Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, initiating an oral history interview with Lt. Col. John Gary Morris. Today’s date is the thirty-first of August 2005. I am in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock. The colonel is speaking to me by telephone from his home in another part of Texas. Colonel, first of all, good morning.

John Gary Morris: Good morning.

LC: I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in the Oral History Project. It’s extremely important to us that we have your contribution and we’re grateful for your time.

GM: Honored.

LC: Thank you. I want to confirm that it’s all right with you, first of all, that I call you Gary.

GM: Yes.

LC: Okay, and also that we make this interview available, both in audio and transcription form, to researchers through the Vietnam Archive.

GM: Yes.

LC: Thanks, Gary. First of all, let’s start off by finding out a little bit about where you hail from and when you were born. Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and when?
GM: 1942 in Houston, Texas. From there I moved to Dallas and eventually ended up in Irving at age four, which has been my home town basically for the rest of my life except for the stint after I came home from Vietnam. I spent seven years there after the war. Then after seven years I moved back to Irving and I’ve resided there ever since.

LC: Where were you living after Vietnam?

GM: In Denton, Texas.

LC: Oh, okay. So you’re Texas through-and-through.

GM: Yes.

LC: Okay. Gary, tell me a little bit about yourself growing up and your parents. Did you live with your family and what did your parents do?

GM: My mother was a teacher. My father was a self-starter. I admired him greatly. He started his own business, which lasted up until almost forty-five years, which I sold later on. When I did sell it, it was the fourth oldest business in town, in Irving. He started it with two people and we ended with three people. So he started it. He had no credit. As I look back, it was quite something. He was Czech. His parents came over from Czechoslovakia. He was probably, in my mind, as I look back—he’s deceased—he’s probably the most unusual person and the most fascinating person I have ever known in my life.

LC: Really?

GM: Extremely patriotic. He would talk about it to friends, but I’ll tell you he just came as close to John Wayne as I ever seen except that he didn’t talk about it. His favorite person was Tom Landry.

LC: Tom Landry, the football coach?

GM: Yeah. He came close to being a Tom Landry. He was active in the Methodist Church. He didn’t talk about it much. He taught Sunday school class for years. As a Czech, he was extremely protective of his family. Also, I guess as a European parent, praise was little, physical hugging and kissing and all of that was unheard of, but the paddle was there. Not much talking about whatever other than, “Did you do your schoolwork?” and if you didn’t do what you were supposed to do you got busted, but extremely protective. He told me about my grandfather who came over. He came over from the old country. He left there because he was at the age in which
Czechoslovakia was going to draft him in the Army and at that time when you went in the Army you went in virtually for your life, I think for twenty to twenty-five years servitude. So he came over in a boat and he started out in West Texas where my father was from. The thing I remember about my father was he worked all his life. I saw a book that he gave to his granddaughter that was a fill-in-the-blank sort of space. It would ask you questions. Some of the things he said was—and it was very impressive upon me—was, “What did you do most in your childhood?” He said, “I worked.” “What did you do for a pastime?” “I worked.” “What was your favorite thing to do?” “I swam in the creek.” He lived with seven brothers out in West Texas. It was an extremely hard life. His dad was a blacksmith. It was hard. All his brothers became alcoholics with the exception of him. I don’t know why he did not. I guess it was because he was the oldest brother. Alcoholism was not unknown because out there they didn’t have much water. So being a Czech, they knew how to make their own brew. I understand from my cousin that it wasn’t that un-often that they didn’t get into the brew. They drank a lot of it.

LC: Whereabouts in West Texas were they?
GM: Bomarton, Texas, which is just southwest of Seymour, which is just southwest of Wichita Falls. They were such a wild bunch that he told me one time that when they came down to dinnertime it was everyone for himself. One time one of the brothers stuck a fork in the other brother’s head.

LC: In his head?
GM: In his head. They took him off to Wichita Falls in some type of vehicle to have a doctor extract it and so forth. They were just a wild bunch. Dad strongly believed in sports and schooling. He loved to read Latin. He graduated valedictorian of his class of four. He had a scholarship to Texas. He went down there and he didn’t like it. It was too big, I think. He went to North Texas. I keep talking to him because he was most influential in my life. My mother was caring. She was a schoolteacher. She was there. She just didn’t have that much contact with me. He was the one I was always trying to impress in everything.

LC: Now, where was she from?
GM: She was from a little town. I forgot the name, but it was up on the other side of McKinney. On her side, I became a member of the SAR (Sons of the American
Revolution), because back in her history there was a member who was a great-great-great-great grandfather who was in the Revolutionary War and who was wounded and fought in several engagements.

LC: What was her name? What was your mom’s maiden name?
GM: Johnny Davenport.

LC: Was her first name Johnny?
GM: Johnny.

LC: Was that legal? That was her legal name?
GM: That was her legal name.

LC: That was kind of hard.

GM: Johnny LaVerne Davenport. My father who was in the Revolutionary War was named John Dick, D-I-C-K. I had several other grandfathers who fought in the War of 1812 and so—

LC: What about the Civil War? Do you know anything about that?
GM: No, I couldn’t find anybody. But I don’t know. I grew up in a very patriotic family. I can remember lots of times playing Army. I did it all the time, all the time, always playing Army. I don’t know why, I just did it all the time.

LC: What about brothers and sisters?
GM: I have a sister. We weren’t terribly close. I did have—a great effect on my life was I had a collie from age four until I graduated from high school.

LC: What was your dog’s name?
GM: Her name was Jill. I loved that dog. I was not here when she died and it killed me. I loved her so much that I named my firstborn after her. My daughter’s name was Carrie Jill Morris.

LC: Well, I know that feeling.
GM: It was horrendous. So anyway, with that, I was not good in school.

LC: Were you not?
GM: No.

LC: Did that displease your dad?
GM: Yeah, and at the time they didn’t know anything about ADD (attention deficit disorder), but I was ADD. You can go back and I found my old lessons and so
forth and they all said, “He needs to slow down. He needs to stay in his chair. His
writing is terrible. He needs to slow down.” Everything was fast, fast, fast. I can
remember fast, fast, fast. I needed the medication. In fact, even all the way up through
college I worked on the principle of reading something three and four times. I over-read
and if you looked at my book it looked like a coloring book. I’d line it and one color
would be yellow and then I’d come back and line something else in black. It was a
coloring book. I had a professor one time tell me, “Gary, you can tell me what color
socks General Lee wore at the Battle of Gettysburg, but you can’t tell me who won the
battle.” Therefore I was a C-minus student and I worked hard in school. It was hard to
prove to my parents that I was working hard. So I got scolded a lot and even in college—
I had a scholarship to the University of Dallas to play baseball. I loved the game of
baseball. My father loved it. We played a lot in the backyard and so forth. Anyway, I
had no help in high school playing baseball. They didn’t know anything about it. We
had high school football coaches.

LC: What high school did you go to?
GM: Irving High School.
LC: About how many kids in your class?
GM: Oh, seven hundred.
LC: So it was huge for that time.
GM: I think that was it. Yeah. But my graduating class was only like three
hundred.
LC: What year did you graduate?
GM: 1960. Baseball was my love.
LC: Did you follow all the—were you a big fan of professionals?
GM: Yeah, I was a Yankees fan.
LC: You couldn’t hardly help it back in those days.
GM: No. My drive was to be a first baseman for the New York Yankees. I heard
all this garbage about, “You can do anything you want to if you just try hard enough.” In
later years I clarified it. If I may jump forward, with my artwork I would go to the
schools and sometimes I’d be there with some professional basketball player or football
player. They’d always say this garbage, “If you want it bad enough you can get it. Just
try hard enough.” I always come up behind them and I’d say, “Well, you can try that but you’d better have a back-up.”

LC: Back-up plan.

GM: I use the example that when I was a kid I’d try hard enough to be a first baseman for the New York Yankees and finally one time I got to meet the first baseman for the New York Yankees. I realized that guy weighed about sixty-five more pounds than I did. He stood about eight inches taller than I did and hit a ball about a hundred yards farther than I did and there was no way I was going to play baseball for the New York Yankees. I realized “I better have a second plan. So you can try, but have a back up, pal.”

LC: That’s very good advice. Were you drawn to any particular subject in school, in high school?

GM: No, no, nothing.

LC: Nothing?

GM: Nothing, just baseball.

LC: Just trying to get through it so you could get to the Yankees.

GM: And then when I went to college, it was the same thing. Just get through. So I played my four years of college baseball at the University of Dallas. I guess those were probably the happiest four years of my life. I still think back to those days, the competition, the fun, the laughter, the extreme competition, and I was good. I had a national record with NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) for several years of stolen bases. I just used to get on the bases. We had a great coach, Coach Al Ogletree. He eventually ended up being the winningest coach in NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) history and he ended up in every hall of fame you could think of. I helped him into the Texas Baseball Hall of Fame. We were just a bunch of kids that he was fortunate to be able to get that didn’t make it to the other colleges. We would go and we beat every Southwest Conference school. We played a brand of ball that I would call it a combination of little ball and we had a little bit of big ball. Little ball was hit, bunt, steal sort of thing and then we had a couple of guys that could go into the pros with big ball. They could hit the big ball. Coach would let me and other guy
who were extremely fast, if I may say, and he would work it—I don’t guess you want to
hear all this.

LC: I sure do. Actually, I’m waiting to find out how many bases you stole.

GM: I stole twenty-seven in one season and we only had twenty-nine games in
one season.

LC: Oh, my gosh.

GM: We didn’t play many games. Today they play sixty and seventy. Back then
we played twenty-nine. I stole twenty-seven straight without being thrown out. So that
was a record. Nobody broke that for several years. So we had situations, for example, I
went to Coach one time and said, “I’ve got an idea if you let me try it.” He said, “What’s
your idea?” I said, “Well, if me and Pat, if we get on first and the other one gets on third,
let’s say I’m on first. Let me walk off first and pretend I’ve got myself caught off first. In
other words, the pitcher will see I’m off and I’ll start back to first and I’ll slip, but I really
have control of my body.”

LC: You’re going to fake him out.

GM: Yeah. When he throws the ball at first I’m actually doing to take off
towards second. I’m going to have a real good jump towards second. When he starts
chasing me down towards second, Pat’s on third. He’s going to take off toward home.

LC: Right, got it.

GM: He’s going to chase me to second and while I’m going to second, he’ll stop
and look and see that Pat has already gone toward home. Pat was fast enough that he
could get into home plate before the throw is there and I’d already be at second. By the
time the catcher got the ball at second, I was already halfway turned to third. I’d go into
third. So where you had a situation where you had a man at first and third, now you have
a man that scored and I’d be at third base.

LC: And you’re sitting on third waiting.

GM: Yeah, and the pitcher would be going, “What the hell happened here?” But
it was all planned.

LC: What did Coach say?

GM: He just sat there and laughed and the other guys are going, “What’d they
do?” I guess our biggest thrill, we played Ft. Hood. Now, at that time the services were
drafting and they drafted out of the majors. We’re going down to play them in a
tournament two years. We beat them both two years and they had guys on there that
were playing for Philly, you know, and they didn’t have any Yankees, and the Dodgers
and they had Los Angeles. It was just unbelievable when we looked at the roster. We’re
going to play these guys? It was bad enough playing Baylor and all those guys and Pan-
Am. They played—the first game we beat them in a playoff. Then we played in the
playoffs and these were men, okay? We were kids. They played dirty and I’d be on first.
I played first and these guys would come back into first and they’d go for my foot when
they tried a pick-off.

LC: Now, when you say that, what do you mean?

GM: Well, if the guy’s on first base, he’s got a hit and he’s standing there. The
pitcher tries a pick-off and throws the ball back on first. Well, he comes back toward
first to step on the bag. Well, guess what? They’d step on my foot with spikes. It hurt
and they’d bring blood, you know? I wasn’t going to say anything. It happened three or
four times. I’d go over there and we’d look down and hell, I wouldn’t even have a sock
hardly at that point. It would just be gone. We weren’t going to say anything so we’d
fight back on double plays. If I was at first and there was a ground ball—you know what
a double play is?

LC: Yes.

GM: I would go in to second base. If I wasn’t going to second base I’d go out to
shortstop. I would literally go out of my way and I would go in there. While he’s
throwing it in there and whoever’s at second we’d go in there and knock him silly. You
could do it and you could hurt them because if they were in the air they’ve got to come
down and they could come down wrong. Well, there was a time we were playing Baylor
and I slid in and I didn’t mean to hurt this guy. I went under him. I just barely touched
his toe with my foot and he came down wrong. He broke his ankle. He was the starting
split end for the Baylor Bears and he was out for the season. That’s toe versus toe. Well,
every time we went in to do something like that they respected us and they wouldn’t start
a fight or anything. But later on in the game one time they went too far.

LC: What happened?
GM: Well, they had a man on second. They hit a ground ball to shortstop, this
guy did. When you’re that close to the ball, to shortstop, you’re not going to go to third
because you’re standing right in front of him.

LC: Right. He could reach out and touch you.

