet are now pointing at the enemy. And so they were able, because of that to concentrate  
5 the force and the fire in that area and they really did stop the NVA long enough for the air  
6 to get there. There is one funny story I do remember, funny, sardonically funny perhaps,  
7 but I don't think this one's in the memoir, I do recall throwing a red smoke grenade out  
8 of the airplane, again trying to mark the enemy position and it went into a foxhole.  
9 Foxhole I guess is the correct term, it was more like a small, it was like a grave almost in  
10 its dimensions, probably about six feet long and a couple of feet wide and not quite as  
11 deep, maybe three or four feet deep, pre-cut had been there for a while, by the NVA or  
12 the VC. But there were a couple NVA in it and I threw the red grenade and it actually  
13 went in the foxhole where they were. Now this thing, if you've never seen one, it doesn't  
14 look like much from a distance, but it is sputtering smoke and fire pretty vigorously and  
15 so they bailed out of the hole and were immediately shot by the guys on the ground. I  
16 don't think that ones in the memoir, but it's a true story. I was getting by that time, of  
17 course near the end of my tour, at least well into it, getting pretty good with smoke  
18 grenades and as you can tell, both from this narrative and from ultimately when I got the  
19 DFC and from the Air Force side, the Air Medal with V from the Army guys, through  
20 Army channels, because the Air Force doesn't do an Air medal with V, but the Army  
21 does. So they put me in for that but that narrative suggests correctly that when I get shot  
22 up a little bit there, that I had wandered rather low in the course of this thing, stupidly,  
23 but I did, I'd gotten down to, I don't know, maybe five hundred feet, maybe four, I don't  
24 know. I was really into the fight, but I wasn't watching myself so I was able to toss a  
25 smoke grenade with pretty good accuracy from that altitude so the long and the short of  
26 that story of course, is that they were under some considerable fire and in some danger, it  
27 was getting late in the day. We'd been there a while, I was running out of gas and best of  
28 my recollection I did not put in an air strike, a local FAC, whose name I had not known  
29 until the FAC reunion, this recent past up at Hurlburt. I met the guy just by casual  
30 conversation we were talking and it turns out that without a doubt, this is the guy who  
31 actually, a local FAC who actually relived me as I was running out of gas and put in most

1 of the air strikes. In fact I think all of them to settle the area down while I flew back to  
2 Dong Ha and got my airplane repaired because it had been shot up a little bit, actually  
3 mostly just checked it to make sure it was still flyable and then came back to relieve him  
4 as darkness was setting in. I think the NVA had pulled out by then, although we never  
5 really knew and most of what I did on my second flight back in that area was to set up  
6 defensive positions for them, find some likely looking spots where they could put people  
7 and make sure that there was a flare ship on station for the night, a C-47 Spooky and then  
8 put them to bed and then went back to Dong Ha, and the next day back to normal. We  
9 never made a contact like that again. I do remember certain things about that particular  
10 thing very vividly because it's probably the closest I ever came to getting killed by the  
11 enemy. I probably came closer doing stupid things by myself in the airplane, but as far as  
12 enemy action is concerned it's probably the closest I came. I do recall vividly one NVA  
13 soldier stepping out from behind a bush wearing khaki shorts, flip flops, a straw hat with  
14 a silver finish on it, I think, painted silver finish on it, probably to reflect the heat. A  
15 khaki shirt and an AK-47 and he opened up on me at reasonably close range for an AK.  
16 I'd say maybe four hundred yards [I said yards, but I meant feet] and hit the airplane two  
17 or three times, shattered the left rudder pedal, stripped the manufacturer's label off the  
18 generator without actually hurting the generator, put a dent in it, and one came through  
19 the window and there was a huge amount of plexi-glass, actually broke both windows,  
20 came in the left window, went out the right.1 So broke some plexi-glass and had a lot of  
21 plexi-glass and dirt and dust in the airplane which is another story. That was obviously  
22 vivid in my mind, again, the only thing I remember saying was I'm hit and before I could  
23 even explain that I meant I, the airplane, which I considered part of me, Karnes had  
24 already called again. A rescue service was on their way, or rescuer helicopter was on its  
25 way from Da Nang before I could turn it off, so he was good like they all were, he did  
26 what he needed to do without a lot of guidance.

27 SM: Why is the plexi-glass and dirt another story?

28 MM: I'll get to that, because let's see, let me finish here and then I'll come back  
29 to that. The other things, what else do I vividly remember about that? Well the guy with  
30 the machine gun who by the way, was killed as soon as he stepped out and fired at me  
31 somebody got him. I guess the point is this was fairly close, I mean this was very,

1 everything was very visible, not just a bunch of little dots running around on the ground,  
2 these were real people on both sides and very obviously so. There was something else I  
3 was trying to say, I've forgotten, it doesn't matter. The thing about the plexi-glass is  
4 when the bullet came up, and I don't know that this is in my memoir either, but when the  
5 bullet came up through the floor and broke the rudder, because there's just a lot of dirt  
6 and debris on the floor, not a ton, but enough and the plexi-glass flying around. Later  
7 that night, I kept seeing something wrong with my left eye and I presumed that I had just  
8 maybe a piece of dirt or a piece of glass or something in my eye and it was of some  
9 concern to me. So that when I get back to Saigon, I went to see the flight surgeon, I said  
10 there's something wrong with my left eye, and he, good examination at the hospital there  
11 which was probably the best one in country. Well that and Da Nang and couldn't find it,  
12 the ophthalmologist or optometrist, ophthalmologist, I guess, couldn't find anything. I  
13 said okay, that's fine if you can't see anything, I'm happy. He said no, I'm not happy, if  
14 you're seeing something, there's something wrong. They sent me downtown Saigon, this  
15 is very interesting to me, female Vietnamese optometrist. You've got to understand that  
16 we had this, sadly in almost every case, third world country kind of an attitude about the  
17 locals and being sent to a Vietnamese eye doctor wasn't my idea of a great idea. What  
18 the hell is this guy going to do to me, turned out to be a woman educated in Paris, very,  
19 very good optometrist. She couldn't find anything either, so I said fine, great, we'll call it  
20 a day, but the system now was in full swing and it wouldn't stop. I actually got  
21 aerovaced, if you can imagine, out of Vietnam to the U.S. hospital at Yokota in Japan for  
22 a week while they looked at me there, and it was misery because it was Yokota. I'd been  
23 there many, many times as an air lifter, it was a pretty good place to relax and have a few  
24 beers and something good to eat in total peace and comfort, they wouldn't let me out of  
25 the hospital. Although I was ambulatory and the only problem I had was this maybe eye  
26 thing. Well, the long and the short of it is, it was finally diagnosed as something called a  
27 vitreous floater, which everybody has, they're just little things inside your eye, like the  
28 little hard white part of an egg white that you get when you're separating an egg. There  
29 are things like that floating around in the liquid part of your eye and they sometimes  
30 obscure your vision or what not. You don't see them unless you look up at a clear sky  
31 or swim underwater with your eyes open, normally and it had always been there is the

1 long and the short of it. It's just that I'd never noticed it until this trauma of getting shot  
2 at and hit, so that's the point of the story about the debris flying around the cockpit.

3 SM: Now who was the other FAC?

4 MM: I think the other FAC, I have his name somewhere, if it's not in the  
5 memoir, if it's not in the version I sent you, it is in my absolutely most recently updated  
6 version, I won't take time now, but I'll look at it and I'll get it for you next time, his call  
7 sign and his name are in there.

8 SM: Oh, Dan Riley.

9 MM: Yes, there you go, right, so it is in there, good. I thought I sent you the very  
10 last update that I did. So and he told the story absolutely perfect, he knew every detail,  
11 and I hadn't a clue who he was until the reunion.

12 SM: Now a couple clarifying questions, back to II Corps real quick, when you  
13 were down there near the Bong Son plain and that area, did you ever fly into or hear  
14 about a place called Two Bits?

15 MM: Two Bits, no, means nothing to me.

16 SM: Also, quickly back to the civil war issue, even though a lot of what you  
17 talked about today and what you've written in your memoir seems to be retrospective,  
18 when you were there what was your impression in terms of who you were really fighting?  
19 Were you really fighting against North Vietnam, or did you feel you were fighting  
20 against an internal threat, helping the South Vietnamese?

21 MM: Oh, we knew, when we went it I Corps that time, the Hue Phu Bai, Hue  
22 thing, we knew we were fighting two enemies at that point.

23 SM: Two enemies?

24 MM: No question.

25 SM: And that was?

26 MM: Maybe three, the VC, Vietcong as one, in one lump, the North Vietnamese  
27 forces, whatever size and style, and the Buddhists and the Corps Commander. We knew  
28 it. It was all very subtle though, I think probably the commander of the Airborne  
29 Division unit that went there was probably a little more senior than he had to be. They  
30 probably grabbed at least a full Colonel, maybe the most senior full Colonel, and these  
31 guys all knew each other, they'd been fighting in Vietnam for endless years. So this guy

1 was no stranger to the I Corps commander, nor vice versa and I think when he went up  
2 there, there were meetings and it was all very cordial and lots of smiling and bowing, and  
3 all that sort of thing. But everybody knew what was going on, that's not unusual, you can  
4 find that in corporate America, everybody's having a drink and dinner and smiling and  
5 being charming and they hate each other, or at least they're trying to cut each other's  
6 throat in a business sense.

7 SM: Now, did you have an opportunity to talk about these types of things  
8 amongst other FACs or with the Army advisors that you worked with?