GM: Haul over to third base and then you’re out. It’s what we call you look him
back. You’re look him back towards second, making sure he goes back towards second,
then you throw to first. Well, this guy just took off toward third and the third baseman
was behind third. He’s supposed to be ready to receive the ball, bent over, glove down.
This guy did what we call a stand-up slide. He tucked one leg under and the other leg up
so he could bring it down fast and stand up. He raked Norman. He raked him from the
top of his head all the way through the face, down to his chest with his spikes. I mean, it
was ugly. I mean, he went back and all you could see was blood, especially on his face.
Nobody did anything. Norm was just bleeding like crazy. We sent him to the medic
place to get taken care of. So Coach being what he was, he was stout. We played on.
We remembered who the guy was. So when he came to bat the next time, the next inning
or so, Coach walked out to the mound and he brought all the infield together and he said,
“What I want you to do,” he says, “I want you to put the first pitch right in that guy’s
head. I want you to hurt him. I don’t want anybody here, if he charges the mound,
that’s fine. You just keep throwing ’til you hit him.” We had a guy who threw pretty
damn hard. So what was going to happen, we looked over at Al and he was up on top of
the dugout. What he was going to do, he was going to waylay him from the side. I guess
you’d call it a clip in football. He was going to take care of him right there on the infield.
He came up to bat. The coach over there called him out of the game. That was the end
of that. The funny part is that Norman was sleeping in the bunk with me that night. He
was above me. No, he was below me. Well, I got up in the middle of the night to make a
head call about three in the morning and Norman had come back all bandaged and stuff.
He was asleep. I got down to go made a head call and he wasn’t there. I went all in the
quarters there and he wasn’t there. So I said, “Coach, Norman’s not here.” Norman was
from Irving, too. We played ball together. Norman was quiet, but you didn’t mess with
Norman. He’s the one, he’d get you. You know? So sure enough, we went out and we
looked for him. We called security and they said, “Well, we’ve got him over here at the police station.” “What do you got him over there for?” “Well, he went over to and beat this guy up about something that happened on the baseball field. He went over there and beat him up. We had to go over there and drag him off and we’ve got him here locked up. We were just fixing to call you to come pick him up.” So what Norman did, he found out where he was and went over there and beat the hell out of him.

LC: He handled it separately.

GM: He took care of it himself, all bandaged up. He went over and got the guy in bed and I don’t know, just beat him up. We had great fun. We were playing Baylor. Baylor was a bunch of jerks. University of Dallas was Catholic and they were Baptist. They just didn’t like us. They would give us a bad time so a couple of our guys took some shoe polish—this was at the Fort Hood tournament—and they had their uniforms out hanging on the line. They took this shoe polish and on the back of their jerseys they wrote UD (University of Dallas) on all of them. So we played them the next day and they had UD written on the back of their jerseys.

LC: I bet they were mad.

GM: No, who was mad was our principal. Not our principal, our president.

University of Dallas was an intellectual type of school and I learned what pseudo-intellectual meant there. We had to pay for all of those and so forth.

LC: Uh-oh. You guys were supposed to be better than that?

GM: Four years later they dropped us. In fact, we ended up going to NAIA conference playoffs the next year and the president came down and said, “I want you to reduce your schedule to thirteen.” We asked why and he said the school was getting better known for the baseball than they are the other.

LC: So he decided—

GM: The coach left.

LC: Oh, yeah, right.

GM: He left and they dropped all the scholarships. It was so sad because a lot of the kids had come here and were freshman or sophomores and now they don’t have scholarships and now they’ve got to go somewhere else. As a result Dallas Baptist University over here got a bunch of boys, our guys, and started a program and now they
have probably one of the best baseball programs in Texas. They’ve sent several to the
majors. I remember the time the president of SMU (Southern Methodist University)
came over here to watch us play SMU. While he was over there he said, “I’d like to meet
the president of your school.” We sent a runner up there to get the president, Dr. Cowan,
and asked him to come down. He said, “I don’t go to those games. If he wants to meet
me he’s got to come up here.” What a jerk. My father was president of the Irving
Chamber of Commerce. He went out there and talked to the president, Dr. Cowen and
said, “We ought to do a joint venture here. Let us join hands and we can help you and
you can help us,” and today that’s a major deal. The public relations person of the school
is president of the Chamber. It’s a big deal between the two. He said, “No, we work
primarily with Dallas. We don’t do anything with you guys.” He basically escorted Dad
to the door.

LC: He sounds very—

GM: I got to get back to telling you about Dad. One time he did something for
me I’ll never forget. I was a senior. I slid into second and I actually broke a bone in my
ankle in which I could not go up on my toes, but I could walk. When I run, I run on my
toes. Good runners run on their toes. So Coach came out there and he was a football
coach. I could walk around without my toes and I couldn’t run. He just kind of did a
number on me and told me to get off the field. It embarrassed me and really hurt me
because I was ready to play. I loved the game. Dad was over there. So I went home. I
was really upset and—no, I went to the hospital that night. They had to look at it because
it was swollen. They took X-rays. The doctor that was there checked it out and said,
“You’ve just got a bad sprain. Go on home.” About 7:30 the next morning that doctor
called and said, “No, you need to come on in here. You’ve got a broken bone.” So I
came on in and I got a cast. I went on up there. So I went to school. My first class was
close to the football coach’s office. I was going around and I looked around and I saw
Dad’s car there. My best buddy was there and I said, “Hey, Dad’s out there. I wonder
what he’s doing out there. Let’s go out and see.” Charlie said, “Hey, I know your dad.
You better leave things alone.” I’ll be darned. I came out of my first class and there’s
that coach. I want to talk about someone that did a 180. “Hey, Gary, how are you doing?
How are you feeling? Need help getting around?” I mean, he must’ve really got in his
britches. That always impressed me about Dad. The game—one time I hit a ball, and I
guess my greatest thrill was we beat Texas. I hit a homerun the last inning. Here’s this
little old school of five hundred people that beat Texas. I hit a homerun and I came off
and he was setting over there and I went over past him. It really hurt me. He didn’t say
anything like, “Nice hit, I’m proud of you,” or a slap or anything. He was just sitting
there keeping score and he said, “Be sure to get your studies done.” That was all and that
hurt. Well, what I didn’t know was, the minute we got back home that night he called all
the newspapers and told them what I had done. It came out the next morning in the
Herald and all the papers. I said, “Hey, Coach, how’d you get that so fast?” He said, “I
didn’t call them.” I said, “Who called them?” He said, “Your dad did.” So he would tell
people what a good ballplayer I was, but he never would say it to anybody else.

LC: Well, it also sounds like he was also concerned that you study, too.

GM: He was concerned I’d become a—the worst thing he could call me was a
showboat. Boy, he called me that one time and, boy, that really hurt. I quit doing
whatever it was that I was doing. “You’ve got to quit showboating out there in the field.”
“I’m not showboating.” Anyway, I admired him as a patriot. When I was in Vietnam he
sold flags. I got this story from the places. Some hippie came in there and wanted to buy
a flag.

LC: Came into his store?

GM: Yeah. Dad wasn’t going to sell it to him. He wanted to know what he was
going to do with it. He got in this humongous argument about selling him the flag
without saying—they got in this big argument and Dad was going to physically throw
him out of the place. The secretary called the police and they came out there and got this
guy and threw him out. He wasn’t going to sell him that flag because he was afraid he
was going to burn it. See? I always thought that was neat. He never, ever said anything
about being proud that I joined the Marine Corps or I was going to Vietnam, never said
anything to me. When I left to go to Vietnam and I left Love, I guess it’s typical about
every father and son. I just went down and hugged mom and hugged sister and came to
Dad and I almost broke down and I almost cried. I almost cried. We just looked at each
other and I turned around and walked away. I was fixing to cry.

LC: You didn’t shake hands or anything?
GM: No, just walked away. The feeling was there. I understand that while I was overseas he arranged to read so many pages of the Bible each day through the tour. It was so funny. My mother said that somehow they got into a discussion. She heard that if you got hurt or killed that the Marines would come knock on your door. So she told Dad, she says, “I want you to remove the doorbell.” “Why?” “I don’t want the Marines to come and ring the doorbell.” He said, “Well, they’ll just knock on the door,” and she said, “Well, I want you to remove the front door.” She was a wonderful mother. I used to love that. “I want you to remove the front door.” He said, “Well, I can’t remove the front door. People can just walk in.” “Well, I don’t care. I want you to remove that front door. I don’t want it.” I just love that story.

LC: Well, Gary, let me ask you, when did you leave University of Dallas?

GM: When did I leave?

LC: Yeah. Did you graduate?

GM: No, I didn’t graduate. I lacked two years of Spanish. I just couldn’t deal with Spanish. I just couldn’t handle it. So I transferred over to North Texas and I graduated the next year.

LC: Which was?

GM: ’65. That’s where I saw the Marines land at Da Nang.

LC: On TV, you mean?

GM: On TV. Yeah, I can remember the day I saw it. I was in the chow hall watching them land. Oh, I’ve also got to tell you one funny thing, too. The last game I played we were in a conference. I always hoped that I had a chance of playing some pro ball somewhere. I hoped somebody was watching. There were scouts up there. This guy came up behind me and I was untying my shoes and he says, “Son, are you married?” I said—he said, “Son, you got any kids?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Are you married?” I said, “No, sir.” He handed me his card and he said, “Call me when you get back,” and he was with the Cubs. I turned to my buddy and I said, “What the hell is he talking about, ‘Call me when you get back?’” He said, “Hey, there’s a war going on. You’re fixing to be 4-A.” It’s the first time I thought about the real world, the real world out there. I saw the thing on Da Nang. Then I started to think about what I was going to have to do and the recruiters knocked on my door.
LC: Did they really?
GM: Yeah. They were going around the place I was staying. I loved the blues. It goes back to the beginning of time. The blues sell themselves. I talked to them. One of the reason I joined them was when I played college ball I never missed a game. I never missed a game and I always wanted to hit leadoff. Leadoff, most guys don’t want to hit leadoff. It takes a particular person, Coach told me later, to find somebody that wants to hit leadoff. It’s like a lot of people don’t want to sit on the front row. Nobody wants to be the first one to do something of whatever. They want to be the fourth or fifth one back. Well, I always loved being the first one there because I liked to get things going. I always like to screw the pitcher up as much as I could, you know? I liked to get in close to the plate and see if he could hit me. I would try to foul off as many as I could. I just loved to—the pitcher and me were at war. Then when I got on first it was me and the pitcher and then it was me and the catcher and the second baseman. It was just these little wars. I loved it. But I loved to be the first one to get this thing started. One time I bunted myself on after I fouled this guy off many times. Then I finally got him to throw to first base so many times he finally threw it away and I went to second and I got on second and I was bouncing around. The guy turned around and actually threw the ball over the shortstop’s head. Wrong place. I went to third. The coach took the pitcher out. I had him so flabbergasted that he actually got taken out and I had him taken out. But that was my greatest thrill. We had him going before the game was ever going. So anyway, I joined the Marines because they kept saying, “We’re the first ones in. We’re the first ones in at everything.” I said, “Hey, that’s me.”

LC: That sounds like me.
GM: That’s me. “What do you mean you’re the first one?” “We’re the first ones in, always.”

LC: Well, when did you sign up?
GM: That year.
LC: ‘65?
GM: In that fall or that spring. I spent the next five or six months running. I weighed 129 pounds and I stood 5’10”. I was just a stick. I barely made it in the weight category to go in the service, but that’s the way I played. I was just skinny all the time
and it was part of that ADD. I ran everywhere. I couldn’t walk. So I went in and I could
run—before I went in I could run five miles forward and five miles backwards carrying
fifty pounds without stopping. My upper strength was real good. So when you got in
there at boot camp I could run with them, but the Marines had a way of getting you.
They could see it. What they would do is they would make you walk fast. They
wouldn’t let you run. These DIs (drill instructors) could do that. In that, they killed me.
They absolutely walked me in the ground. I couldn’t go a hundred yards. Have you ever
tried walking fast?

LC: It’s a whole different—the muscles are completely different.

GM: Yeah, it’s hard. You’ll bust your rear end walking fast. Then when I got up
to do the pull-ups they saw I was really banging them out so what did they do? They
made me reverse hands. It’s a whole different set of muscles.

LC: You mean cross over?

GM: Yeah. Instead of having the hands facing you they made you turn them and
do the hands to look the other way. That’s a completely different set of muscles. I did a
half of one and they loved it. They were just screaming at me.

LC: Now what would they scream at you?

GM: Oh, lots of not nice things. I can’t remember. That was the time when they
could use profanity. They can’t use profanity now.

LC: Right. They have to be more clever.

GM: They’ll get you.

LC: But they would spew out whatever came to mind, probably.

GM: Well, in basic their deal was, “You think you’re going to be a lieutenant or a
Marine officer. You came in here to Marine officer, you were a candidate.” They would
just make you terrified of you’re not going to make it. It worked. The guys who
thought—most of them were from California. I’d heard them on the bus coming from
California that it was a piece of cake. They were gone the first three days.

LC: Gone meaning they washed out?

GM: Yeah, they quit.

LC: They left.

GM: They just quit. That’s where we lost a lot. They just quit.
LC: Now, Gary, why did you not quit?
GM: I wanted to be a lieutenant. I did not want to go home as anything but an officer in the Marines. I was going to be an officer of the Marines and that’s all there was to it.
LC: Since you had your degree, that was going to be possible.
GM: What?
LC: Since you had a degree and had been to college, it would be possible for you to be an officer.
GM: That gave me the capability to be an officer. That’s what I’ve told these kids at school. Have a backup plan. Go to school and get a degree. I tell this as how I got into the art field. I didn’t get to play first base for the New York Yankees, but I got my college degree which led me to the point that I became an officer in the Marine Corps, which gave me—and I’ll get into the art here later—it led to this other thing. That’s how I got in there as a lieutenant.
LC: Just for listeners, to clarify, you did your boot, your basic training at Quantico.
GM: Yes.
LC: Once that was completed and you hung in there, what is it, ten weeks or so?
GM: Yeah, it was ten weeks.
LC: Something like that, yeah. Then they needed to send you for further training.
GM: Yeah, Basic School.
LC: Basic School.
GM: They gave you about two weeks off and then you came back and you were a lieutenant. They sent all the lieutenants to Basic School, which is dormitory. It was the coldest winter in twenty-seven years of Virginia. Here’s where you learned leadership. You learned how to land navigate. You learned how to call in air support, mortars. You got to use all the firearms. You qualified with your rifle, and it was hard.
LC: Did you spend some time in the classroom and some time out on the field, out on the ranges and so on?
GM: Yeah, fifty-fifty. I wasn’t impressed with Basic School. In fact, we talked about this when we went back to the reunion about three years ago. We went back to
Basic School and we talked to the CO (commanding officer). We told him about what we had and he said, “No, it was terrible.” In fact, I have a copy of the CO’s address to us at Mess Night. In other words, about the last two or three nights that you’re there at Basic School, right before you graduate you have a Mess Night. You put on your blues and you learn how to conduct yourself as an officer when you’re eating in your blues. You don’t pick up your fork until your guest does.

LC: Sure, some etiquette.

GM: Yeah, and which fork you pick up. Make sure you don’t stick it in somebody’s head like you do in Bomarton. You do all this. Don’t let me forget to tell you about the Civil War. I got a copy of that. I’ll tell you, the first thing out of his mouth was, he said, “I’ll tell you what. Out of all the jobs I could get in the Marine Corps, this is the worst job I ever got.” He listed all the jobs he got and all the ones he wanted. He said, “This is the one they gave me.” That’s a hell of a thing for a CO to say.

LC: That’s not very inspiring.

GM: “I ended up being a principal for a bunch of lieutenants. I want to go back to war and I’m over here doing this.” That tells you the attitude right there, that there was a problem. So during Basic School they didn’t really give you enough. I remember one night in particular that will tell you how bad it was. We went on a march. Then we came back—a long march and we stayed overnight—and we marched some more. The next afternoon we marched back to a hill where there were some bleachers. We were supposed to meet some trucks, what we called cattle trucks, to take us back to Basic School. We were all wet from marching and it was cold. The wind was blowing and we sat up in those bleachers for about an hour and it just got cold and they never showed up. So most of us got down off the bleachers, got down to the side of a hill and just huddled up together because we were freezing. So they didn’t show up for about five hours. So we got in, went back, and about two hours later it was time to get up. Nobody got up out of the dormitories. The DIs came to do their—not the DIs, they were called the platoon commanders, they were captains—they came through there banging on the doors, telling us to fall out for formation. There was only a very few of us that did. I was one of them. I can remember the guy banging on my bunk and a lot of guys fell out and went to sick call because most of them were sick.
LC: Oh, I can well believe it.

GM: Even some of them got pneumonia.

LC: Yeah, pneumonia, exposure, yeah.

GM: Yeah. So we went to formation and there’s about six of us. Boy, they screamed and yelled at us. “Those guys are in bed. We’re going to write you up.” So anyway, I forgot what happened, but about two weeks later we had decided we were going to the rifle range. There was two companies of us. I think we told the other company what we were going to do. I think they did the same thing. So we went out to the rifle range. This is how your company is graded. The captains and the base commander was graded on how well you did. The Marines are great. You want to be great shots. Marines are supposed to be great shots. We’ve got out there and said, “By God, we’re going to pay him back on that.” So when it came time to shoot, we shot birds, trashcans, anything, leaves, bushes, anything you could think of. We didn’t hit the target. If you shot and didn’t miss and you missed there was—on the end target down there was a white rectangular flag made of wood that they’d fly. They’d fly it over the target. There were about eight of them. That’s all you saw down there was white flags all afternoon because nobody was even hitting the target. We didn’t even hit the thing. Boy, they were—they could see what we were doing. They were torqued and they marched us back down there. Finally, I forgot how they found out they did it, while we were doing it. The base commander went nuts. He called us all in and did a number on us. You couldn’t talk back. If you talk back you could be relieved of duty.

LC: That’s right.

GM: So somebody had guts enough to request mast with his boss. It’s the formal thing you can do.

LC: Now, explain for someone who doesn’t know what that is, what is it?

GM: Request mast is where you can talk to your boss. If you’re aboard ship you can request mast to talk to the captain.

LC: Without—

GM: Talking to your superiors. It’s their superiors. You want to talk to the boss.

LC: You can go around the chain of command.
GM: Everybody. If you’re having a problem with your captain, with your boss and you know he’s a problem child, too, you can request mast with his boss. Anybody you want to. You can actually request mast with the commandant of the Marine Corps if you want to. It’s hard to do, but you basically just want to go up to the person above. So he did. He went up there and told him what the problem was and what we’d been going through and the terrible training that we had been receiving and all this sort of thing. So anyway, I think he got his butt chewed and whatever. Then he came back and things got better, but I noticed one thing. This was 1960. Guess what happened about a hundred years earlier? 1860.

LC: Fort Sumter was fired on.

GM: That’s right. The Civil War, if you think back, was only a hundred years earlier.

LC: That’s right.

GM: I want to tell you something.

LC: Okay.

GM: The Civil War was alive and well. Most of us had never been out of the state. It didn’t take long before people were calling Johnny Reb and Yankee.

LC: Is that right?

GM: Yeah. Even though we were all college graduates and known better, there were some—and our particular class, and I think it was common with everybody else, there are a lot of Texans who joined up. I think that’s true of any war.

LC: Yes, I think so.

GM: A lot of Marines come from Texas. A lot of Mexican-Americans join the Marines, but there just seem to be an overabundance that joined the Marines from Texas. I don’t know how many guys in our group got called “Tex.” You got tired of it. But the Civil War was alive and well.

LC: Well, how did it go with African-American guys?

GM: We didn’t have any.

LC: None?
GM: Well, I think in my basic school class we had two. I’m sorry. In my boot
camp we had two. I think that was about the average. Out of forty in my group we had
two. So there was just a few.

LC: How did they get along?

GM: Fine. I don’t know how they got along with the guys up above. As far as I
know, I got along with them fine.

LC: Right.

GM: The ones I had a problem with was the damn Yankees that kept calling—
and I wasn’t there to start a deal. Just quit calling me that, you know?

LC: So these guys from up North, they’d give you a hard time?

GM: I’d come in there and I remember one guy kept making fun of the way I
talk. Finally one day he kept saying—he talked about Cuba. I’m going—he kept saying,
“One day I’m going to go to Cuber.” He kept calling it Cuber and I laid into him. “I
went back to the queue last night and I went through that damn dictionary and I couldn’t
find Cuber anywhere. Where the hell is Cuber? I know where Cuba is but where the hell
is Cuber? You keep talking about ‘You’re going to get an idear.’ What the hell is an
idear? I know what an idea is. What the hell is an idear?”

LC: You let him have it.

GM: Yeah. I just nailed him to the wall and he didn’t bother me anymore after
that. It mostly came from the Boston side. The Boston people, they were the ones that
used to drive me nuts.

LC: Boston.

GM: They would talk about the way we talk and I said, “Hey, get a grip.”

LC: Well, you were saying, Gary, that the content of basic school wasn’t really
enough to keep you guys, not occupied, but keep you moving forward in terms of
learning and everything.

GM: No. Of course, a lot of us from there went to whatever school you were
going through, supply school or infantry school, and that’s where you really learned what
you needed to know.

LC: How was that determined, who went where?
GM: You had a choice, three choices of what you wanted to do. Then the CO and platoon commanders would decide what you wanted. Coming out of management I decided I wanted to do supply because I wanted to have that as a backup when I got out of the Marine Corps.

LC: That you could get a civilian position?

GM: Yeah. That’s what I wanted. I knew I wasn’t good enough. We had done some field training for infantry. I just knew right off the bat that I was not that good or had the qualifications to be a grunt or whatever.

LC: Which would take what? What was it that you thought you didn’t have?

GM: The biggest problem was navigation at night, land navigation at night. What we only had at the time was a compass. We took the compass and you had a little nightlight pop through. What we had to go through in the country is you had a bunch of guys behind you. They told us, “This is the only way you will go on patrol.” You don’t go by lakes, ponds, trees, and whatever. You might during the day, but at nighttime you’ve got to use that compass. That just terrified me because I just knew I couldn’t do it.

LC: That wasn’t going to be your specialty.

GM: That scared me. I just knew I couldn’t find those points. You’d have to walk three hundred meters at certain degrees. When you got to that point you would check in. You better be at that point because if you’ve got yourself in a bind and you need to call in an artillery strike it would work off where you were. “I need some rounds two hundred meters east of where I am.”

LC: Right. The errors could be really bad.

GM: If you weren’t in the right place and that happened a lot. In fact, in Vietnam, that’s why we lost a lot of lieutenants. Lieutenants went fast in Vietnam. You talk to guys in infantry who went to infantry school and all that, they’ll tell you that they didn’t learn. You just forget what you learned. You had a little book that you kept that was basic fire rules and things you got when you went to get a brief on something. It was just kind of like a pilot’s book when you went to checkout your aircraft when you’re about to fly. You do all these checks through the book. Well, you did kind of the same thing here but every commander did it a different way. You eventually just forgot it,
what they told me. Then what I ended up doing it on patrols, they told me what they wanted to do and I just did what they told me. I can remember certain things from Basic School, but I learned real quick what they told me over there.

LC: You internally—

GM: You listen real quick and you watch and you learn real quick from somebody else. The guys that were there, they told you. There was no problem in not telling you. They weren’t going to be an ass and not tell you because you were a rookie or you were green or something. You were a Marine. I don’t know what the Army did, but you were a Marine. They were going to help each other when you came in. They didn’t want you to get the guys killed. They’d ask you, “Have you ever called in an artillery fire?” “No, I haven’t.” “Well, let me show you how it works. If you got anymore questions let’s go through it again.” That’s the way it worked. If you didn’t know it, if you didn’t do it, he’d go to the CO and say, “He can’t do it.”

LC: Gary, you went to supply school, is that right?

GM: Yeah.

LC: Where was that?

GM: No, it was Camp Lejeune.

LC: How long was that course? How long did it take?

GM: Oh, about fifteen weeks.

LC: So you’re becoming a logistics officer, logistics and supply? Is that right?

GM: Yeah.

LC: Was what you learned there what you needed to know?

GM: I never once—in my three years I never was in supply.

LC: Not even at the end of your—

GM: When I came back after Vietnam I think I spent three months in supply and I had forgotten everything. I didn’t know what I was doing.

LC: Now when you were at supply school, of course, you’re going forward thinking, “These are the jobs I’m going to put to. This is what I’m going to be assigned to.” Did you have an affiliation with a unit at that time?

GM: No.

LC: Okay. When did you—what happened after you left supply school?
GM: I stayed at Lejeune and was assigned to a supply company. I did nothing for about four months but sit in a chair. I mean, nothing. I kept wanting them to do something. They said, “Well, you’re going to have orders to go to WestPac. Your orders are coming any day. It’s going to take time to work you into the program,” and they basically didn’t want to waste their time with me working me in there. So I did nothing. I mean nothing. For four months I did nothing. I’d go in there saying, “Where are my orders? When can I go? Send me somewhere.” Sure enough, my orders finally came and I got out of there.

LC: To where?

GM: Head west. I was going to west. First I went to California. We had a month of what they called jungle training and so forth. You were given a platoon. I was in a company of Marines. So you took these Marines out and you took them around these trails and taught them what you knew about ambushes and how to deal with an ambush, what you would do during an ambush. We taught them how to defend a hill when it was being taken if you were being attacked. Then we learned how to take a hill. We’d teach them how to read a map and how to do squad and then fire team attacks. One would cover the other. Then you teach them how to do it and how to use voice commands and arm commands and that sort of thing.

LC: How long did this last?

GM: About a month.

LC: Where was it? Twenty-nine Palms?

GM: No, it was Camp Pendleton. I’m trying to think of what all happened there that was strange. One thing I’ll always remember is there was a lieutenant. He was a Naval graduate. I guess he was a picture book trying to be Chesty Puller. You know Chesty Puller?

LC: Yes, sir.

GM: He always had this sawed off cigar in his mouth. He was always talking out the side of his cigar and he was loud. Everybody just got sick of him and nobody wanted to be around him. So one day he had his platoon up on the side of this hill. We were, our platoon, breaking off and going somewhere. So my platoon broke off and we were passing in front of his platoon. He said something to one of my guys, which you’re not
supposed to do. If you’ve got to say something, they’re out of line or something, you
come to me. Of course, that embarrassed me because I couldn’t say anything back to him.
It wasn’t right.

LC: Right. So he got a dig in.