9 MM: No, not those kinds of things. When we had a chance to talk, my  
10 conversation with the Army advisors was generally strictly operational, and that's the  
11 only time I ever really saw them. Once in a blue moon the division would have a party,  
12 some sort of a party in Saigon. They'd bring in some local girls of a better quality than  
13 the normal and they would be there to dance with and that's all. Just female companion,  
14 somebody to talk to, and the conversation during once of those evenings might drift a  
15 little bit away from operations, but they were rare. And at home in the villa on Yen Do  
16 Street there in Saigon, I forget the number, I have it written down somewhere, number  
17 three or number thirty-four Yen Do was the address of the villa. We tried, I almost think  
18 now unconsciously, it's a good question, I never thought about it. Unconsciously, we  
19 didn't talk much about operations unless something really worth sharing came up. The  
20 operational discussion was when we passed the baton, if I was leaving say Dong Ha to go  
21 back to Saigon for my break and Wayne or Bill was coming up. I'd certainly give them a  
22 very good operational baton pass, the terrain and the threats and what we'd done in the  
23 past and what it would look like into the future and where you could get good support  
24 from the Marines and maybe what the DASC was doing well and maybe where they  
25 weren't doing so well. A good operational pass of the baton but once we got back to  
26 Saigon, it was like trivial almost, just casual conversation about this and that. That was  
27 about it. It's funny because we spent like a full day, I think we slept a lot to tell you the  
28 truth. I think we probably got up late in the morning, maybe ten o'clock, remember it's  
29 hot as blazes all the time, no air conditioning, we did have fans and what not. So you got  
30 up late, you didn't move very fast, might have had a light lunch, read a book, take a nap,  
31 read some mail, write some letters, a little conversation in the afternoon, have an early

1 dinner, go to your room. Read some more, get to bed, it was pretty mundane and the  
2 conversations were very general and usually more about home and the future, what's  
3 your next assignment and that kind of thing, than operational.

4 SM: Were you able to develop strong relationships with your fellow FACs,  
5 friendships?

6 MM: Strong, funny word.

7 SM: Was it avoided?

8 MM: No, it was not avoided, how do you put it? The opportunity was limited to  
9 get a very close relationship and since we rarely actually worked together. Like for  
10 example I read Charlie Pockets book, *Viper Seven*, and Charlie's situation was closer to  
11 what I had at Duc Hoa and Long An, but never long enough to get involved. His  
12 relationship with the one or two other FACs that were collocated was obviously much  
13 stronger. You came home every night, same guys, same Army guys and you had a whole  
14 year there. With us, we rarely functioned operationally together and so just a friendly,  
15 more than casual friendly relationship I guess is as far as I would go with it.

16 SM: Another question about ARVN, what was your assessment of the ARVN  
17 units you supported down in Saigon and then in I Corps?

18 MM: Well, the ARVN Airborne Division was excellent in every respect. You  
19 couldn't at least, within reasonable limits fault them on anything as far as I was  
20 concerned. Their leadership was hand picked from the best of the Vietnamese military  
21 leadership, had been in the division, it wasn't like the U.S. Army or the U.S. Air Force,  
22 where you got a new assignment every three years. These guys had been with the  
23 division since forever, the senior people and the young guys I think anticipated staying  
24 and growing in the division. The troops were good as any troops will be if they're  
25 probably led, they'll do their job. The American advisors were, I won't say a cut above,  
26 that wouldn't be fair. I mean the American advisors who came to go to the Ranger units  
27 or even just the ordinary Vietnamese units were probably very good, but I can tell you  
28 that the guys who came to the Airborne division were, from personal experience, I mean  
29 guys like Schwarzkopf and I think I mentioned Colonel LaBrozzi, who had a battlefield  
30 commission in Korea, strangely for just reasons of rotation I think I seemed to find  
31 myself in the field with him more than most of the others. I'm a kid and he's an old man,



1 it was another one of those father-son relationships almost like I had with Gene  
2 McCutchaon. I mean Gene was twenty years older than I was for crying out loud, and  
3 LaBrozzi with a battlefield commission from Korea was probably right up there too. So  
4 those are the people I remember best, but if you went to the unit area, the division area  
5 there at Tan Son Nhut it was well maintained, it was kept clean, it was good. I certainly  
6 never found fault with them. Oh, this is the thing I was going to touch on and drifted  
7 away from, we drifted back. There is, and we may have already discussed it, but it's a  
8 fact, it's just a matter of history that because of the strength of U.S. air power and the  
9 effectiveness of U.S. air power generally in the South, and the availability of it, and the  
10 fact that these guys had been fighting since long before we'd thought about getting over  
11 there. There was a tendency I think in all cases, when contact was made, to hold rather  
12 than attack and just hold position, sort of pin the enemy until the air could come in and  
13 destroy them. And frankly if I had been a Vietnamese division platoon leader or  
14 company commander and I knew that was the situation I can't imagine why I'd go  
15 charging in with rifles. I'd be dead today, theoretically or perhaps, whereas I know I can  
16 get the enemy destroyed, probably better than I can do and I'll be there to do it again  
17 tomorrow. So there was very definitely, at least in my opinion, that tendency and I think  
18 that tendency also applied in the division. The story up where I got my DFC is classic. I  
19 told them where the fire was, they held the enemy, didn't retreat certainly, but they're not  
20 going to do a cavalry charge like in the movies. Hold the enemy until the air comes in  
21 and destroys them. So that's probably a point, that's significant. I know you've been  
22 probing with a lot of your questions through the course of these interviews, so you  
23 obviously have some thoughts in mind where you're trying to fill in some blanks and I  
24 know at least my experience, I haven't been very helpful in most of them, but this one I  
25 think is significant.

26 SM: My question about ARVN, my interest is not so much in clarifying or  
27 verifying anything in particular, but there's already assessments out there, and some of  
28 them are not very glowing or very positive. I want to know what you think because  
29 based on what you said already I thought that it seemed like the Airborne division and the  
30 units that you were fighting with, were pretty good, they were doing a great job.

1           MM: Yes, there was no question. I'll be honest with you, what little I knew of  
2 the U.S. units, particularly the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav., because we worked adjacent to them very often,  
3 was that they were as inclined to do that as anybody else and for all the same good  
4 reasons. If you've got a company of NVA out in front of you, and you know exactly  
5 where they are, you've got to be semi-suicidal to go charging into them when you know  
6 you can have napalm and five hundred bombs all over the place in ten minutes. It makes  
7 no sense to me, there is an element of human survival even in the craziest soldier I think,  
8 or maybe not in the craziest. But I think that again it's a question of leadership, I'm sure  
9 there were U.S. units with some Chargin' Marvin in front of the, as the company  
10 commander who did things that were very brave and probably unnecessarily brave at  
11 times. But again, generally I would say that's the way the war was fought, find the  
12 enemy, pin them, locate them and let the air destroy them, at least whenever possible, and  
13 I think, why not?

14           SM: You mention in your memoir another interesting incident, a personal attack  
15 against you when you were driving through a city.

16           MM: That was when we went up to Hue, when we went to Phu Bai and then as I  
17 said, we sort of got our act together there, I think is the phrase I used and then we  
18 convoyed up Highway 1 from Phu Bai to the Hue citadel and then beyond. We, now  
19 meaning the entire package, the ground units, myself, my radio operator, my crew chief  
20 wasn't with us. I don't know how he got there, or the airplane got there, now that I think  
21 of it because I didn't fly it in. I don't remember that part, but the airplane ultimately got  
22 to Hue. I did not fly it into Hue, I may have flown it into Phu Bai, or you know what we  
23 did? I remember now. We literally stole it from the local FACs, in the sense that  
24 McCutchaon got the TACC down in Saigon to order them to turn loose one of their  
25 airplanes for us, that's right because it was too far to go, too quick to get our own up  
26 there. So I think they probably positioned it for us and I think my crew chief probably  
27 flew in a Caribou or some such thing and then my radio operator and I went with the  
28 Mark 108 Jeep to Phu Bai and then we convoyed. The thing was that I had to get into the  
29 Citadel which is where my airplane and I guess by then my crew chief was, and where we  
30 going to, again camp out and bunk out. I would up, now that I think about it, bunking out  
31 with an Australian captain who was the advisor to a local APC, armored personnel carrier

1 unit. I have no idea what his name was, but typical Australian. He had a bunk so that's  
2 where I wound up sleeping, but I'm drifting. The story was yes, we had planned, using  
3 the maps that at a certain point as this convoy was heading north to a position northwest  
4 of Hue that I was going to have to break out of the convoy alone and go to the citadel.  
5 Now, I've described in the memoir that, as best I remember, practically speaking all the  
6 way from Hue Phu Bai to Hue city, which is a considerable distance, the road was lined  
7 with local people, stirred up by the Buddhist. And had their, the thing I most vividly  
8 remember is that they had their little home altars, or shrines, which every home has, no  
9 matter how small, just a table, foot and a half by two and a half or so, but a little altar  
10 with symbols which don't mean anything to me, not understanding Buddhism. But  
11 incense burners and pictures and little statues and what not and has to do, I know enough  
12 to know that it has to do with ancestors and what not, but these were all moved out of the  
13 homes and lined the roads and then people standing there as well, watching us go by,  
14 obviously making a statement. I don't remember any really belligerent or hostile looks,  
15 but sort of making a statement's the best I can do. We'd just as soon you weren't here  
16 and we want to let you know that, we're not going to get hostile and they didn't. The  
17 thing again in the memoir, I remember it has to do with the Buddhist colors, gold and red,  
18 very predominant, banners and things like that, or at least that sticks in my head. A lot of  
19 gold and red cloth, tapestries and altar covers and little flags and what not lining the  
20 route, and there were lots and lots of people. The long and short of it is that at the  
21 appointed point, adjacent to Hue citadel, I and my driver, who I've chosen, not to name,  
22 broke out of the convoy. Just very quickly made a right turn out of the convoy down a  
23 street, almost a boulevard actually. I can see it, it looked a little like Paris in Hue, making  
24 it for the military portion of the citadel. That sort of break in the pattern agitated a lot of  
25 the bystanders and we wound up being chased by a mob of a couple hundred people  
26 probably. And again the amusing part now is that my radio operator, who was not one of  
27 the brighter ones, reaches for his revolver which we all carried and he's, almost before I  
28 can stop him, he's leaning out the left side of the Jeep trying to drive it and playing  
29 stagecoach shotgun kind of guy with his revolver. He didn't fire it and I just quickly told  
30 him to put it away, drive, and don't miss a gear because they're going to eat us if we miss  
31 a gear. And so we did, very quickly, this whole thing took seconds probably before we

1 finally outdistanced the mob and got to the citadel but it's very vivid because I really  
2 figured although the crowd had been peaceful. Things like this changed the nature of the  
3 crowd and just the fact that they were running and now getting in a physical mode, if they  
4 had caught us I think we would have been in serious trouble because we were absolutely  
5 alone at that point.