GM: Yeah, he was being a big man with a cigar. I remember looking up at him.
He had his hands on the side and his legs spread. I was 129 pounds and he was
considerably bigger than me. So I said, “I want to talk to you. I want to talk to you over
here.” So he was in front of me and we went behind these trees and then just when he got
to these trees I took my helmet off and I hit the top of his helmet real hard and got his
attention. He turned around and I think it scared him or got his attention. I told him,
“Don’t you ever do this again. If you do I’m going to the CO. Everybody in this platoon
knows what you’re doing.” We just talked. I said, “You’re forgetting all the points of
leadership. If you don’t we can just settle this right now.” So anyway, he didn’t stop, but
he didn’t bother me anymore. One day he finally got what’s coming to him. He got
relieved. I remember this. He finally got his—out in the field or anywhere, when the
chow is served, your men get served first and then the NCOs (non-commissioned
officers) get fed and then your officers get fed.

LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

GM: He broke in line and got fed. He got his chow.

LC: You’re kidding.

GM: Yeah, he did, with his cigar. Somebody reported it to the CO. Then I went
in there with the guy. I said, “I want to tell you something else, what he did to my
platoon.”

LC: Do you remember what it was he said? Is it something you can tell on the
tape or not?

GM: To my man?

LC: Yeah.

GM: It was just something about the way he was marching.

LC: Implying that he what?

GM: He wasn’t marching right or he didn’t have his cover on straight or, “You’re
marching out of tune. Get squared away.” Just something that had to do with the way he
was marching. “Get that collar up,” or, “Your shoe’s untied,” or something, but he did it in front of all of the Marines. Every Marine knows that you don’t bother the other company or the platoon.

LC: Right. You mind your own house and all that.

GM: Anyway, he got relieved. He got relieved. He got pulled out. I don’t know what happened to him after that.

LC: Well, that sounds like it was probably a good decision by someone.

GM: Oh, yeah, I’m sure somebody got a hold of him and yanked that cigar out of his mouth. You might be from the Naval Academy, but you’re no Chesty Puller. In fact, when you went to Vietnam, if you had some of those Chesty Pullers, those hard chargers, I was told when they had these guys—I don’t know who told me, I just remember this—that, “Hey, we’re going to hi-diddle-diddle right up the middle,” hard-chargers. “Just give me a rifle, give me a platoon and show me where they are,” they would take those guys from the field and fly them into Da Nang and take them through the morgue. They’d walk through the morgue. All of a sudden there wasn’t any more hi-diddle-diddle up the middle. It kind of sobered them up. No more hi-diddle-diddle up the middle.

LC: That’s interesting.

GM: I heard that that’s what they had done.

LC: That’s interesting. Well, when—let me just stop you for a minute, Gary, in terms of talking about the training and the progression that you were in to ask what you were thinking about the conflict in Vietnam itself. What did you understand about why the United States sent troops in, particularly the Marines?

GM: No question about why the Marines were going. It was obvious we were going. As far as the war was concerned, I feel today the same way I felt then. We had some type of an agreement signed with those people to protect them or help them in the event that they were attacked from a foreign source. It was no different to me than Korea. It was another Korea. That’s the way I feel about it today. People say we shouldn’t have got into that. Well, to me, I don’t know about the Tonkin Gulf and all that. Maybe that was wrong. He was looking for an excuse to go in, but that’s the way I feel about it. I’ll tell you something I’ve always wondered, if I can get off the subject a minute.
LC: Sure, of course.

GM: If I could change one thing in my life with someone else in my life was the fact that Kennedy would not have been killed because he was the first one to start sending the Army Special Forces over.

LC: The advisors.

GM: The advisors. He was the first one to put troops in. He started it. Then he was killed and then it went to Johnson and it got bigger and anybody and everybody hated Johnson. I think primarily because of the fact that he was from Texas and he talked like it. Again, you had the Bostonites who hated Texas and came in. My feeling is that’s what became the anti-war. I always would’ve liked if he could have stayed alive to see what he would’ve done.

LC: To see what Kennedy would have done.

GM: Yeah, what he would’ve done. Would he have—I don’t know what would happen. I’d like to hear what you would think of what would happen with all those anti-war people who were up in the Northeast, his people, what would his people have done if he stayed?

LC: Do you think that he would have stayed or do think—of course, this big discussion—

GM: I have no idea. That’s what I’m saying. I have no idea. I’d like to talk to somebody that could’ve told me what they thought might would’ve happened. It was obvious that you could withdraw.

LC: Yeah, everybody you would talk to on it, you would probably get a different answer. There’s a lot of debate about it, that’s for sure, a lot of debate.

GM: Yeah. I’d like to talk with somebody from the Northeast, I guess maybe one of his campaign supporters or what Bobby Kennedy would have done. Well, Bobby Kennedy was going to pull them out, but that was after Johnson was there. What would he have done if he’d stayed in, because we were already in? Great mystery.

LC: It is a mystery. It’s a very interesting question. When did you, Gary, get your orders for going to Vietnam?

GM: ’67.

LC: Do you remember when about?
GM: No.

LC: Sometime in ’67?

GM: Yeah, because for some reason—this is true—I was in a jeep in the hills of California. A guy pulled in and said, “We’ve got sudden orders for you,” and I said, “For where?” He said, “You’re going to Iwakuni, Japan.” What? So I ended up going to Iwakuni, Japan, for two months because somebody got relieved of duty. A lieutenant had a job there. He did something with the money and got in trouble. They had another lieutenant coming, but they had to have somebody fill that hole there for two months.

LC: What was the job? What were you supposed to do?

GM: It was great. It couldn’t have been any better. Special Services, tennis, basketball and all that kind of stuff.

LC: No kidding.

GM: Yeah. I even had my wife come over for a month.

LC: Now when did you get married?

GM: Sixty—we got married—

LC: What were you doing? Were you already in the Marines?

GM: Yeah. We got married, I think, when I came back after I graduated from Basic School. I came back and got married.

LC: What was your wife’s name?

GM: Linda.

LC: Was Linda from Texas?

GM: Yeah.

LC: There you go.

GM: She went to TWU (Texas Women’s University) and I was at North Texas and there we met.

LC: I see. So you got to have Linda come over to Japan?

GM: Yeah.

LC: Well, that was good.

GM: Yeah.

LC: What were you supposed to do, kind of make sure that recreation was available to officers?
GM: Well, the Japanese really ran the thing, okay? But they had to have an American officer sign off on everything.

LC: So you were there to sign off?

GM: Yeah.

LC: That sounds pretty good.

GM: Yeah. The thing that’s interesting is I found out later that one of the Japanese that was working for me, somebody, another Japanese, caught him and for years he’d been stifling money off the top and invested it in land for years and had beaucoup money that he had. He went to jail for—when you go to jail in Japan you go to jail for a long time. Meanwhile, guys like us were just signing off on stuff. I think they eliminated her job. I’ll tell you one thing that’s funny that happened over there. I was over there for the Fourth of July. They came over to me and you know you can get fireworks over there for nothing. So they came to me and said, “Well, we’re going to have a fireworks display. Well, we can have a fifteen minutes fireworks display or a thirty minutes display or we can have an hour’s worth of display.” I was piddling around with something and they said, “It’s your decision. What are you going to do?” I said, “Oh, hell, let’s just get it over. Have a fifteen minutes display.” So I got up there and I got myself in trouble. There was people that didn’t get there in time. I’ll tell you what. Fifteen minutes of a Japanese fireworks display, it was the Second Coming. I mean, fireworks were everywhere. It was from horizon to horizon. It was everywhere. It was the most spectacular fireworks display. I’ve never seen anything like it. Then it was over and it was like a war. It just quit. Everybody said, “Well, what are they going to do next?” It was over. It was the greatest fifteen minutes of fireworks display you have ever seen in your life.

LC: But you got in trouble.

GM: Yeah, it was over. People said, “Wow!” but it was over. They shot off everything. Yeah, it was horizon to horizon.

LC: It was great if you were there on time

GM: Yeah, it should have been a forty-five minute show where they have a normal fireworks display, hell, they just lit the candle on one fuse. It was literally like a war and then it was over. You’d have this stuff drifting down where you were sitting.
LC: Oh, sure, I’ll bet.

GM: That was kind of neat. Then I got orders to go south. That’s when I went to Da Nang and I said, “When am I going to get to go? When am I going to get to go?”

Also, this is kind of interesting. They had the shows come over and they would practice here before they would go to Da Nang, USO (United Service Organization) shows.

LC: They would practice in Japan?

GM: Yeah, and I had—Hugh O’Brian brought a show over. Sandy Duncan came with him. She was a nobody. I remember we were in the O-club talking and that was dinner. He pointed her out at the other end and we talked. She was from East Texas. Then lo and behold, years later she becomes somebody.

LC: Very famous.

GM: If you remember, she lost an eye.

LC: Yes, I remember that. I don’t remember the circumstances.

GM: Well, guess who spent all the time up there with her? Hugh O’Brian.

LC: Oh, is that right?

GM: Yeah, they were very close. They did a song and dance routine. Then one night I went into town with him and we had a good time. He was a neat guy. He bought my wife a dress and he bought me something. He was a pretty neat guy. He had a brother who was killed on Iwo Jima.

LC: Oh, is that right?

GM: Yeah. He said he was trying to break out of the stereotype of he was playing the part on the TV of who was it? Hickok or somebody. He was trying to break out of that role and that’s what he was doing over there.

LC: Well, Gary, let me ask you about your arrival in Vietnam. You arrived at Da Nang, is that right?

GM: Yeah, I went to Okinawa. Then they transferred me to Da Nang.

LC: Okay. Did you think that you were going to be doing logistics and supply stuff?

GM: Yeah. I didn’t know what I was going to do, but I kept thinking, “Maybe they’ll send me out.” I wanted to go out and be assigned to a company somewhere outside, something where I could be going with the infantry because those four months I
spent at Camp Lejeune, I didn’t want any more of that. I didn’t want to be stuck in Da
Nang doing nothing.

LC: Did you tell people that?

GM: Yeah, in fact, that’s where I ended up. I ended up at Da Nang with the 1st
Marine Air Wing actually doing something with the wing, but it was just there. I told my
Major Dillo, I said, “First opening that should come, send me out there. I don’t want to
just be sitting here.” So I sat there about two or two and a half months. During that time
I’d usually get little things. I didn’t like this. I didn’t like it. It was somewhat scary. I
had two squads. At nighttime we would go out and we would go through these villages
that were outside our compound. We would go through those villages and just walk
through them just like if you were out in the bush. You would walk through these other
villages and you’d check them. You’d check underneath to see the pads and see if there
were actually any tunnels in Da Nang. It could be tunnels into Da Nang. You’d check
them to see if there were firearms or anything like that. You’d find them.

LC: So you’re looking for caches of supplies?

GM: Yeah, and they were there. What I didn’t like about that was I was afraid
some guy would have a punji hole there that you couldn’t see.

LC: Yeah, for sure.

GM: Yeah. Every time you came upon a mat between things you were scared. I
was concerned somebody could just nail you from behind because these things were so
close. But I did come back and find one thing. There was a Vietnamese compound next
to a Marine compound. Tet was just beginning to happen. Tet, that’s when the North
tried to take over the South.

LC: Now, Tet of ’68, right? Big Tet?

GM: Yeah, Tet was a big one, the ’68 Tet, but there were a lot of rumblings
going on before that. I came across this compound, one and the other. They had a big
fence and the Vietnamese had taken a six-by, which is a big truck. It had railings on each
side of the truck so that you drove it up next to this fence. Hold on a minute. Took this
two-by-eight, and they ran this thing over the top of the fence. Then on the other side
they put a ladder so if they started—and they had three 105 pieces there that they were
going to use for support to shoot at. In other words, they could get shot at right there.
They were an artillery base. If they got any incoming the first thing they were going to do was run up this ladder, run across this six-by and hit this board like a diving board, into this American compound. I went up and told the CO, “You’ve got to come see this.” So he looked at that at first he got mad and then he says, “I’m going to do something.” I said, “What are you going to do?” “Leave me alone. I’ll do something.” So the next night I came by there and I couldn’t see really what he had done. So I looked and I looked and then I found out what he’d done. He’d taken a saw. On his side he had had one of his Marines cut about halfway across or better on that side of the fence, real close to the fence all the way across that board. So the first guy that jumped on the side of that fence was going straight down. It was going to be the world’s shortest dive. So anyway, that was something I’d never—I took a picture of it.

LC: Gary, let me ask, just so that people listening will have a sense of the progression of things. You sent along a copy of your DD-214, for which we thank you, and it shows that you were in the Da Nang area from about September of ’67 through May of ’68. Does that sound right to you?

GM: Yep.

LC: Were you with the 1st Marine Air Wing that whole time?

GM: Yep.

LC: You were? What was your rank at this time? I went from—let’s see. I became a second lieutenant, a first lieutenant, and captain.

LC: Did you become a first lieutenant, then, while you were at Da Nang?

GM: Yeah, and a captain.

LC: And then promoted to captain. Let me ask about the location. You were based in Da Nang, but you did some operations outside, obviously, outside the city.