6 SM: Now was this the time when someone hurled a grenade at you?

7 MM: No, that was different that was in Saigon, going from the house at Yen Do  
8 to Tan Son Nhut, just a perfectly routine morning, just jumped in the, we had a couple of  
9 Jeeps and drivers, the FACs had a driver, his name was Phoung, just a young enlisted  
10 man out of the division and his duty assignment was the FACs driver. I have  
11 photographs of him and McCutchaon had his own. Phoung served the four of us and  
12 Gene had his own driver, named Loung, L-U-O-N-G, I think, I also have a photograph of  
13 him. So Phoung I guess had picked me up, I think it was just the two of us at the house,  
14 to take me out to the base to do something. As I said OARs, or after action reports or  
15 something, just because I was bored and wanted to go out there, and we were driving  
16 down one of the main thoroughfares that led from the house to the main gate at Tan Son  
17 Nhut. I picture it in my mind as an intersection, fairly broad, again almost Parisian kind  
18 of a boulevard, lots and lots of people around, cyclos and people on foot and bicycles all  
19 over the place and a hand grenade was thrown from, we were heading north if I  
20 remember right, that's the way the road went to Tan Son Nhut from the house and the  
21 hand grenade was thrown from the left of the Jeep somewhere. I never even saw who  
22 threw it at us, I'm sure but it sailed over the Jeep and landed on the sidewalk to the right  
23 and exploded and I'm sure, in a little market area, which was typical, something for sale  
24 on the street kind of a place, fruit or coffee or God knows what, could have been anything  
25 and it exploded. And we didn't blink, we just kept right on going. I wasn't about to stop  
26 and render aid or see what the heck it was all about, that was just pure survival at that  
27 point, get the hell out of here. I'm sure there were people injured if not killed, but that's  
28 the way it went, again, one of those over before you can think about it and it took less  
29 time than it takes to tell about it, stories. And it happened occasionally in town, times  
30 like that.

1           SM: Would you guys report that to anybody, it seems like that would be great  
2 fodder for Americans and Vietnamese both working on counterintelligence?

3           MM: You know I think I mentioned it when I got to the base but it was  
4 understood that those kinds of things would happened and probably generated almost no  
5 interest other than, oh, wow.

6           SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Morea on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2001.

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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Michael Morea  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
February 15, 2001  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Mike  
2 Morea. It's the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2001 at approximately five minutes after nine, Lubbock  
3 time. I am in Lubbock, Texas, Mr. Morea is in Florida. Sir why don't you go ahead and  
4 talk about your final impressions upon learning you were leaving Vietnam and as you  
5 were getting on the plane to get back to the United States?

6 MM: Well, that's interesting, because I hadn't really thought about that but I  
7 think I can sort of dredge it up from memory. I guess again, I've probably overused the  
8 word, but it is the thing that sticks in my mind most about the whole experience is this  
9 aspect of surrealism that surrounded the whole experience of being in a war and I think  
10 what happened is that, past the six month point, you begin to realize that you really are  
11 there and you really have been doing certain things and you really have been fighting a  
12 war and more to the point. You actually begin to realize, that I could get killed here, but  
13 I'm halfway through and I just might survive this thing and that sort of starts to dawn on  
14 you in an indirect, probably subconscious sort of way. But it also starts to dawn on you  
15 that if that's the case you've got to start planning for the future, I think when guys go to  
16 war, it's almost like everything stops in their mind, at least it was with me and you just  
17 sort of get on with it. Being a bachelor, maybe it was more that way, I didn't have family  
18 and kids to worry about, but it was sort of like the whole world stopped and I'm just  
19 going to do this and maybe I'll survive it and then you start to get this feeling, by golly I

1 am going to survive this. I've got experience, I haven't done anything terribly stupid yet  
2 and I've got less than half the time to go, so you start to think about the future and  
3 assignments and all that sort of thing start to come up and I think probably, I think I went,  
4 I'm jumping around here a bit, but I went on two R & Rs while I was in Vietnam, I think  
5 the rule was you were allowed big one, and the married guys typically went to Hawaii or  
6 someplace and met up with their wives and the single guys like me took two shorts ones,  
7 like a week each, I think we were allowed two total weeks. I went somewhere, I forget  
8 when, but I think probably in about October or thereabouts I went to Bangkok by myself,  
9 ratted around town like a bachelor will in a place like Bangkok. Had a good time, drank  
10 way too much and got back on the airplane and came back to work a week later. Then in  
11 December I remember more distinctly, I took my second one, which was to Hong Kong.  
12 And by the time that second leave rolled around, I was only two months from leaving  
13 Vietnam, thoughts of assignment and a new life and going back to normality and  
14 civilization and all of that sort of thing were definitely beginning to take over a lot of  
15 your thinking. Particularly your spare time thinking, and I think that was the case with  
16 me. So you start thinking, well gee, what am I going to do, and you start thinking  
17 assignment and the interesting thing about that and I think this is also in my memoirs is  
18 that being an air lifter, C-133s at Travis before I went to Vietnam, I pretty much knew I  
19 was going to go back to air lift and the assignment came down, my assignment came  
20 down, probably about December there, I think I had a couple of months to work with it,  
21 that said I was going to go to C-141s at Norton Air Force base which was in San  
22 Bernardino, Southern California and of course that was a real plum assignment because  
23 the 141 was new in the inventory. It was a jet as opposed to, it was the first real jet  
24 transport airplane and it was going to be a great thing to fly that thing as it was almost  
25 brand new in the inventory and sort of progress through my career with that airplane. So  
26 I was pleased at that with one exception, problem was that I had at some point, and again  
27 I think it ties into this, I think I'm going to survive thing, at some point I had started  
28 writing to, I wouldn't even call her my girlfriend, a girl I knew back at Travis who I dated  
29 occasionally, rarely I would say is more accurate and saw at clubs, bars in San Francisco  
30 and parties in the bay area and at Travis. We sort of seemed to be compatible, and I had  
31 started writing her and she wrote back, and we both I think thought there was something

1 cooking there and I knew very well that if I went to San Bernardino that was going to be  
2 the end of that relationship. So in the back of my mind, I had this idea which I didn't  
3 bother with while I was in Vietnam that I needed probably to get my assignment changed  
4 and go back to Travis if we were going to explore this relationship. The long and short of  
5 that story, I'm jumping way ahead now, is that when I finally did get back in February I  
6 stopped in to see my old squadron commander whose got an interesting piece of history  
7 associated with him in Vietnam, which I think I will mention because it is public record.  
8 But I went to see him and I told him the story and asked him to get the assignment  
9 changed while I was on leave back in New York, which he did and so I ultimately  
10 reported back to Travis rather than San Bernardino and I ultimately married the girl and  
11 she's still living with me here, so that worked out fine, but that is kind of an interesting  
12 thing. I know I haven't directly answered your question Steve, but you so start to think, I  
13 think it's the opposite, it's not so much what you start to think about as what you weren't  
14 thinking about up to a certain point, at least in my mind, you sort of close everything out  
15 and you just say, this is it, I don't want to talk to anybody, I don't want to know too much  
16 about what's going on anywhere else. I'm just doing this and if it's over and I survive  
17 then I'll get back to the normal world and that again, is that, we used to call the States the  
18 real world. There were phrases that we used that I think unconsciously suggested that  
19 that's how we thought about things. I don't think I was any different in that regard.  
20 Again, just to reiterate, sort of as time ticks by and you become more and more aware of  
21 the fact that you probably are going to leave this place and go somewhere else, you start  
22 coming out of that cocoon kind of a situation and starting to think about the broader  
23 world and reality again. That's probably not as well as I could do if I sat down and  
24 thought about it for two weeks before I said anything, but that sort of was the feeling that  
25 I had.

26 SM: Now you mentioned that the commander, squadron commander you  
27 approached?

28 MM: Name was Jerry Kehrli, K-E-H-R-L-I, and he was a hell of a nice guy. He  
29 was a damn good commander, but he made a big mistake and people my age remember it  
30 because it was very public. He was a commander in Vietnam of one of the units there, I  
31 think at Tan Son Nhut, aerial port squadron if I'm not mistaken although I could easily



1 be. A full Colonel and he got caught smoking marijuana, which of course today is a joke.  
2 People say so what? But back then a commander in Vietnam in the '60s, it was a major,  
3 major deal and he wound up getting convicted and winding up in Leavenworth, believe it  
4 or not, five years I think, court martial, the whole deal. Yes, honest, it's hard for guys  
5 your age to believe something like that but is absolutely true, Jerry Kehrli was his name,  
6 good guy. He got out afterwards and I don't think they hammered him too bad in terms  
7 of retirement and all of that sort of thing. He might have lost one grade or gone back to  
8 Lieutenant Colonel for retirement purposes or some such thing, but sad story in a way  
9 because he was really a good guy, but he made a mistake. He wasn't drinking, he was  
10 smoking a joint every once in a while at night. It was illegal, you could get plastered  
11 every night at the bar, but you couldn't smoke a joint and that's just the way the rules  
12 were and he broke them.