GM: Yeah, during the Tet Offensive I was moved out and I’ve got Mike McCollum. He’s got a map and I can’t remember the hill numbers of it, but there was a place out behind what I call the Bob Hope Theater. Out behind there, up on a hill—there were some hills, I think two or maybe three, that we had and we built. It overlooked this huge valley called Happy Valley. From there a lot of rockets were shot into Da Nang from time to time.

LC: From the hills overlooking the valley, those—?
GM: No, down in the valley.

LC: Oh, from the valley.

GM: On the hills, we would view and from there we would go on patrols from there out into the valley. Fortunately there was not much jungle there. It was just heavy brush, almost kind of like West Texas brush, but thicker. So we would patrol out into those areas and just basically try to keep from getting ambushed and see if we could make them aware that they couldn’t set up something in there.

LC: Now, just to get the geography right, and correct me if I’m wrong, Gary, does Highway 1 go through Happy Valley?

GM: No.

LC: Okay. It does not.

GM: No, I don’t think it did. It went beside it. It went between Da Nang and Happy Valley.

LC: So you’re up on the ridgelines, essentially, around Happy Valley.

GM: Yeah.

LC: How many men were you commanding, let’s say, as a first lieutenant?

GM: At that time I had about thirty-two and the other platoons had likewise.

LC: You’re training, of course, had been primarily leaning toward logistics. All of a sudden here you are in combat in command. Was this something that you look to right away?

GM: No. But I was—the funny thing is in the Marines you just say, “Hey, this is what I’m supposed to do.” You were all basically combat officers. These guys know that I’m not trained for it. Somebody will be there to give us guidance. Sure enough, when I was there they told me what I was to do and told me what to be looking for out there. Be looking for the punji holes, what kind of punji holes we’d be looking for, what kind of trails to be looking for, obviously don’t walk on any trails, don’t walk the same place twice, here are your sister battalions, here are your support elements if you get in a bind, mortars are over here, radio calls, and all the basic stuff. The first three or four times you went out you had a gunny go with you who knew the stuff. He was in command.
LC: The gunny would be somebody with so much in-country experience that he would help you out.

GM: Right. That’s what you’d do. I did not get a combat medal because quite frankly, I didn’t really—there was guys that spent six months out there in that stuff. I was out there maybe six or eight weeks. It just didn’t seem right to get one. So I didn’t get one. I didn’t ask for one. I didn’t even put in for one. I wasn’t going to be that guy.

LC: Yeah, I’m picking that up. Gary, when you were out there, were there any days that you particularly remember, either because you located something or did you have any contact or was it because they were boring days?

GM: There was a village way out that we came into and the standard deal was—and the gunny was in charge. We went in the village and it was an unknown village. So we surrounded it and we came in. We poked around and checked out the top of the hooches for weaponry. We had the bayonets. We checked the floors under the mats for holes and caches and so forth. While we’re doing this we’re rounding up all the Vietnamese. They ran around like chickens with their heads cut off and this sort of thing. LC: The Vietnamese civilians?

GM: There was a guy there walking around with a camera and there was a guy with a microphone. Where he came from, I don’t know. They just came from somewhere. So they were there filming this thing. Anyway, they were filming all this stuff. I didn’t pay any more attention to it than that. Sure enough, we found a door underneath one of the mats and it was a tunnel. That made it a VC (Viet Cong) village. What we did was call in one or two H-46s and put all the Vietnamese aboard and flew back into Da Nang where the intel people could separate them and find out if any of them were Charlies, which they were, I’m sure. They took all the rest of them and doctored ‘em and—what am I trying to say? The corpsman checked them out, the kids and everybody, and fixed them up. I understand what they did. Then they put them into a new village safe from where they were, from Charlie. That took care of them. Meanwhile, after we blew the whistle for somebody to go down and look at—I don’t think anybody did. We didn’t have any tunnel rats with us.

LC: Right. So what did you do?
GM: We just blew them. We dropped grenades down in there and then I think we dropped—we didn’t have any satchel charges or anything.

LC: You just threw some grenades down there?

GM: We threw some grenades down there and got some secondary charges and explosions down there.

LC: Which told you what?

GM: There was stuff down there. There was armament down there.

LC: Ordnance of some kind.

GM: Then we torched the village and I can remember this cameraman watching us torch the village. Then this guy was talking on this microphone. We turned around and another helo came in, an H-46, and we all got on board. We went back to the hill and I remember these two guys went with us. Then they got to the hill and they got in some kind of jeep. They went back into Da Nang. I mention that because when I got back home I saw something very close to this that really, really upset me.

LC: Saw it on TV?

GM: Yeah. It was one of those cases with the press in which they didn’t tell you the whole story.

LC: Okay, sure.

GM: It was one of those things that just made you furious.

LC: Did you know, Gary, who they represented? Was it Associated Press or was it American TV? Who was it?

GM: No. They were Americans.

LC: Television?

GM: Yeah.

LC: You have no idea how they just showed up at your operation.

GM: No, I heard them. I was told they were going to be coming up from behind us. They were going to follow behind us and don’t be concerned. They were going to be going with us, but they showed up late. They were going to go anyway. So we showed up and they came up behind us. They introduced themselves to the gunny and told them okay. Then they started shooting.
LC: Now before you later saw this kind of operation shown on television in the States, while you were actually there and they were there filming it, did it bother you that they were there? Did you think, “They have no business up here,” or did you think, “Well, whatever. They’re doing their job”?

GM: I didn’t really think about them because I was watching the gunny and I was trying to learn—we were in a possibly VC village and I was scared that somebody was going to fall out and start gunning us down. I was more concerned about—I was at the ready.

LC: Somebody might pop up from a spider hole or something.

GM: Yeah, that somebody would come out from somewhere behind or somewhere and I was walking around looking for stuff and looking for people and kind of making sure that we all had the place covered all the way around it. I was afraid we were going to get ambushed.

LC: About what time of day was this?

GM: It was afternoon, about mid-afternoon.

LC: You guys had arrived in the village. How did you get there?

GM: Oh, we walked in.

LC: You walked in?

GM: We went on patrol and we were told to go out and check out this village.

LC: Did you get any—other than the interrogation effort which happened back at Da Nang separately, did you get any intel in the village itself, like did you find any written materials or documents or anything?

GM: No, but what we did find that’s kind of funny—the gunny forgot to tell us to do this. When he told us when they started torching that thing we started walking off and we heard something go (makes shooting noise). He says, “Everybody get out of here fast.” He forgot to tell us if there’s ordnance in there we might get hit. Boy, we boogied out of that place pretty fast. I remember that. Boy, rounds went off everywhere and were popping off and so forth.

LC: It was a little frightening.

GM: Yeah, that’s kind of stupid that he forgot to tell us. We laid down and hid behind stuff.
LC: How did your guys react under—this is a pretty stressful situation they’re in. You don’t know what danger you might actually be in, but you have to assume that you are in danger when this is going on. Did your guys react well and did they hang together?

GM: Yeah, they did. In watching the Iraq films, it’s just the training. It’s just the training. Where the real stretch comes in, and we were in this one time for just a few minutes, it was in the dark, you’ve got an ambush from the left and we went in. Everybody broke out of the trail. It was me and a radio and you don’t know where anybody is. You don’t know where they are. It is terrifying. It is terrifying because you don’t know what’s going on and it’s your job to—

LC: Get it together.

GM: Get it together and try to just—what I learned from the gunny is he told me that you’ve got to learn to just stay calm and try to figure out as quickly as you can where the fire’s coming from. You can’t see the fire. You can go back to Iwo Jima. You can’t see bullets flying and they’re not necessarily going to have—what am I going to call it? Bullets are going to be—I can’t say the word—where you can see them coming.

LC: With tracers and stuff?

GM: Yeah, tracers. They’re not going to be firing with tracers when you see them come at you. They don’t have smoke. You just had to listen with the sound.

LC: You just had to go by what you could hear?

GM: What you could hear. Our training is to go toward that fire.

LC: Go toward it?

GM: Go toward the fire. Move toward the fire. Put all your weaponry toward that fire. So we did that and then your squad leaders would have radios and then you would try to find out where they are and what kind of casualties you’ve got. Then you’d work from there and try to work around it if you could. Let them do what they can do and let them tell you what they need. “I need a backup squad out here. If we can get somebody over to the right and eliminate the fire,” or, “We need somebody to bring up this,” or whatever. I forgot exactly what we did. I think we just sat there and I think one squad worked around to the left. This is important. I think the people who really run the war are the sergeants—staff sergeants and sergeants.
LC: Why do you say that?
GM: Because they’re the guys that move the people and are with the people. I can tell them, but I’m not there. They tell them and they’re there. They’re really the ones that are—they’re the Marine Corps. They’re the Army.
LC: Well, Gary, let me ask you about another group of people. On a night like the one you’re describing where you’re in contact, what about the corpsmen? What role did they play and do you remember anything, if anyone that evening got hurt? Can you tell me anything about those guys and how they performed?
GM: We lost two.
LC: Two corpsmen?
GM: No.
LC: Two men.
GM: Two men. There was nothing the corpsmen could do. There was nothing they could do. They were hit instantly from the fire.
LC: Obviously the corpsmen were called to try to help them.
GM: There was a funny thing that happened. I’m going to tell you the best, too.
LC: Okay.
GM: Americans have this knack of—I saw some of these things on TV on a couple of the history things. If you interview them or talk to them and they’re together and it’s hot and there’s nothing they can do and they’re sitting there they’ll actually have a sense of humor. They do.
LC: Yes, sir. That’s true.
GM: They do, they will. I lost my thought. Oh, yeah. We went down the creek embankment. The corpsman was in the water. He slipped and fell down. Somebody thought he got shot. So he opened up and everybody opened up. It took about four or five minutes and two guys went down on top of him to make sure he didn’t get hit.
LC: They threw themselves on top of him.
GM: Yeah. He’s sitting there screaming and we think he’s hurt. No, he’s screaming, “Get off of me.”
LC: Right, but those guys were trying to protect him.
GM: Yeah, and they’re trying to protect him. Finally I stopped everybody shooting. Once everybody stopped shooting he’s screaming obscenities about, “Get off, you’re killing my leg.” Then everybody just broke out laughing. It was just funny as hell. Well, then we had to go home because we made too much noise. We had to go back.

LC: Right because now obviously your position was completely revealed. Did you in that situation have to basically get out of there fast?

GM: No, we just called in and said, “The mission’s over.”

LC: But I get that you guys did laugh about that.

GM: Yeah, it was good. It was good. That’s not bad. When I told them what happened and when you’re in that type of situation, unless you’ve got a screwed up CO or something, it’s okay. If you find somebody that’s bad, that’s really not doing it, word is going to get out and you’re going to send them back. In this business about drugs and this movie they did that—I can’t think of the guy’s name that did the movie that was so famous about Vietnam.

LC: *Apocalypse Now*?

GM: No, the other one. *Platoon*.

LC: *Platoon*?

GM: Yeah, and he said all that stuff about the drugs and all this kind of stuff and made it look like we were all on drugs. I’ll tell you if anybody’s on drugs everybody wants him out because if he’s walking point or if he’s walking flank and he’s out in la-la land, your flank’s going to be useless.

LC: It’s worse than useless though, isn’t it?

GM: Yeah, somebody could walk right through him and he’d say, “Hi, how are you doing, pal? They’re right over there.” So what you do is you get rid of him. You tell your sergeant. We’d get him out and we’d send him back to wherever. In most cases he ended back in Okinawa and then back home.

LC: Now back in Okinawa would there be some kind of judicial proceeding or something against him?
GM: Yeah, they’d get the word and be tagged. In most cases they’d be shipped right out of the Marine Corps. They’d be sent back to the States with probably a general discharge or a BCD (bad conduct discharge) and kicked out of the Marine Corps.

LC: So just on this topic for a moment, Gary, did you know of guys who were even when they were—let’s say they’re not walking point, they’re not on a patrol, they’re on downtime or rest time or whatever—that had access to, I don’t know, marijuana or something?

GM: No.

LC: You just didn’t see any of that?

GM: No. I’ll tell you something else. I don’t know about the Army. When we were off duty we kept everybody busy. In most cases you didn’t have to keep them busy. They knew how to keep busy. If you ran out of something to do you cleaned your rifle.

LC: That was taught, right? That was taught from the time they came into the Marines.

GM: Yeah. But it was hot. So on occasions you’d go back and you’d take your shirt off and you put it up there to dry and you put on a dry one because if you went to bed that night or the rack that night with that wet shirt and the temperature would drop twenty degrees you would freeze your rear end off. So you put the one up there to dry, you changed socks. You always changed socks. You put them up to dry. If you could you washed them out. You always washed your shirt out if you could, your underwear, too. You just tried to keep yourself as clean as possible. If you had time you’d wash your hair. The things you could do—there was always things you could do, write letters and do all that other stuff. We didn’t find somebody—yeah, you’d find them resting. That would be fine.

LC: Sure. Oh, gosh, yeah.

GM: But not too long. If they were sleeping, leave them alone.

LC: Because I’m sure that more times than not they’re exhausted from the heat and all the action that they’d been in and so on.

GM: You’d spend most of your time—and I’m not really, I’m not speaking from a combat veteran, just in the little time that I saw and talking to a lot of my buddies, you spend most of your time doing nothing back at the place. A lot of times you’re preparing
your hooch. This is from my buddies—you’d spend most of your time, those guys were
digging deeper holes all the time.