13 SM: How was he as a commander?

14 MM: Oh, super guy, terrific. He was the 84<sup>th</sup> Squadron Commander at Travis  
15 there for years, wonderful guy, great.

16 SM: Competent?

17 MM: Yes, completely competent, personable, everything, he was a good  
18 commander.

19 SM: What a shame.

20 MM: Yes, it was kind of sad, but again, I'm not telling any tales out of school,  
21 that's public record.

22 SM: Yes, sir. Now, when you arrived in the United States what was that like,  
23 getting off that freedom bird?

24 MM: I think, actually I'm going to have to back you up to answer the question  
25 correctly. I think it started sooner than that, it started when the airplane lifted off from  
26 Saigon, it was like day and night. Like the whole thing almost disappeared from your  
27 mind, at least temporarily. It's over, that whole thing is over, I'm out of here, I escaped, I  
28 survived, I made it. It was almost instantaneous when the gear came up on the airplane  
29 and you could feel it in the airplane, it was not just me it was everybody. You really at  
30 that point realized, I made it, I'm going home, and then you start to think almost as if it  
31 didn't happen, at least for a short while. In my case probably for quite a while, it was like

1    okay, that's done. The guys I knew back there, they're going to continue their job, I  
2    probably will never see them again. Although that turned out to be fortunately not  
3    correct, at the reunion I saw several of course, but it was just an instantaneous sharp  
4    break, like somebody hit you upside with something and snapped you back to reality,  
5    almost that sharp I think in my case. Funny thing, I remember Phil Teague, who I think,  
6    you met Phil at the reunion. If you don't remember he was a kind of a boisterous isn't  
7    quite the right word, very, had an aura about him almost, a really outgoing guy. He was  
8    walking with a cane, a little hunched over, not old but I think he'd been in an accident,  
9    Phil Teague. Phil and I sat next to each other on the airplane coming home and the funny  
10   thing I do remember is Phil had this enormous bottle of Lavoris, green mouthwash with  
11   him and we drank the thing all the way home. Of course it wasn't Lavoris, it was crème  
12   de menthe, believe it or not, an enormous bottle of the stuff and we just quietly sipped on  
13   that all the way back to the States and of course the stewardess knew what was going on.  
14   It was a Continental flight if I remember, she knew what the heck was going on, but we  
15   were behaving ourselves and they didn't care. Kind of funny, but again, that does really  
16   in a way tie to your question, it was like, okay it's over. Let's have a drink and by the  
17   time we get home we won't even remember it happened. I think, when I got off the  
18   airplane, to answer your question directly, I think it was at San Francisco, I think it didn't  
19   land at Travis, it landed at the international airport, San Francisco and I don't even think I  
20   spent the night. I think I caught a flight, I honestly don't remember, may have spent one  
21   night. If I spent a night it was in the Jack Tar hotel, that's a vague memory or else I just  
22   caught another airplane and went straight to New York, I honestly don't remember. No,  
23   that's not true because I went down to Travis to see Kerhli before I went home, so I  
24   honestly don't remember, I don't remember how it all evolved.

25       SM: What month and year is this now?

26       MM: This would have been February of '67.

27       SM: February '67, any kind of anti-war protesting going on?

28       MM: None that I saw and again, you've asked that question before and I guess to  
29   answer it again, we were vaguely aware through the *Stars and Stripes* and radio programs  
30   that there was a protest in progress, don't think we realized how intense it was, don't  
31   think we cared much.

1 SM: Well, I meant at the airport?

2 MM: At the airport, nothing that I recall.

3 SM: Did you ever have any run-ins with anti-war protestors?

4 MM: No, I subsequently came to know a few people socially who were very anti-  
5 war. We had conversations, they had their opinion, I had mine, it never got angry or  
6 anything as best I recall. The society that I lived in was not the, I was past the college  
7 thing and I was past the hippie thing. So that group of people was probably a subculture  
8 in a literal sense to me, in that they were younger, poorer, less worldly wise perhaps.  
9 Didn't really know what they were talking about, was probably my bottom line opinion.  
10 If they knew what was really going on they'd understand better but they didn't because  
11 they were just kids. That was probably my thinking and just leave them alone and they'll  
12 go away or whatever. I think the only one that sticks in my mind in a different way  
13 would have been what year would it have been, '68, probably, the '68, was it the '68  
14 Democratic National Convention in Chicago where they had the riots and all of that sort  
15 of thing, I think that's correct.

16 SM: I believe so.

17 MM: Yes, and of course that was nationally televised and very intense, the  
18 politics within the democratic party with McGovern, who was considered a real peacenik  
19 for lack of a better word, was making a run for the presidential nomination. And there  
20 were a lot of people of that persuasion who had a lot of influence were getting a lot of  
21 television time. I remember there was a Catholic priest, Berrigan, Karragin, Garagin,  
22 [Berrigan is correct], some such name who was very politically active and very anti-war  
23 and there were. What's his name, Jane Fonda's ex-husband whose now a Congressman I  
24 think from California, who was very young, very active, anti-war protester at the time. I  
25 want to say Bruton, that's not it, but it's something like that, but again it's easy to say  
26 Mayden, or find out who I'm talking about. He's still out there and of course times have  
27 changed for him too. Although I think he's still a very liberal Democrat but in any case  
28 that whole '68 convention Brouhaha was brought the thing home in a different way. It  
29 was sort of like, holy smokes this is serious. This thing is really becoming a national  
30 problem here rather than just a bunch of flower children romping around in the park in  
31 San Francisco somewhere. So that I do recall as maybe an awakening of things to come,

1    which of course did come later, primarily through the Johnson administration because I  
2    guess he won that election and became the president. No, that's not.

3           SM: That would have been '64.

4           MM: No, that's not possible, Johnson became president when Kennedy was shot,  
5    and then had a second term, so this may have been into that time. I don't know, who won  
6    that election?

7           SM: In '68, that would have been Nixon.

8           MM: Yes, actually Nixon beat the Democrat. That's exactly right and Nixon  
9    then was almost in the process I think from that day on, I think he made a half-hearted  
10   attempt to take a look at the war and see if it was winnable. Realized it wasn't under the  
11   political circumstances and probably from early in his administration, the philosophy of  
12   the U.S. government, although it may have been a secret philosophy was let's get the hell  
13   out of here as quick as we can. And it took years and years for it to happen, but I think at  
14   that point, probably that Chicago convention was where the thing went over the hump.  
15   Everybody said, and of course Tet had happened in January of '68, Tet Offensive so  
16   combination of those things I think you could probably call that the point where we went  
17   from seriously thinking we could win to seriously thinking we ought never have started  
18   as a nation.

19          SM: Well, just out of curiosity when you got back in 1967, and then you found  
20   yourself back at Travis, I assume you were back, what were you flying C-130s?

21          MM: 133 again, yes.

22          SM: 133, okay. What did you hear in terms of the progress of the war throughout  
23   the rest of '67 and especially leading up to Westmoreland coming back to the United  
24   States and giving his progress report that basically the war was almost at an end?

25          MM: My recollection is very little. I think I was busier, see two things happened,  
26   well several things happened. Now I'm dating this girl with some seriousness, I am now  
27   back with enough flying time in the 133 from my previous tour to where I'm sort of in a  
28   fast track to become aircraft commander, which is a biggie, the pilot in command and of  
29   course there's an awful lot of studying and training and what not involved in that, in  
30   addition to just flying the missions. We were flying very heavily into Vietnam, I was  
31   flying, pilots don't believe it today, or they believe it but they find it hard to imagine, I

1 was flying a hundred thirty hours a month or so, regularly. Which was over the  
2 maximum by a few hours and usually wound up flying on a waiver, because we were  
3 supporting Vietnam so heavily and a combination of all of those things. I don't think I  
4 paid a lot of attention to be honest with you. It was like I did my part, and the war is  
5 continuing. I think in the early days I probably still thought we were going to win, in '68  
6 probably, but by '70 I knew we weren't, but I didn't pay a lot of attention.

7         One thing does pop into mind though, that might be of interest, during those days  
8 the black population in the military was becoming very agitated, very belligerent.  
9 Obviously not every person, but particularly the young enlisted blacks were becoming  
10 very agitated as a group. There were people within the groups that were stirring them up,  
11 anti-war, black power. You're talking about the period of time where black power was  
12 big, where the Afro haircut was big and of course you couldn't wear an Afro in the  
13 military so there was agitation about that. The Black Muslim thing was starting to occur  
14 and that included a beard and you couldn't have a beard so there was a lot of agitation  
15 about that. There were, Travis in particular, there were some riots in the dormitories,  
16 which is historic. You can go back and discover the details from newspaper and that sort  
17 of thing, but there was some level, relatively low level rioting in the barracks, amongst  
18 the young blacks. That obviously got our attention and I guess we sensed that it was  
19 somehow war related, but not necessarily directly. It was more related to the burgeoning  
20 civil rights movement, which of course was in full steam by then, with a lot of Stokely  
21 Carmichael, Malcolm X were all prominent figures of that particular period in time. So  
22 that's something that I do recall and do recall being very concerned about because of what  
23 it might portend for the future, you know where the hell are we going? We're losing our  
24 integrity, we're no longer one any more, Air Force, now we're a black Air Force and a  
25 white Air Force and that's not good. So that was a matter of real concern I think to just  
26 about everybody. And kinds of attitudes among the white guys, hey if you wanted to be  
27 in the military you knew you needed a haircut, what's this with the Afro and you can't  
28 wear your hat on top of an Afro, you look like an idiot. But there was on the black side,  
29 this need to, when they got out of uniform and went down to San Francisco identify  
30 culturally within their culture. So very bad situation in terms of trying to sort it out. It is  
31 to my mind, comical, maybe not to everybody. There was a disease which appeared

1 during those years that had never been anywhere before. That disease that struck black  
2 men only, or largely which came, was epidemic at that time and has disappeared since,  
3 and I say that somewhat tongue and cheek, because it was quite serious. It was called  
4 pseudofolliculitis barbae, and the disease basically was ingrown hair on the face, as a  
5 result of Negro physiological characteristics, particularly curly hair. The theory was that  
6 because their hair was curly, it tended to curl and in-grow and infect, and I think there's  
7 probably some truth to that. If you think of maybe black men you've known, frequently  
8 they do seem to have like an acne problem around their beard area, but this thing became  
9 an epidemic in the Air Force and the reason, at least a lot of us white guys thought, the  
10 reason was because if they'd get the doctor to declare that they had this disease, then they  
11 could get a beard. Because you wouldn't have to shave, because you'd let the beard grow  
12 out and this in-growing would stop. So it's a little interesting point of history, this whole  
13 thing about this pseudofolliculitis barbae, which again, you've got tons of black guys in  
14 the military today and they seem not to be suffering from it any more. So it was a thing,  
15 it was an interesting cultural thing, unfortunately of course created division and that's the  
16 bottom line and that's why I say it's funny, but it isn't funny. It's got comic elements, but  
17 it certainly wasn't funny in the long run.