LC: The reason for that?
GM: In case you get mortared.
LC: Right. You need some kind of bunker.
GM: Yeah, it was always good to be another inch down. Put a few more
sandbags on top.

LC: So if you can’t think of anything else, get a shovel and get going.
GM: Yeah, just do something because after a while you can get bored doing
nothing. I’d do the same thing. I’d get bored and have nothing to do. There wasn’t
anything to do but sit up for the next two or three days and you’re not going to be doing
anything. So hell, I’d just try to find some more timber laying around and I’d spend time
with my binoculars looking out around the countryside to see if I could pick up some
kind of movement. You’d see that all the time. Somewhere out in the valley out there all
of a sudden you’d seen some mortar rounds land. Somewhere somebody else saw
somebody moving. A lot of times it was just kind of a harassment fire. You’d call in
harassment fire for there to be landing, just to let them know that you were there.

LC: Now, it’s pretty clear that there was no—Happy Valley was not a free-fire
zone. You guys had to work with the civilians who were there. But was part of the
mission to try to get friendly civilians out of there? It sounds like it.

GM: Yeah.
LC: Relocating them to other villages.
GM: Yeah.
LC: Okay. But could you pretty much fire if you saw some movement? Could
you pretty much call in fire or at least let people know?
GM: Yeah, it was a free-fire zone.
LC: It was?
GM: Yeah.
LC: Okay. Let me ask if I can about—you mentioned that you had to keep
yourself clean and you had to try to stay in dry clothing as much as possible. Guys
must’ve been getting sick, though. I’m not talking about combat. I’m not talking about
injuries right now. I’m just talking about feeling sick, getting a virus, getting stung, all
the different things that could happen. Was there sick call? Did you guys have access to
treatment for that kind of stuff?
GM: You had your corpsman.
LC: What could he do for you, I don’t know, let’s say if you had a really upset
stomach or something like that?
GM: Oh, he’d have pills there for you. I know that—if you were bad enough—
the CO would leave the call up to the corpsman. So the corpsman, he’d go to the CO and
say, “This guy is sick. He needs to go back there.” Or he’d say, “He just needs two
days’ rest.”
LC: Okay, so you relied on the corpsman for that.
GM: Yeah, the corpsman, he was the doc. I’ll tell you what else he carried that I
used one time and that was—what do you call it?—pills.
LC: The malaria pills?
GM: No, no, the pills you use when your bottoms all stuffed up.
LC: Ex-Lax? That kind of stuff?
GM: Yeah, the stuff you stick up your rear end.
LC: Yeah, the suppository things?
GM: Yeah, he carried those. He had a bunch of those. He could always tell.
The new guys would come back and he’d walk around and he’d ask them, “When’s the
last time you made a number two?” They’d say, “Well, it’s been two or three days.”
“How does your bottom feel?” “You know, my bottom kinda hurts when I sit down.”
It’s because your rear end from fear tightens up. It just tightens up. So after two or three
days you’re pretty well stopped up so he’d say, “You go take one of these now and
relieve yourself.” There was a term. I forgot the term that we used for that. My memory
is so bad sometimes.
LC: You’re doing fine, Gary.
GM: There’s a term that we used when things are bad. Anyway, it’s not a good
term to use.
LC: Well, if you remember it let me know because I think it’s—I mean this is
what life was like for you guys. This is what we need to make sure is not lost. I mean
this isn’t written down anywhere. This isn’t in the documents and that’s why we’ve got
to get you to remember as much as you can about it. Let me ask another thing, if you
don’t mind, about the medical situation. Did you ever have an experience where one or
more of your guys had to be medevac’ed out?

GM: Yeah.

LC: Can you tell somebody who doesn’t know what that was like what happened
in your situation? What was the degree of—what were the circumstances under which
you had to call in a medical evacuation?

GM: Well, we had two guys that the corpsmen would tell you, “It’s Medevac
time.” He would tell you the number and then he would also tell you the seriousness of it
because the Medevac people would pick you up, but also they would need to know the
seriousness of the wounds.

LC: Right, how bad it was.

GM: Yeah, “Which ones are we going to go pick up? We’ve got two critical
over here at A and then over at another place we’ve got two guys shot in the arm and
they’re in good condition.” Well, which one?

LC: Right. They had to make a choice.

GM: Also what the enemy condition is. Is it a hot Z, an LZ (landing zone) or is it
about to be? You’d better come get him now because they’re closing in. Usually it’d be
a Huey come in and those guys would—they’d come in and you had to give them a
direction to come in from where it was safe and where they would have less chance of
being fired upon.

LC: Were you responsible for that communication, for making those decisions?

GM: Yeah. Or you’d go to your gunny or somebody that’s out in the area and
tell them which way is the best and somebody would know. Then you’d send somebody
that had done it before and you’d send them out there as they were coming in and you’d
help them land.

LC: How would you help them land?

GM: Well, like you see them at the airports, he’d put his arms out telling him to
come forward, come forward.

LC: Making sure that he’s not going to hit trees or anything.
GM: Right. Drift left or drift right. By the time he’s ready to land he’s ready to draw up left or right and then they would settle down. Then that would be it. A lot of time we would drop smoke telling them where we are and telling them what color smoke it would be. Charlie used to get real—I never had this happen, but Charlie on a lot of occasions got wise. You’d say, “Where are you?” and say, “I’m going to drop green smoke.” Charlie might be on your frequency so about that time he’d throw out green smoke. So what we learned to do was that you’d say, “I will pop smoke out to you,” and then the pilot would say, “I see your green smoke.” You’d say, “That’s affirmative.” He would identify your smoke.

LC: Rather than you telling him in advance.

GM: Right, yeah. So then he would come in and doc would have him ready. We’d put him aboard. In most cases, morphine was almost always given. That tickles me that these corpsmen would be dealing with—I remember one time a friend of mine had a picture that he kept with him all the time. The corpsman and two other guys were fixing this guy up. They were up to their chest in the creek fixing this guy up. He lived. Then they put him on an aircraft. I keep thinking you go to the doctor’s office and you get worked on. Everybody’s super clean. I think that about that and I go, “Good grief.”

LC: Here he is in the mucky river.

GM: What’s all this? I can remember a guy in a creek bed one time and they had no gloves or anything. That was it.

LC: What was his condition, this guy?

GM: This guy here?

LC: Yeah.

GM: He was shot in a limb, if I remember correctly. The other guy had fallen and broken something. I remember one time I had jumped out of a helo. They had taken us somewhere on the other side of an area and dropped us off. I jumped out. My right ankle I had sprained so many times playing ball and it’s almost gone. I had stuff on my back. It was high weeds and I jumped off and I turned my right ankle. I mean, I hurt it bad. I went to the corpsman and I said, “I’ve hurt this thing.” But at the same time you couldn’t go to the CO and say, “I’ve got a twisted ankle. I need some rest.” There’s just certain times you couldn’t do it.
LC: What happened?

GM: Well, we took the boot off and that sucker was just—you didn’t have any ice so that was gone. We finished whatever we were doing. When we had time we just propped it up and taped it up as tight as I could.

LC: But, of course, you don’t know that you could’ve broken something. You didn’t know.

GM: He didn’t think it was broken because when you’ve got broken bones you feel a sharp pain. This was just a dull pain.

LC: But anybody who’s ever done it knows it hurts pretty good.

GM: Yeah, it hurts. But then again, I don’t know. Your mind was on so many other things it wasn’t that big a deal. If you were home around the house doing something it hurts worse for some reason.

LC: Go ahead, Gary.

GM: I think this was a telling story about the Marines in that they took the last Marines—I can’t tell you—I heard it on TV and I think I heard it from one of the guys that was in it, that they were the last Marines to leave.

LC: To leave Saigon in ’75.

GM: Yeah, and being the fact that we were always the first ones in and the last ones out. The last ones out was always turning it over to the Army and leaving the way we did in that condition, they were the last ones out for the Marine Corps. They were crying.

LC: Yes, sir.

GM: They were crying in the bottom of that helicopter. They were all crying. The helicopter guys, when they got back they were terribly sad. They just wanted to be by themselves because they were Marines and this was just not what they were doing. I think that’s also—I don’t know, but I think that’s probably why General Carey might have picked up another star because he probably had the worst job of any Marine of all times.

LC: This is Gen. Richard E. Carey that we’re talking about.
GM: Yeah, the business of doing what he was doing Super Gaggled us was great and being in a firefight is terrible and all that, but you’d rather be that than be what he was having to do.

LC: Pulling out of there.

GM: Running away. We were running away.

LC: Well, thanks to you, Gary, we’ll have a chance to interview the general next month, in just a couple of weeks, in fact, for me. I’m looking forward to that. He’s had an incredible career, within which of course the actions in April 1975 in Saigon were an important element. But as you know, he had a very long and distinguished career in the Corps and is one of the most respected senior members of the Corps. That’s saying something.

GM: He wore the star.

LC: Yes, sir. Gary, let me ask you—we were talking a moment ago before we started recording about the hospital ships that were off I Corps during the time that you were there. They were taking Marine casualties and treating them. These are Navy ships, the USS Repose was one, and the USS Sanctuary. When guys who had been injured or wounded in action were medevac’ed did you have any way of finding out what happened to them or where they went?

GM: They all went to China Beach.

LC: What do you know about China Beach and what went on there?

GM: Well, China Beach was the area that was in northern I Corps. As far as I know that’s where all I Corps area wounded went to. It was a major hospital right there.

LC: Did you ever go down there?

GM: I just flew by one time. I never knew anything about it. No, I didn’t know much about it. I just knew where it was, just on the other side of Marble Mountain. I didn’t know a thing about it, no.

LC: Was it important at all in the minds of the men that you were commanding or in your own mind to know the support that was in place, the whole system of medical attention that was in place and that would be available to you guys if you did get hurt, or did you try not to think about it?

GM: No, I probably didn’t even think about it.
LC: Really?

GM: No. I imagine they thought, “If I get hurt, where am I going and how quick can I get there?” I imagine everybody told them that we can get helos in there and we can be there in ten minutes. I think they all knew that. That made them feel better.

LC: Did you have any kind of particular feelings about the Medevac helicopter pilots and crews, the guys that were flying?

GM: Sure. They were simply courageous. I was never in a situation where it was a hot LZ where they went into, but I’ve seen on these history channels where they were and these guys were—their mission was to go in regardless. My goodness, they’re just tremendous. I can’t say enough about them.

LC: Yeah, it’s pretty incredible, isn’t it?

GM: Oh, it’s unbelievable what they did. They’d be lifting off and they’re just sitting targets. To hear those rounds hitting you, I just don’t know how they did it.

LC: It’s just incredible selflessness.

GM: Oh, yeah.

LC: And courage, that’s for sure. Well, you know, it seems to me, Gary, that some of what you’ve told about your own experiences are pretty courageous stuff, too, and the men that were with you, quite remarkable. Let me ask some questions that may kind of lighten it up and maybe let us know something more about the experience. When you were out on operations, either night or daytime, were insects or snakes or animals ever part of what you came across? Do you remember anything about that?

GM: I never saw any, but I was terrified of snakes.

LC: That was from before you got there, I think.

GM: Yeah. Let me tell you.

LC: You can tell me.

GM: I was terrified of them and I’m still terrified of snakes.

LC: You and me both.

GM: I was just afraid I’d get captured and they might put one in there with me just to make me talk. God, I’d sing songs, whatever they wanted me to do. I’ll tell you a story about a buddy of mine. He lived next door to me at Camp Lejeune. He was in recon. He was a captain in recon. Those guys are pretty hardcore. They eat bushes and
everything. They’re pretty rough and they go out real far in the bush. I’ll never forget
this. I found out he was in Da Nang. So his wife told my wife. So I went over to see
him. I drove up and went inside and we talked. He says, “Gary, you’ve got to wait
outside a minute. I’ve got to talk to one of my troops. He killed a snake and shot a snake
and we were out on a recon and it killed the mission right there. You hear the gun and
you hear fire all over the place. I’ve got to nail him here.” I went outside and so he
started chewing on him and he said, “Why in the world did you shoot the snake? We’ve
been planning this mission for months. We were in North Vietnam. We had so many
we thought we could get. You put all our lives at risk by doing that when you killed the
snake. Why in the world did you kill the snake?” or, “Why in the world did you shoot
the snake?” He said, “Well, sir, because it was too close for an air strike.” I thought that
was great. My kind of guy.

LC: Yeah, I can relate.

GM: My kind of guy.

LC: I can relate to that. What about insects and that kind of stuff, leeches and all
the rest? Did you guys have to deal with that up where you were?

GM: Not much. Where I was at we didn’t have all that kind of crud. I mean we
had insects and stuff like that, but the leeches were generally up where the mountains
were and so forth. I saw a few, but I didn’t deal with that. It was just the bugs. I just
couldn’t get used to the—I just didn’t like anything touching me. Of course, we wouldn’t
let the guys really go around with their shirt off. For one reason so they wouldn’t get
bitten. Also, their clothes, lay your shirt arms out and leave the shirts long because
especially if they’re wet, during the day that acts as an insulator as opposed to leaving
your arms out naked because there’s the direct rays from the sun and nothing protecting
them. But if you leave the shirts on all the time you’ve got an insulator there.