18 SM: Tragically comic.

19 MM: Yes, exactly, but again understandable in the context of 1968 and what was  
20 going on in the black community. So anyway, those are some things that do pop to my  
21 mind, but direct confrontations with anti-war protestors, no. See, another thing happened  
22 to me, which I think, no you don't know from the biography because I didn't send you  
23 that part. I was only home one year, February '68 I got home. I'm sorry '67 I got home  
24 and February '68 I'm sitting here now trying to, I think I had just become an aircraft  
25 commander in the 133. I'm getting more serious with my girlfriend and the Pueblo crisis  
26 kicks off in Korea. The North Korean Special Forces made a raid on the South Korean  
27 White House, called the blue house but their White house in Seoul, an armed raid, trying  
28 to assassinate President Park, which failed. But as a cover for that then the North Korean  
29 government ripped off the Pueblo which was a U.S. Navy Intelligence ship which had  
30 been sitting off the North Korean coast for endless years. But the next day they seized it  
31 and this became an enormous international incident and almost precipitated the third

1 World War. Although it's not all that well document in history but I think people who  
2 know will tell you how close we came, so we deployed an enormous force almost  
3 overnight in February of '68 now to Korea and I know because some of the things I did  
4 there, how close we were to war, again. So here now you're fighting in Vietnam and you  
5 got this, probably more serious potential war, regenerating in Korea because of the  
6 nuclear equation, the Russians were still powerful then. The Chinese of course and I got  
7 deployed for that, after being home a year to be Forward Air Controller in Korea, should  
8 the war start. So again I was very busy, probably too busy to worry about politics at the  
9 time.

10 SM: Now for the year, the year from '67 to '68 that you flew support, you said a  
11 lot of missions you flew for that year were support for Vietnam?

12 MM: Right back into Vietnam, usually once a month.

13 SM: You were flying back to Vietnam, landing in Tan Son Nhut basically or?

14 MM: Yes, once a month frequently Tan, the big airfields obviously, we weren't  
15 going any little places any more. Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang, Qui Nhon once and that was  
16 dicey because that airfield was really too short for a 133, but I did manage to get it in  
17 there and get it out. I remember another not so funny, funny thing, but I remember  
18 having to back the airplane. We'd back up because of the propellers you could reverse it  
19 and back the airplane right up to the fence at the very end of the runway for my departure  
20 and then ran the engines right to max power with the brakes set, which isn't normal, but  
21 to get everything as powerful as possible before I let go of the brakes and roared down  
22 the runway and just literally blew half a village. Of course the village was made out of C  
23 ration boxes, but must have blown the thing to three hundred yards from where it was  
24 sitting when I started. That's sad, these people, they're used to it. They probably picked  
25 up and put everything back together by evening, but I do remember blowing the place all  
26 over, not intentionally. I didn't realize it was happening until it was too late to stop, so  
27 Qui Nhon once, Da Nang frequently. Tan Son Nhut frequently, and probably Cam Ranh  
28 bay once or twice, delivering cargo or picking up. Actually the primary mission we had  
29 for the 133 was helicopter rotation, we would typically fly either five or six Hueys or two  
30 Chinooks, I think it was two, I think we could carry two into -- here's how it worked, let  
31 me start at the beginning. A typical mission would be to go from Travis to Harrisburg

1 Pennsylvania, which was a big Army depot for helicopters, repair and preparation. We'd  
2 land at Harrisburg, we'd pick up new helicopters, either refurbished or brand new. Go  
3 back to Travis and then head out to Vietnam and take them wherever, Tan Son Nhut, Da  
4 Nang or what not and then we would pick up beat up ones, shot up ones, crashed ones  
5 and bring them back to ultimately through Travis to Harrisburg again. And that was one  
6 of our primary missions in addition to installing the Minuteman missile during that same  
7 time frame and it was because of the size and weight capacity of the airplane of course.  
8 So, typically during a month I would probably make one circuit from Travis to Vietnam  
9 and back. About sixty flying hours, one trip over to Harrisburg, maybe another ten and a  
10 couple of short trips within the United States, running missiles and that sort of thing.  
11 Sometimes they'd squeeze two Vietnam trips out of you in one month, which meant you  
12 were gone for the whole month because they typically took two weeks to make the circuit  
13 and that was generally what we did.

14 SM: Now when you would land in Vietnam, how much time would you spend  
15 there and what kind of information were you able to get?

16 MM: Nothing and again because, the time would be always short, you only crew  
17 rested there in an emergency which is to say the airplane broke on the ground in Vietnam  
18 so badly that you couldn't stagger it out to the Philippines which was the next stop. You  
19 know a couple hour flight to Clark Air Base, so you were there for minimum ground time  
20 trying for two hours, total and during that time of course you had to debrief your flight.  
21 You had to get something to eat if you could, get your weather briefing, file your flight  
22 plan, get an intelligence briefing, which normally just consisted of the essential  
23 information. Departure safety kinds of things, take off, climb immediately, turn left, turn  
24 right, avoid this area, and that was it, you didn't get a lot of detail, so and you were in and  
25 out before you knew it basically.

26 SM: Any time when you were flying back into Vietnam that you were shot at?

27 MM: Not that I know of, no, probably was but unless you got hit, which I don't  
28 think we ever did, you didn't know it.

29 SM: Other pilots that flew in, were there ever any stories circulated that there  
30 shot at or shot down?



1 MM: Not often if at all. The biggest concern actually was friendly artillery. We  
2 were much more concerned with that because at the altitudes we flew, enemy ground fire  
3 in the south was essentially a non-factor until you were extremely close to an airfield and  
4 we evolved procedures to defeat that. We evolved a very steep approach angle on final  
5 approach, so that you could approach an airfield much higher than normal, much closer in  
6 and then make a very steep descent to the runway. I think four, four and half degree glide  
7 slope, which sounds very shallow, but for an airplane is actually double normal.  
8 Normally you're on about a two-degree slice, coming in and we were on a four, four and  
9 a half as I recall. So that wasn't the problem, the problem was that while you were  
10 coming from the coast let's say to Saigon, which might have been a twenty minute flight  
11 or so, and then maneuvering in the traffic pattern, we knew that there was a lot of artillery  
12 flying around and not ever really controlled in any sense. We always said if you could  
13 see. If every artillery round that the friendlies were firing had a tracer on it, we probably  
14 would have never entered the country, but never again, never had an incident where we  
15 hit or anything, but that was our concern, that and just traffic density. I, going into  
16 Saigon would have myself, the copilot and everybody in the airplane who wasn't doing  
17 something, standing behind us, the two seats, looking out the windows. That was the  
18 biggest concern was just running into something because the traffic density, particularly  
19 as you approach the big airports, you got fighters, you got transports, you got little  
20 airplanes, big airplanes, helicopters, that was the thing we were concerned with, was a  
21 mid-air collision. Very definitely, the big concern, so we had eyeballs all over the  
22 cockpit looking.

23 SM: Did that ever happen to your, do you know?

24 MM: Not in the 133, now I had a couple of close calls in the O-1, but.

25 SM: No, I mean flying those operations, other C-133 pilots?

26 MM: Again, nothing that I ever heard of where there was an extremely close call  
27 but we were taking the precautions to avoid it.

28 SM: Any other types of support missions that you flew during that year, just  
29 primarily bringing in and taking out helicopters?

30 MM: The helicopters and as I said, the airplane, the 133 was really designed to  
31 take the Minuteman missile from, I think I've told you this, from the factory up at Hill

1 Air Force Base in Ogden, Utah where Thiokol put the solid propellant in the missile at  
2 the factory. Of course at that point you had a very heavy object, a hundred thousand  
3 pounds or so, that had to be delivered to the missile fields up in the northern tier, in the  
4 northern states and a lot of research had been done about doing it by truck and by train  
5 and various ways and ultimately they decided that the safest way was by air. Less likely  
6 to crack the solid propellant through repeated shocks that you might get on the highway  
7 or a railroad and so the airplane was basically designed and built to carry those thousand,  
8 ultimately what amounted to I think a thousand some odd Minuteman missiles from the  
9 factory to the various sites. So we were always doing that in between doing other things.  
10 We always had a couple airplanes up running that route, you might put, depending on  
11 maintenance and things. Winter was very bad if you're trying to get to Maelstrom Air  
12 Force base in Great Falls, Montana in the middle of the winter. You might spend all  
13 week trying to make one run, but over the course of many, many years we put the whole  
14 thousand in, that one squadron did. That and some other space support, we'd  
15 occasionally go to Denver pick up a component, take it down to Cape Canaveral, things  
16 like that. We did not do a lot of ordinary cargo hauling during those days just because of  
17 the priority of the other things and our capacity to do them.

18 SM: What did you think when you heard about Tet, '68?

19 MM: Tet, umm.

20 SM: Remember?

21 MM: Yes, I think I knew it was coming. Actually I hesitate to say this because it  
22 really sounds overblown but I'll say it because it's true. In my memoirs there, and I  
23 won't, the last battle thing that's in my memoirs there where I was, Colonel McCutchaon  
24 had said no more combat for you. You're going home in a few days and I was taking the  
25 airplane, ferrying it over to Bien Hoa for maintenance, I presume you've read that and I  
26 had the Vietnamese Lieutenant in the back seat. He was just along, not a joy ride exactly,  
27 but for an orientation and just trying to get a look at the terrain around Saigon and we  
28 accidentally ran into a battle just to the north and west of the airfield. We were able to  
29 coordinate the ground troops and other things to basically destroy the enemy attack, had  
30 quite a few kills on that one. Subsequently somebody told me, somebody in the  
31 Intelligence business told me that that attack was actually a probe, a test, of an intended

1 1967 Tet Offensive and that when it failed by virtue of that little accidental encounter  
2 between the Vietcong and the Airborne unit that was out there patrolling that the Tet  
3 Offensive was actually put off for an entire year and didn't occur till '68. Now, that  
4 sounds a little crazy to me, that one little confrontation could have actually had that effect  
5 but I was told that. So I guess to answer your question when the Tet of '68 I don't think I  
6 was too surprised.

7 SM: What did you think when you heard President Johnson decide not to run for  
8 re-election?

9 MM: That's an interesting question. I don't recall having a reaction; I think I just  
10 felt sorry for the guy. I knew the kind of circumstances, pressure he was under, actually  
11 when I was in Korea during the Pueblo I was involved with something I can't even talk  
12 about, even today. It was a reconnaissance mission, I can tell you that much, but I  
13 actually was the action officer for it as a Captain and I talked to Johnson every day,  
14 personally. He called and he was, and this is not necessarily to his benefit, but he would  
15 call on the old Donald Duck secure telephone that we had and, KY3, I think it was called.  
16 Your voice was distorted, I don't know if you've ever used one but you sounded like  
17 Donald Duck a little bit on it when you were talking and he would call every day, I think  
18 at about three in the afternoon, and he personally wanted, he didn't want any filters  
19 between him and the data. He wanted to talk to me personally because I had the  
20 information. So every day at three o'clock I had to be by the Donald Duck phone booth  
21 there waiting for his call. I thought it was kind of pathetic in a way that he would have to  
22 do that. It was good in a way that the guy was that interested and that involved and had  
23 that kind of energy I suppose to be able to function that way, but I also thought it was kind  
24 of sad that he had to do it that way, and I think, you could see on television as things  
25 started to deteriorate, the physical toll that it took on him. I mean the poor man looked  
26 horrible so when he decided not to run, I was certainly wasn't surprised and I think I just  
27 felt sorry for the poor guy. That was my basic reaction.

28 SM: Now, when you were flying in Korea during the Pueblo incident, how long  
29 did you stay there?

30 MM: No, I was not flying.

31 SM: Oh, you weren't flying?

1           MM: No, I gave you that impression, I'm sorry. I went there as a forward air  
2 controller, that's a true statement, but the sad story was that when we got there, we  
3 discovered there was no close air support system of any kind and there were no airplanes.  
4 The country had evolved since the Korean War into an almost completely air defense  
5 orientation. There was a, what the hell was it called? ADCC, Air Defense Coordination  
6 or Control, I don't know, Air Defense Control Center at Osan there, which is where I  
7 would up in the 314<sup>th</sup> Air Division headquarters, again, pathetic. World War II  
8 technology, grease board with guys drawing tracks on the backside of it with grease  
9 pencil. It looked like something out of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in England in 1945, but that was  
10 the state of the art there and no close air support system whatsoever. So I and several  
11 other guys after, and again, this is in my memoirs but not the portion I sent to you. They  
12 sent ninety forward air controllers over there and all we could do is get drunk, there was  
13 nothing to do in the dead of winter, February, Korea, it's cold. And some of us after  
14 about two weeks decided that was enough of that and we went looking for work, literally  
15 and I found a, long story, but I found work in the headquarters and basically I and some  
16 other guys who I knew, drifted over to the headquarters and formed a little nucleus. Kind  
17 of sub-office, under the guy who was DOCP, Director of Current Plans, but he sort of had  
18 a plans and operations job, full Colonel by the name of Alva P. Wilkerson. Very, very  
19 wonderful man, very brilliant, had just come from the Pentagon when the war started. I  
20 think he'd hardly gotten off the airplane when the whistle blew and he walked into a  
21 disaster. An area that had been neglected for twenty years and all of a sudden he's got to  
22 fight a war from this office, but I worked for him for the whole duration of the six months  
23 I was there. What we did is we tried to create a close air support system and we did a lot,  
24 writing documents, concepts, philosophies, structures, regional geographic structures,  
25 equipment requirements, communications networks. Started the ball rolling to getting  
26 some airplanes, which after I left showed up from Vietnam as I understand, the O-1s as  
27 they were replaced by O-2s in Vietnam were moved up to Korea to create this close air  
28 support system which didn't exist. So that wasn't kind of an interesting phase in my life  
29 too, but how did we get on that, you asked me?

30           SM: Well, I was just curious how long you spent there?

1 MM: Oh, six months, six my was a TDY, it was a six month TDY that was  
2 almost over night, just got a phone call one morning in February and said come get your  
3 combat gear and stand by for a call to get on an airplane.

4 SM: Now, you mentioned earlier that there was obviously some reconnaissance  
5 going on, was the U-2 still the primary platform for that, especially in that type of  
6 environment?

7 MM: No, I guess I can probably tell you that the platform was an F-4, that's  
8 probably all I can tell you. I think the U-2s were probably flying, but I think that was  
9 probably, the results of that were probably going straight back to Washington.

10 SM: Well, so after you got back from Korea, mid to late '67.

11 MM: '68.

12 SM: '68, excuse me.

13 MM: Yes, now we're in August of '68 I think.

14 SM: Well, August '68 getting geared up for the election.

15 MM: That's right, the election was just about to occur wasn't it? So I must have  
16 just got home when all of that hubbub was really going on the news in Chicago. I hadn't  
17 thought about that, but that's got to be close, that's right. But again I think I was back  
18 from Korea, back in the squadron, back trying to get the rust off the edges in terms of my  
19 flying and, I'll tell you again, one funny in a way. I use the word funny in a lot of  
20 different contexts, but at that point I decided this relationship with my girlfriend had got  
21 to go one way or the other. We've either got to quit this foolishness that's been going on  
22 for years and years now, or we've got to get married so I think I proposed around  
23 Christmas. It was a couple of months later and we didn't have a long engagement  
24 because we knew where we were going. We were married in April of '69, so it wasn't  
25 too many months after Korea that I just said let's get on with this, or call it a bad idea. So  
26 it did have that effect, but again, so busy with other things. Keep trying to reorganize my  
27 life here every time I turn around that I don't think I was, I was obviously saddened by  
28 what I saw in Chicago and I knew at that point that we were in trouble, but I guess in a  
29 sense not much I could do about it, so I didn't worry about it too much.

1 SM: Actually, one more question about Korea, was there a point during your six  
2 months there, that you realized that what was happening was not going to escalate into a  
3 significant war?

4 MM: No, I think when I left we were just as likely to go to war as the day I got  
5 there, if not more so.

6 SM: Why's that?

7 MM: We had built up a force and things have a certain momentum of their own.  
8 The Pueblo, if I'm not mistaken was still in North Korean hands. Just the general  
9 atmosphere there was, the day we got there the atmosphere was we've got to like hell to  
10 take the sleepy hollow backwater of the American military up to war footing as quickly  
11 as we can and I think that atmosphere was just as intense the day I left there. Every day  
12 was like, okay there's still a few more things we've got to do and it could happen  
13 tomorrow. We knew that a MIG could get from the nearest MIG airfield across the  
14 border to Osan, with two five hundred pound bombs and be back across the border and I  
15 think the whole thing didn't take five minutes, we were that close. So it was still very  
16 intense when I left. I think that politically, if you could talk to the right people or read the  
17 right books, you'd probably find that the burden on Lyndon Johnson just must have been  
18 unbelievable. Between Vietnam, trying to do the Great Society, his real priority on a  
19 domestic level, trying to make that happen, being completely frustrated I think, or not,  
20 being frustrated largely by having to focus on Vietnam and then Korea and then having in  
21 a sense probably the people he thought were quote his own people, namely liberal  
22 Democrats really turning against him, you could imagine what the effect on the guy must  
23 have been.

24 SM: Now, what about the nuclear threshold, was that always an ever-present  
25 threat while you were in Korea?

26 MM: Absolutely.

27 SM: And after?

28 MM: Yes, that was still, we were serious Cold War and so that was always very  
29 close to the front of your mind and again I can't talk too much details there. But in Korea  
30 we knew what they had, we assumed they knew what we had and the impression was that  
31 the willingness to push the button was fairly high, at least on the Soviet side.

1 SM: They hadn't bought into MAD?

2 MM: I don't believe MAD, that's a whole history book. What time frame was  
3 which philosophy the one that was driving the train? And not having been a SAC guy, I  
4 just have peripheral understanding of how that all worked, but we didn't assume that they  
5 had bought into MAD, I think you can say that. For a minute I thought MAD, what the  
6 hell's he talking about, Mothers Against Drunk Driving? But I do remember what the  
7 other one meant too, Mutually Assured.

8 SM: Yes, Mutually Assured Destruction. Let's see, I want to say that was  
9 McNamara that tried to implement that and so by the time you got to Korea MAD would  
10 have been a tenet, a belief.