LC: Right. You’re not going to get so many cases of heat—

GM: Bugs and sunburns, too. It’s an insulator.

LC: What, if you had to say, was the most useful piece of the uniform or the
equipment that you had? I know everybody tended to try to customize what was issued
to them so it worked best for them. What worked best for you? Did you have a certain
way of carrying your stuff?
GM: This is the—you just ran into something I really love.

LC: Okay. That’s fine.

GM: I wrote and had them send me—and I got a bunch of them. The company sent me a bunch of them—were these little things that you scrub your head with. It’s got a little nipple on one end and on the other end it’s got a whole bunch of little things sticking out. You’ll put your hand around it and you scrub your head, plastic. You don’t have to use your fingers. Basically it just feels so good to massage your head with that thing.

LC: You wrote back home and got one?

GM: Yeah, “Send me one.” They’d send me one and then all the guys wanted it.

LC: I’ll bet they did.

GM: They all wanted it. We’d all be sitting up there just massaging our head with it. We’d wash our head all the time. The colonel couldn’t figure out what the hell we were doing. We just enjoyed it.

LC: It feels good.

GM: It feels good. We’d wash our head three times a day. That just felt so good.

LC: Well, actually that’s not too hard to imagine because I’m thinking of all the stress and you know those muscles up around your neck and all and the top of your head just tight as they could be, I’m sure.

GM: It wasn’t unusual to find buddies sitting by their buddies rubbing their necks. The packs we had aren’t like today. They were packs that literally weighed on your shoulders. It put all the weight on your shoulders. They hurt.

LC: What did you have to have with you in the packs, just for somebody who wouldn’t be familiar with the basic equipment you would not leave on a patrol without? What would you take?

GM: I’d always carry an extra weapon. I’d always carry an extra small-arms weapon.

LC: Making for a total of how many weapons that you would have?

GM: I’d have a .45 in there and I’d have another .45 on my side. Then I carried that M-16 with me. I’d always carry—oh, what did I carry? It’s been a long time.

LC: I know it.
GM: I didn’t carry much on patrols because see you didn’t—

LC: What about food?

GM: Yeah, we’d carry food. I’d carry generally for two meals. I always carried an extra canteen of water. I would carry my blade on the side. I’d carry a small pocketknife, kind of a Swiss pocketknife for everything.

LC: Right. What about a shovel?

GM: No.

LC: Pretty much not?

GM: No, I didn’t carry that. I carried extra morphine, an extra roll of—what do you call that—body wrap in case I had to turn into a corpsman.

LC: You mean like a gauze kind of thing?

GM: Yeah, in case the corpsman couldn’t get there and the guy was sitting next to me, hurting.

LC: Like a pressure bandage?

GM: Yeah, I would do that and I had the morphine right there.

LC: So you had some of that to carry around.

GM: Yeah, because I was trained to do that. Let’s see. Towel—I had an extra towel in there because I needed something to wipe my face because I wanted my face dry for some reason. If I wanted to do something, like talk on the radio or something I wanted my face dry.

LC: So you had a towel?

GM: I had an extra map for radio calls. It was mostly equipment that I used.

LC: What about ammunition? How much would you have?

GM: I had that around me.

LC: So on a bandolier kind of thing?

GM: Yeah. But see, I wasn’t really supposed to get into that.

LC: Right, you’re commanding.

GM: Yeah, I’m supposed to figure out what we’re going to do. I’m supposed to find out where to go. They know that’s what I’m supposed to do. If they see you firing back there they know we’re in deep trouble.
LC: But you, of course, wouldn’t want to be without the ability to defend
yourself.

GM: Oh, no. If I see them coming up I want to be able to do it. I can’t
remember what else I carried. I carried as little as I could because I wanted to be able to
move. The more you put up there and you lay down the more they can see, the bigger the
pack.

LC: That’s true. The bigger the profile as you’re moving through.

GM: Yeah. You see these guys today over there. Geez. That’s a huge pack
they’ve got on their back.

LC: Yeah, and it weighs a lot, too, as I’ve heard.

GM: Yeah. Oh, and probably about three pairs of socks and powder. I carried
talcum powder, too.

LC: Now, most people might not get why that would be a high priority item. Can
you explain?

GM: Well, it was always—sweat and humidity can do a number on your feet real
quick. They’d get infected or you’d get blisters, which you can get with water in there
rubbing against the shoe or whatever. If you get blisters you’re going to be in trouble so
you always used dry socks and made sure the feet are always dry and clean. Always try
to wash them because you’re putting—I forgot what the square foot of weight that you’re
putting on your feet. It’s a lot.

LC: The pressure per square inch, yeah.

GM: I forgot the amount.

LC: It’s huge.

GM: Yeah, per inch of your feet.

LC: It’s huge.

GM: You’ve got to take care of your feet because there’s nothing else to walk on
unless you turn into a monkey and walk on your hands or something. So you better
protect those suckers. So you keep them dry.

LC: Did you try to reinforce this with your guys or was it not necessary?

GM: No, these guys, they had been through infantry school and they were
already grunts. They already knew. They were in the know. Again, I don’t know about
the Army, but these guys—there was a guy who came back, a reporter with Channel
Eight who came back from Iraq. He’d been with the Army and he’d been with the
Marines. He said, “I can’t tell you how well-trained the Marines are. When they pull up
to a site to set up camp or to prepare to go into battle nobody says anything. Everybody
just does what they need to do.” In camp, shoes come off, socks come off, people start
cleaning their rifles. He says, “In the Army I see them lay down their rifles on the
ground. You don’t ever see a Marine lay a rifle on the ground. That’s automatic dirt.
They’ll sit down and talk or whatever, but these guys they’re doing things. They’re
trained. They’re setting up their machine guns to cover certain areas for crossfire. They
just automatically go in and do it.”

LC: That’s very telling.

GM: Yes, it is. He said, “Also it’s sad that the Marines never have any
equipment.” He said he rode in a convoy of Army trucks. Every truck had a radio, about
fifteen or twenty trucks. He got out to the Marines and only the front truck and the last
truck had radios. What did they decided to do? They just sent everybody in trucks to do
what they were going to do. They told them where they were going, but they didn’t have
any radios in between.

LC: You know, that makes me think about your mention earlier of calling in for
Medevac support and the fact that the VC were monitoring the radio channels, at least for
Medevac on occasion or you thought they were. You had to be prepared for the fact that
they might be. Did you think that that was true for most communications?

GM: I think if I could point out the biggest error military-wise looking back on
our part that we screwed up the most on was not having good communications security.
We just got on there and talked. We didn’t use codes. We didn’t tell anything. You say,
“Well, these guys are just Vietnamese and Viet Cong and they don’t know.” Well, I’ll
tell you what. When I had my business here and we did plaques for the school for their
end-of-year awards, about eight out of ten were Vietnamese.

LC: The names of the students?

GM: Yeah. The top kids in the school were Vietnamese.

LC: Sure.
GM: So we did one of the worst things you could do is we underestimated the enemy, first of all. Every time, especially around Marble Mountain, when somebody called in for something they had—years later under Marble Mountain they found a huge cavern there where the North Vietnamese or Charlie had been there all along. On Marble Mountain there was an entire Marine squadron, maybe two squadrons of helicopters that would lift out of there. Boy, when they got lifted out of there they knew where they were going, where they were going to land, where the firefight was and when they got there they wouldn’t be there. They’d be gone.

LC: Because communication security was—

GM: They heard us. Or in some cases if they knew they’d be waiting and sitting up there and they’d go in there and they’d get blown away. So our security, not using right codes and secrecy of what we were doing was terrible and we underestimated the enemy and they were smart. They were smart.

LC: Where do you think that underestimating them came from?


LC: Just because they were Asian, Americans thought—

GM: Yeah, we did it with Japan. You look at little bitty Vietnamese guys.

“These guys aren’t smarter than monkeys.” Well, we found out wrong and when I was doing those plaques I go, “Holy cow. These people are smart. They don’t even speak our language and they win eight out of ten categories.” So we underestimated the enemy and they were listening to everything we said and they took appropriate action. That was our biggest screw-up. I mean major operations, they’re waiting on us. It’s like we broke the Japanese code in Europe, I mean in World War II.

LC: Right. Except this time we were the ones who got it done to us?

GM: Yeah. How many times did you hear them say they were flying there and there was nobody there? We’d fly in there and let out hundreds of troops and march them northeast and there was nobody there. It was using the old military philosophy, “We fight on our grounds,” so they would pick their own grounds to fight.

LC: Did you experience or observe or hear about the distinctions and capabilities between Viet Cong and NVA (North Vietnamese Army)?
GM: I didn’t see it. I really didn’t see it or know it. I had heard that the North Vietnamese were much well better prepared and organized. I assume that meant they had radios, the backup mortars and artillery and tanks, whereas the VC just operated alone.

So I’m sure that’s what they meant. You know, the NVA, the North Vietnamese, hand an entire regiment came down to Hue during the Tet Offensive and took Hue. I can’t remember where I heard it, but that General Giap, kind of Westmoreland’s counterpart, that regiment came down there to take care of them. They were going to come down and kick the Marines’ ass down there at Hue. They did, but they only walked away with four people, four or five people at Hue. They didn’t have anybody else left.

LC: Where were you exactly, if you remember, during the Tet Offensive? You were in the area.

GM: Out there where I just told you.

LC: At Hue?

GM: No, I just told you that story because they were there. I was listening a lot to what was going on up at Khe Sanh. When I went over there it seemed like most of my Basic School class ended up in that area. We all ended up at the Tet Offensive. When I go to the reunion just about all of us were in that.

LC: You were all up in I Corps and all up in that—

GM: Yeah, we were all in I Corps and we all ended up in there at the time of the Tet Offensive. You go in there and take roll and almost all of us were there during that time. It’s just strange that a lot of those guys were up in the Khe Sanh area.

LC: What do you remember hearing, Gary, about the battle that was going on at Khe Sanh? Of course, it went on for quite a long time.

GM: Well, where I was—you could always tell the guys from Khe Sanh when they were coming down.

LC: How could you tell?

GM: They were all brown. Everything on them was brown.

LC: From the mud, you mean?

GM: No, just from the dust up there. They were all brown. You’d just go over there and ask them, “How is everything up there?” They’d say, “We’re holding. We’re going to hold.” You just did that. That was my feeling. They were heavily surrounded
and there was fighting going on, but I don’t think there was any doubt in my mind they
wouldn’t hold it because I knew also we had tremendous air support going on up there. I
found out later, and you can talk to General Carey about this, I don’t know for sure, but I
understand they had—the Marines up there were just hoping they would come out
because it would’ve been—well, you had these final lines of fire support in which you
crisscross your lines of your fire. You’d have them stacked differently all the way across
this line in which you’ve just got waves of fire going across this open area.

LC: Meaning artillery?

GM: No, machine guns. Those guys were just hoping they would come out from
the mountains and come down and come through that no-man’s land because there would
have been a slaughter. Also General Carey, I understand they had aircraft just stacked,
waiting to come down on top of them if they came out one after another. They were
ready to come in.

LC: Right. Aircraft up above, in tiers. Yeah, this is something that I do want to
ask General Carey about.

GM: I understand also they knew the battle was over and the battle was over long
before the Army got there because the Marines were already starting to march out of the
hills was when the rats left.

LC: When the rats left?

GM: Yep. The guy told me that. He said, “We knew it was over when the rats
left. They’d gone out into the hills. There are better meals out there instead of here.” So
they left. “Where’d they go?”

LC: Because they could get out to the hills because the NVA had withdrawn
especially.

GM: Well, there was better food products out there, to be raw about the thing.

There was people laying around out there. Here there’s live people so they went up there.

LC: While that was going on were you able to get information about what was
happening up there other than from individuals?

GM: Hearsay.

LC: Okay, scuttlebutt and stuff.

GM: Yep, scuttlebutt.
LC: What was your main source of information about what was going on in the U.S. during this time? Did you see *Stars and Stripes*?

GM: No, I’d just hear it from guys.

LC: Really?

GM: Yeah, scuttlebutt.

LC: Did you have any idea, Gary, how big the anti-war movement was becoming during this time and after Tet back in the States?

GM: No, because when I came home I went to Camp Lejune. I spent six months back there. You knew it was going on, but you just—

LC: You weren’t really seeing it up close.

GM: You wouldn’t see it. Then when I came home in Irving, Texas, there was nothing going on there. Then when I got to Denton I didn’t see it at first, but then that’s when things started to grow and then I realized just how big it was.

LC: Sometime in the early ’70s.

GM: I just realized we would read magazines if we could get three or four guys get together and we’d sometimes—somehow we’d get these magazines, *Life* and *Time* and *New York Times*, which was generally the worst. We’d pick out an article and we’d read them. We’d pick out one that was the most misquoted. We’d each pick out one to read and then we’d vote to see who had the worst misquoted or was just simply a lie or didn’t finish telling the truth. Then we’d read one that was the best propaganda for the NVA that looked like it was written for the NVA. Those were hard to pick winners because they all were. If you were going to write something for the NVA, which one of these would you pick? They all looked that way. I found an old paper that I ordered when I was in business. I found one that was written about the Marines when they came out of the battle up at—oh, I can’t think of the river—the Chosin Reservoir with the Marines at the layout. I found a copy of the *New York Times*. You ought to read that thing. It is glowing about the Marines. I mean the way they wrote about the Marines coming out of there, it was just—you go, “Wow.” They gave praise and told about how they looked and it was wonderful. If you gave that to the *New York Times*, boy, they’d laugh like crazy.
LC: Well, I hope that when you and I continue the interview tomorrow we can
talk a little bit more about media and the media’s treatment of the Vietnam conflict and
that you’ll share some additional observations because I think it’s important that we get
those.