11 MM: Yes, I think it probably was, I think you're right. I can't really confirm that  
12 just from my own memory.

13 SM: The rest of '68 unfolds, what did you think of Nixon's secret plan to win the  
14 war, that is Vietnamization?

15 MM: I don't think I thought about that much. I was more inclined to think about  
16 McNamara's strategies and tactics, not so much the political overlay which was the  
17 Vietnamization, but McNamara's drawing lines and fences and controlling key areas.  
18 And I knew that was a hopeless idea from having been there, absolutely hopeless. I think  
19 within the military community in general, by that time we were beginning to express the  
20 view, either privately or publicly that there's only one way to win this war. You've got  
21 to fight, the whole concept actually of, and this is a Morea-ism that's probably worth  
22 going down in the books is, the whole concept of a limited war is a mistake. There is no  
23 such thing. If there's a war between me and my neighbor over our flower garden in the  
24 context, it's a full scale war and if you think you can fight a limited war, the lesson of  
25 Vietnam is that you're mistaken and you will lose. Because it's a very simple, while we  
26 were fighting a limited war by definition. The enemy was fighting World War III by  
27 their definition and that's why they won. Put it the other way, the only way we could have  
28 won, was to have fought the war within the context of one or two countries as an all out  
29 war, it's the only way to win. I think we who were there at the time knew that, the  
30 memory is probably fading as time goes by and we'll probably make the same mistake  
31 again as people traditionally do. They forget history after one generation or so, and make

1 the same old mistakes over again, but that is probably the one political – military thing  
2 that I understood better than anything else by the time it was all over, is limited war  
3 doesn't work. So when we couldn't do certain things in the north and we're afraid of  
4 what the Chinese might do and decided to pull out and let the Vietnamese do it, which  
5 was what Vietnamization was, and was really nothing more than, in retrospect and if  
6 anybody had a real brain at the time, could have seen it in real time. It was nothing more  
7 than the beginnings of the surrender, the pullout, you knew it wasn't going to work. So  
8 certainly by that time we knew it was, forget it. And I felt pretty sorry for guys who were  
9 still going over at about that time because I knew they were going into a futile effort, at  
10 least when I went I thought that we were going to win the war and that certainly helps  
11 sustain you, but the guys who were going over in '70, '71, and what not, they were just  
12 holding the fort until somebody could get out the back door in my opinion.

13 SM: What did you think of the Kent State incident?

14 MM: Very sad, but I'll tell you by that time I was mad enough to – I didn't feel  
15 very sympathetic about the students. They were rioting, they knew what they were  
16 doing, sad mistakes – what's the word I'm looking for- kind of a house of cards in  
17 reverse kind of a thing. Just a series of blunders on both sides that escalated into a  
18 terrible thing but my attitude by then was, hey if you want to riot on campus, you better  
19 understand, and if you're going to taunt guys with weapons and throw things at them, you  
20 could get hurt. I see it on television, you see Palestinians throwing rocks at Israelis with  
21 guns, well Palestinians are not stupid people. Certainly they know that at some point  
22 some of them might get shot and that's the way that goes and if you feel strongly enough  
23 about what you feel strongly enough about, fine, but don't come crying to me when you  
24 get shot. I think that was my bottom line, so I didn't have a lot of sympathy for the Kent  
25 State crowd. I still don't, they had a memorial there a couple of weeks ago, believe it or  
26 not, they still haven't figured it out. They're still talking about the wonderful liberal  
27 principles they were upholding against the National Guard SS or whatever the hell, but  
28 that's always been a very liberal school anyway.

29 SM: And what were your thoughts as the war wound down and finally in 1973  
30 we've got the Paris Peace Accords after the Christmas bombing and April of 1975 the  
31 capture of Saigon?



1           MM: Well, even then I felt like we could have negotiated a better deal than we  
2 did.

3           SM: What did you think of the Paris Peace Accords?

4           MM: Well, it was obvious we were just surrendering, we were in such a hurry to  
5 get out of there we'd have given them anything they wanted. By that time it was just a,  
6 once you... I'm trying to find an analogy but it's like you know you've only gotten, the  
7 thing is deteriorating so rapidly that you know you've only got a very short amount of  
8 time to even make it appear like things are in control. So you've got to move very  
9 quickly to get out before all the obvious flaws are detected and the bubble bursts and it  
10 just becomes total chaos. So I think, it was obvious to me that at Paris, we were just  
11 okay, whatever you want, please, come on, can we get on with this, can we get out of  
12 here, before somebody notices? But again, that was, I was aware of what was going on I  
13 watched the TV. I read the newspaper, but I had another life at that point. By '70, we  
14 had three kids in a hurry so we had one in January of '70, the next one was in January of  
15 '72, and the next one was in October of '73. So they weren't even six years apart, three  
16 of them, so now I have other things to occupy my time as well. And I think I felt like,  
17 look I did my part, this isn't working, it's obvious and is too bad, but it's time to get on  
18 with it.

19           SM: What were your thoughts, feelings, when news broke that Saigon had fallen  
20 in 1975?

21           MM: I remember it again, as to the question of feelings, I think it was ugly. It  
22 was just so pathetic, it was sad. You'd have wished that in the end it could have been,  
23 it's a hell of a word, but it's one that comes to mind, more dignified, like it could have been  
24 done like with a, like Appomattox or something. Rather than this ugly scene of buildings  
25 burning and helicopters crashing and people running around frantic and all of that sort of  
26 thing, so that was certainly one thought, it was like rubbing it in. Like did it really have  
27 to end this way, okay guys we surrendered, did you have to do it this way. The other  
28 feeling of course, which was, thoughts about Vietnamese that you'd known and I wonder  
29 what going to happen to them. Did they get out, did they get killed, where are they, how  
30 are they faring? Anything from military guys just like your housekeeper, you've got to  
31 wonder, somebody had worked for the Americans for years and years, once the new

1 political machine moved in from the north, what kind of treatment were they going to get  
2 because people were certainly going to know that they had worked for Americans, things  
3 like that, thoughts like that. Of course there was a great tragedy which, from an air lifters  
4 point of view, maybe even... Well this is a terrible way to put it, but it sort of put the lid  
5 on the thing, it was just like the ultimate tragedy was when that C-5, are you familiar with  
6 this story?

7 SM: No, sir.

8 MM: They were evacuating the city, out at Tan Son Nhut and they were  
9 evacuating Vietnamese, just loading them up and there was a C-5 that took off out of Tan  
10 Son Nhut with a load of civilians, maybe some military too, but Vietnamese. Just sitting  
11 on the floor, hundreds of them, none of this seats and seat belts and all that sort of thing  
12 and I don't remember the details. But somehow the back doors came open in flight and  
13 literally, half the load of people went out the door. It's something, again, that's sort of  
14 my recollection, it was just like, after everything else, this. Kind of a feeling that I  
15 remember having, again, a guy in your position could I'm sure, find the newspaper  
16 reports and the official reports on the whole thing, but it was just like not this too, kind of  
17 a feeling ultimately. I think at that point, I think we psychologically, many of us just  
18 turned our back on the thing and said I don't want to talk about it any more. I don't want  
19 to look at it, I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to hear about it, it's just tragic  
20 beyond description for all kinds of reason.

21 SM: Before that had you talked much about your Vietnam experiences from the  
22 time you got back until the end of the war?

23 MM: No, surprisingly not, not even amongst military guys, flying transports  
24 across the Pacific, you take off from Hawaii heading for Wake Island and it's eight hours  
25 of just blue sky and boredom and we didn't talk about it even then.

26 SM: Was there a reason?

27 MM: No, it's just, it's not normally done. I think guys only want to talk about it  
28 to people who shared the experience or people like you who are rare who actually show  
29 some genuine academic or other interest. But for example, I can tell you that when I first  
30 joined the 84<sup>th</sup> as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, brand new green bean trainee pilot basically, I mean  
31 not a trainee literally because I was out of pilot training, but trainee in the transport.

1 Huge numbers of the people in the squadron, the senior guys, were World War II  
2 veterans, the officers and the enlisted people. They never talked about World War II, not  
3 a word, you couldn't get a word out of them, and if you really pressed them, you'd get a  
4 three sentence something or other and then they'd drop it and go back to something else.  
5 Now, I think only amongst themselves, I think World War II bomber guys alone  
6 somewhere would have talked a blue streak, like the FAC reunion but you get out of that  
7 context and it's nope, it's not so much personal or private. There's got to be a better  
8 word, but it's, kind of like you get the feeling there's only a few people would understand  
9 and nobody else is worth talking to, I guess that describes it pretty well I think.

10 SM: Did you also have a sense that, not so much that no one else is worthy of  
11 talking about it, but also most people just don't care?

12 MM: No, not to not care, just would never understand and it's not worth trying to  
13 explain it. I think that's more accurate and I think the World War II guys, even talking to  
14 a guy like me, a young officer, a pilot and all, trying to explain what flying, B-17s over  
15 Germany was like and living in England and having you're squadron decimated daily.  
16 They can't explain it to me because I'm not going to understand it because I wasn't there.  
17 I think that's a fair assessment, so they just never talked about it.

18 SM: Well, after the war was over in terms of the fall of Saigon, how was the  
19 Vietnam War important to you personally in terms of you over all development, as a  
20 pilot, as a person?

21 MM: Very good question. I don't, I can't answer it literally in the context you  
22 asked it because it wasn't after the war was over. It was after my experience, I think – a  
23 couple of things, I guess. I think first of all it was and again, I've said this, you have to  
24 be very careful who you say things like this to, because it wasn't always the same for  
25 everybody, but for me it was the adventure of a lifetime to be perfectly honest. I was  
26 young, I was in perfect health, I was probably at the peak of my flying skills, or almost. I  
27 was doing something that I really got to be just unbelievably good at. I got to do it with  
28 almost no interference from anybody, it was just on your own for a year doing your own  
29 thing. So in that sense it was great in a way, again you've got to be careful how you use  
30 these terms but for me it was, it was just exciting, I was doing exactly what I wanted to  
31 do, doing it well, having a good time doing it, to tell you the truth. And I think in terms

1 of flying it certainly, not so much matures you, because it was such simple flying, but it  
2 did give you a lot of confidence in yourself that you could do probably more than you  
3 would have otherwise thought you could do. Because you'd done so many things, many  
4 of them stupid and survived them and learned from them that I think I really felt like I  
5 was a hell of a lot better pilot. Ten years better pilot after one year in Vietnam, just from  
6 the experience. I certainly learned, I think I learned that despite the old adage that war is  
7 too serious a business to be left to soldiers, it's certainly too serious a business to be left  
8 to politicians solely. The answer had got to be, in my opinion that politicians obviously  
9 have to make the decisions, but they need to listen to military people a lot more than they  
10 did in Vietnam, that hasn't changed either and probably never will. You can see that  
11 today with Clinton Administration and now Bush trying to take over and fix some things  
12 and even in the case of Bush, not fixing things that people necessarily thought he was  
13 going to fix. Or at least in the way that they thought he was going to fix them, and  
14 frankly I think he's right, but there's an awful lot of pork, for example, in the defense  
15 budget. I think times changes, threats change and we're still building a military based,  
16 still in a lot of ways, still of World War II kind of a scenario and really based on whose  
17 district the factory is in. More than what the real military requirements are, but I  
18 definitely learned, I guess in a sense, mistrust is too strong a word. But the mistrust, I  
19 mean I've got a Master's degree in political science too, so I tend to think politically  
20 maybe more than most people do, but I won't say I mistrust politicians. But I certainly,  
21 they weren't George Washington any more, I'll put it that way. They were human beings  
22 who made a lot of mistakes and that was something I learned from Vietnam, certainly.  
23 The biggest effect is I really don't think I ever have since really trusted my non-military  
24 fellow Americans any more. Because of the, either because of what the protestors did  
25 and what they were allowed to do by the rank and file and it continues to this day, with  
26 the Clintons. And again, I obviously have opinions there, but the American people just  
27 don't care about their country any more, enough to get excited about anything if it  
28 doesn't effect whether they're going to get home in time for the ball game tonight. And I  
29 think that was very clear with the entire Clinton Administration and I think it began,  
30 probably in Vietnam. So I just, my opinion of the average American is extremely low  
31 and I think it began back then. I think they're lazy, they are uneducated and uncaring

1 about almost anything unless it puts twenty bucks in their pocket and that's obviously a  
2 gross generalization, but I think probably the Vietnam experience taught me that more  
3 than anything else, sadly, but it's true.

4 SM: You mentioned earlier, that you didn't, in terms of your concerns or your  
5 comment about limited war and then some of the stuff that you said recently in terms of  
6 politicians involvement and things of that nature, I'm curious what you think about some  
7 of the recent deployments.

8 MM: That's what I'm getting at.

9 SM: That are limited in the context of limited war.

10 MM: Well, they're not even limited war. What I honestly believe is in most  
11 cases the recent deployments were smoke screens to get Clinton out of trouble. But  
12 soldiers are not trained to hand out box lunches to little kids, as nice a photograph as that  
13 makes on the evening news. Handing out candy bars and box lunches in Kosovo is not  
14 what militaries are constructed for and I think we make enormous mistakes when we do  
15 things like. Among other things because of what it does to the soldier himself in terms of  
16 how he perceives his real mission, and in peacetime what it does to the family of the  
17 soldier and ultimately to the military structure. I mean our military is in disastrous shape  
18 right now. You can't retain the right people and it's not money and if George Bush  
19 thinks that by raising their pay he's going to solve the problem he's as stupid as the rest of  
20 them, I hope he's smarter. I hope somebody is whispering in his ear, although it should  
21 be obvious to anybody who reads the newspaper. The problem with the military is not  
22 money, yes, give me a few extra bucks I won't turn it down, but that's not the problem,  
23 the problem is trust in the leadership, which isn't there. When Clinton says I want that  
24 guy fired because he made that phone call and that came up in the newspaper and the  
25 General says yes, sir instead of saying I resign, you've got a problem and we have that  
26 problem right now. The other problem is going all the wrong places and sitting on your  
27 ass to be blunt, doing nothing, for endless periods of time. Guys say no, it's not what I  
28 signed up for and they leave. Sadly, what's even worse is that the ones who stay are the  
29 ones who, in the gross sense that just perpetuate the problem so you wind up with a  
30 descending spiral of leadership and morale and everything else and that's where we are  
31 today. It's just too coincidental that every time Clinton got some bad press, some bombs

1 fell somewhere. In Somalia at the pharmaceutical factory and at Bin Laden's camp in  
2 Afghanistan and Kosovo and a half a dozen other places. It just, you've got to be real  
3 stupid to buy that story, but the American people bought it, lock, stock and barrel  
4 obviously. Now again, that's sadly the biggest result I think of those years is this  
5 cynicism on my part about an awful lot of things. Whereas I think in 1960, when, bright  
6 and shiny graduate, I probably, I came from a '50s, World War II, post World War II,  
7 we're on top of the world mentality and there really is an Easter Bunny and come to find  
8 out that if he ever lived he's dead, but that's life too, you learn.

9 SM: Now, in addition to what you've already discussed, are there any other  
10 lessons that we as a nation should take away from the war experience.

11 MM: Well, nothing that hasn't been said a million times before I don't think. I  
12 think it's pretty obvious. When you go to war and involve a nation in a war, first of all  
13 you've got, to one degree or another involve everybody. You can't give college  
14 deferments to kids with money and send all the poor black kids from Tennessee to go  
15 fight the war. You have got to build a consensus so that at least the vast majority of  
16 people in the country understand why you are in the war and believe that it's necessary.  
17 And then once you've done that you've got to go finish it quickly because Americans are  
18 inherently impatient people and get back to the business of America, which is business.  
19 Those are simple lessons, but they've been written about a million times, I think they're  
20 true. We did, I think generally follow that philosophy for example in the Gulf War, the  
21 consensus was built, very quickly, needs to be done. We did it with forces that were  
22 onboard at the time, we won it handily and we got the hell home. I mean there's still  
23 people there and that may or may not be a subset mistake but in general we did it the  
24 right way. That's the way Americans like to do business, understand that there's a real  
25 purpose, get the tools on the table, finish the job and let's go back and have a beer, so I  
26 think we need to learn those lessons.

27 SM: How long have you been involved with, and how has it been important for  
28 you in terms of the FAC Association and the FAC reunions?

29 MM: Well, that's just very recent. I don't think I had heard of the FAC  
30 Association much more than a month or two before the reunion.

31 SM: This past year?

1           MM: Yes, right and so really my involvement was going to the reunion and then  
2 subsequently, I volunteered to write a piece of that history book and we're not sure where  
3 we're going right now. The thing, unless, and I hope I'm mistaken, a lot of the  
4 enthusiasm seems to have waned since the reunion. It's either that, or it's this reticence  
5 thing, you can't seem to generate guys to tell the story, for one reason or another. We  
6 chose consciously to wait for the first newsletter which is supposed to be in my mailbox  
7 today, coming out of Claude Newland and others up there in the Fort Walton area and  
8 then once that hit the street, we were going to use it as a springboard to open the door to  
9 this. Hey we want to write a history book, guys start sending us your... Ideally if every  
10 FAC we contacted sat down and wrote twenty odd pages or so that I gave you, and  
11 mailed it to me and other guys. We've got this thing pieced out by geographic region and  
12 time frame and things like that, but if they were to sit down and do that and then we could  
13 compile it into a book. That would be the fruition of our effort, but some tentative efforts  
14 in that direction, you just don't even get responses, the guys don't want to bother. I don't  
15 know what it is. You may know better than I, you probably have more experience with  
16 that than I do. You talked to a ton of people at the reunion, it seemed like you were  
17 generating tremendous enthusiasm, but I don't know if it's sustained or if I'm the only  
18 guy that's talking to you.

19           SM: I've talked to other FACs, it's been mixed results. How has this been  
20 important for you in terms of, I mean you mentioned before that you haven't really had  
21 too much opportunity to talk about your experiences, has the reunion helped you and has  
22 becoming involved in this project helped you in any ways?

23           MM: Well, at least temporarily it's regenerated an interest and it caused me to  
24 do, look and see some things I had, photographs and what not, and organize them a little  
25 bit and make some folders and what not and the interview here and that sort of thing, but  
26 not, maybe just a consolidation kind of a thing, trying to get it all organized, but no going  
27 back and re-thinking or anything of that sort. I think the memories are fairly clear in my  
28 mind, they're either clear I guess it's one or the other, so I haven't gone back and tried to  
29 re-think it anyway, I'm too busy.

30           SM: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about today?

1           MM: Let me think, not really. I think the only thing I would say to, well I do.  
2   You never really did tell me exactly what is the purpose of this thing, where does it go  
3   from here, what do you do with this, the interview?

4           SM: Oh, the interview. Well, we'll transcribe it, send you a copy of it and  
5   eventually hopefully we'll get it posted to the internet and it will also become part of that  
6   ongoing project to write that FAC book, that is the transcript and recordings if you want  
7   them are available to you for your project.

8           MM: Now, let me ask you this, when you transcribe, do you make some effort, I  
9   hope you do, to clean up the English? Typical American, we talk in half sentences and  
10   change subject three times in one sentence, do you just go with a literal translation or do  
11   you try and turn it into something somewhat literate?

12          SM: Well, before I answer that question, if there's nothing else you want to talk  
13   about, I want to go ahead and end the interview.

14          MM: Yes, that was it.

15          SM: Well, thank you very much. This will end the interview with Mr. Mike  
16   Morea.