GM: That’s very important.

LC: Let me ask you about your own—again, during your time in Vietnam—your
down time. You’ve talked about how busy Marines kept themselves with maintenance
and hygiene and cleaning their rifles and so on. All that’s important. Was there music
around? Did you guys listen to music?

GM: Oh, yeah. Just about every one of those guys, in their backpack they had a
carry-on radio. Everybody had their own radio.

LC: So everybody was kind of—

GM: Everybody was tuned in, but the only thing you’d get was Stars and Stripes.
A lot of guys got tapes. They played—it ranged from country-western to rock, whatever.

LC: What about mail from home? Did you get much mail?

GM: I’ll tell you something funny. Dad told me that we decided—I told him
when I got the mail from him. He said he got mail faster to me than he could get mail
sent to Grand Prairie. Yeah.

LC: I believe it, actually.

GM: It took four days to get to Grand Prairie and it took three days to get to me.

LC: Was your dad a faithful correspondent?

GM: Oh, yeah.

LC: Did he write a lot?

GM: Yeah, they all did. Everybody did.

LC: How important was it to your guys and to yourself, Gary, to have that
connection?

GM: Oh, my God, it’s like any war, like anywhere. The hard ones were—there
were guys that were single that lost their girlfriends to somebody. Those were the ones
that were hard.

LC: Did you ever know of any guys who basically just couldn’t handle that
news?
GM: One. I heard about it and you didn’t want to talk to him because that’s what
your gunny is for or your NCOs are for. In the military, that’s why you have your
sergeant majors. The sergeant majors and your master sergeants who are running it.
They’re the mother of the platoon. You’re kind of the father. You do all those logistics
and you do—

LC: You do some discipline on them when they need it.

GM: Yeah, or you’re making plans for this or that. You’re running a business,
you stay out the business of the enlisted. That’s what your sergeant major does. He’ll
come to you when he says, “I think it’s time we need to move him to another platoon or
we need to move him out.” It doesn’t look good for an officer to bring him in just to
make him feel better. That’s not good. That’s not what you’re for.

LC: Interesting.

GM: Yeah, that’s not your job.

LC: So you had your master sergeant and other sergeants to kind of monitor
the—

GM: You only do it if the sergeant major or the staff sergeant says, “Sir, I wish
you’d talk to him. He’s the one to talk to and if it doesn’t work then I think we need to
transfer him out.” You’d bring him in and it’s kind of uncomfortable to have a captain
talking to a corporal about his personal business. All you need to do is say, “I know
you’ve got a problem,” and you don’t want to get in there and listen to the problem.
“You need to get squared away here because other guys are depending on you.” You do
the typical Marine Corps bit.

LC: Right. Just get on with your job.

GM: Right. “We’ve got to depend on you. You’re part of us. If you can’t do it
then we’re going to have to make some moves.”

LC: Was there ever a time when, for whatever reason, you had to relocate one of
the men out of a squad or out of a platoon for whatever reason, personal or otherwise?

GM: Not for that. The only time we ran somebody off was because some guy
was completely incompetent doing his job or drugs, but you really didn’t want to run a
buddy off. The buddies—guys are tight. Guys are tight.
LC: Yeah, and that’s part of the point, right? In the paperwork that you sent in, Gary, there was one mention that I think listeners might be interested in in the future and that has to do with a note you made about a time that you suspected some of the Vietnamese civilians who were around were probably VC. Can you tell me anything about that, that their sympathies were with the VC? I think you mentioned a barber.

GM: Oh, yeah. During the Tet Offensive, back where I was staying in Da Nang, I had been told—I’ll tell you what. I was down there the first night that the Tet Offensive kicked off. It was three o’clock in the morning and I was called over by this colonel. He sent me over there with a bunch of cooks and bottle washers and all this. They’re all Marines—and that was a great story, too. I’ve got to tell you that. I went over there to his quarters. As I turned the corner I saw these, I don’t know, probably about two to three platoon sizes of Marines over there lined up. I didn’t know what they were for and then I turned the corner to go into his place and there’s another bunch of Marines over there lined up. He said, “I want you to take these Marines out there and go over to the river just north of the bridge and set up a blocking position. The 1st Marine Division elements are pushing some VC into the river. You’re to take them as they come across.” We were to set up and the guys would come across. I said, “Well, there’s two groups up there. Which one do you want?” He said, “Take your pick of either one you want.” I said, “I don’t understand.” He said, “Well, when we call for volunteers we have so many of them we had to form two organizations. So take your pick.” He says, “By the way, don’t issue any ammo until you get one unit out of sight.” “Yes, sir. We’ll kill each other to death out here.” I thought it was funny, “Don’t issue any ammo.” It also showed you just how eager these kids were. If they were working the mailroom and all that stuff, shit, they wanted to be worth something. They wanted to fight. I thought that was—then when I got home and I saw the other garbage and I think about those kids that were volunteering to go do that it just added to my problems. They just wanted it. My God, they wanted to do it. Back in the town when I was in the Da Nang area we had a lot of fights. There were a lot of fights because kids wanted to go out and they joined the Marine Corps to fight.

LC: They were ready to rumble.

GM: Yeah. They just got bored. They were on edge and they got ticked off.
LC: Yeah, I believe it.

GM: We never took disciplinary action against anybody. What are you going to do, send them to Nam? So we just usually put them in another unit and moved them around.

LC: Well, I had asked you about the barber. What did you find out about him?

GM: We were over there and took care of the situation. As we’re going through the dead and so forth, one of them was a barber and I recognized him.

LC: You’re going through the VC dead bodies?

GM: Yeah, looking for papers and all this kind of stuff. One of them was a barber.

LC: No kidding. How did that make you feel?

GM: That gave me a scare. Then two other guys they found were cooks in the O-club. Then we picked up a couple of mamasans. One recognized them for the ones that were cleaning the hooches in another area.

LC: Now were they dead?

GM: Oh, yeah. Then we went back and somebody said—we had these hooches with two doors on either end. Then we had a shelter outside, or bunkers. You could really—if you wanted to all you had to do is open up a door and roll a grenade through this.

LC: That didn’t actually happen.

GM: No.

LC: But it was possible.

GM: Somebody could do it. What we did was we took a broom handle and put it through the doors so nobody could open the door. That’s all we need was some mamasan rolled through there and roll a grenade through there. They came out. They rose up and came out, but they got nailed.

LC: Yeah, the VC’s losses obviously were very heavy. Could you see any change after the Tet Offensive in terms of how much enemy activity there was, say, in the Happy Valley area?

GM: Yeah. We kept going out farther and farther and farther and nobody was there.
LC: They were all gone.

GM: Yeah, we just kept going out and kept going out. We had to go farther, but then somebody was going to have to come get us. They would have to get a helo to come get us. We didn’t want to go out that far.

LC: Well, Gary, at some point here you got promoted to captain, is that right?

GM: Yeah.

LC: Now, did that come about—I know you’re a modest guy, but did that come about because of incidents that you had been involved with in part or was it just your time in the progression?

GM: Well, you have so many slots in each position open in the Marine Corps. Let’s say you’ve got five hundred first lieutenants open. The Marine Corps tries to fill them as best they can. Say you’ve got five hundred in wartime. In peacetime it may be a hundred. So promotions are slow. In wartime you have so many people get killed so you’ve got more promotions. So basically there were more slots open and the Marine Corps filled them quicker. So I got it picked up quicker. I went through my first lieutenant bars in about a month. The lieutenants were just getting nailed. They really just—it was sad. If you were one of those lieutenants you just didn’t hardly last. First lieutenants were tremendously open. So if you were a first lieutenant and there was an opening you got made a first lieutenant. Like I say, technically I wore my first lieutenant bars about a month before I made it to captain. Now that’s a sad story for both the Marine Corps and me and for other guys. I’m just lucky I didn’t get myself in a situation to be—that’s a major hop as far as responsibility’s concerned.

LC: Yes, sir. It is.

GM: It’s going from a platoon level up to probably a battalion level and there you’re talking about completely different tactics, support, and the whole nine yards.

LC: Did you have to move into those responsibilities right away?

GM: No. I still went out there and did my bit out there as the platoon leader.

LC: Did your guys treat you any differently?

GM: Nope. If they had put me into a battalion-level position I would’ve probably embarrassed myself because I didn’t know what I would be doing. At the same time I would’ve been hurting the Marine Corps because I couldn’t have done the job the
way it should’ve been done. But that’s kind of the way it was. I kept saying, “Good
God, I hope they don’t put me in this captain’s responsibility because that’s a major
jump.”

LC: Yeah, it is. It stands out right away on your DD214. I just wondered what
the circumstances were and they’re very sad circumstances, as you noticed.

GM: Yeah.

LC: Yeah, it’s a sad thing that’s often said that the life expectancy of a lieutenant
in the Marine Corps, especially during this time period, ’67, ’68, was just very few days
in-country. Not very long.

GM: Really? Is that what you read?

LC: Yes, I’ve seen that.

GM: Days?

LC: Yeah, a couple months, actually, I think. Not necessarily that they were
killed, but they were wounded such that they weren’t able to return to the field right
away. Yeah.

GM: Well, just about everybody I’ve talked to in my basic class who were in
another billet got transferred over to the Tet Offensive. Artillery, or whatever, they got
transferred over. The infantry officers were doing infantry work.

LC: Yeah. Also where the Marine Corps was during the Tet Offensive was
clearly the hotbed of larger operations that involved the NVA, not just the VC, up in
Quang Tri and all around there. So it’s a real tough area, a real tough area. Gary, let’s
take a break there.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing the oral history interview with Lt. Col. John Morris. Today’s date is the first of September 2005. I’m in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech. Gary is speaking to me by telephone from his home in Texas. Good morning, Gary.

Gary Morris: Good morning.

LC: Thanks again for your time. Gary, yesterday we were talking about problems in the field, particularly medical and kind of day-to-day health problems. I wonder can you clarify the term that we were talking about yesterday?

GM: Yeah, this term is called the “pucker factor,” which refers basically to your bottom when it gets real tight. Most people in the civilian world don’t really experience it unless they’ve been in a long-term situation where they’ve been scared. Then they really don’t realize it maybe until later. But when you’re scared your bottom tightens up. Then after a while you sit down and actually your bottom hurts where you use the bathroom because it’s just a natural tendency to tighten there. It goes back probably to the beginning of time. I don’t know. I’m sure in modern times maybe in the Civil War or whatever, but at least in Vietnam we used the term “the pucker factor is up for the night.” What’s it going to be like tonight? Well, there’s a good chance we’re going to be mortared or shelled or we’re going to be hit. This was everywhere and that meant the pucker factor was going to be up tonight which means it’s going to be a bad night.

LC: You’re going to be scared.

GM: Yeah, you’re going to be scared. That was a common term used. One of the ways you treated that was the use of—what did you call it?

LC: Well, suppositories was what I said yesterday.

GM: That was generally the best way to do it. In some light cases you’d drink some milk of magnesia or whatever or something to make you go to the bathroom. Just milk of magnesia but the corpsmen didn’t like to carry that around because it was in a
bottle. A lot of guys didn’t know how to use it. Some of them even put it in their mouth and took it. They’d been in the country or the city and—

LC: Never had it before.

GM: They’d kind of get embarrassed to walk off with it. They’d come back and find out, “Did you use it?” “Yeah, but it tasted terrible.” He’d say, “You’re not supposed to take it, pal.” He’d have to explain to them what they’re supposed to do it with it. Of course, everybody’d get a big chuckle out of it. That happened to the guys that were green coming over. That was even for the officers. Even second lieutenants were coming over and the corpsmen would always tell them, “Hey listen, be sure put this in the right place and don’t put it in your mouth.” That’s what that meant.

LC: Okay. It’s helpful to have those terms clarified, too, so we know what that means. Let me ask you a little bit, speaking about times when it was quite reasonable to be scared, Gary. About the weapons—what enemy weapons were the most frightful?

Which ones did you guys most wish didn’t exist?

GM: Well, I guess anything that had to do with an ambush. That’s the thing, I would not have wanted to use that. I was terrified of ambushes, whatever they used in an ambush. Of course, the first weapon they used was generally a booby trap, which got your first guy. You were always terrified of that. It was the same thing we would use. What we used on an ambush would generally be a machinegun or toss out a couple of grenades, but quite frankly the things that just drove me nuts was mortars. They don’t make any sound when they come down and they just explode. Other artillery you can kind of hear coming over and whatever. These suckers just explode and it’s very unnerving.

LC: Just out of nowhere?

GM: Out of nowhere it just “boom” and you don’t know when the next one’s going to boom. That’s the one I guess that bothered me the most. The other troopers, I don’t know. I never did take that. I know that the North Vietnamese, and I can understand this, the thing that they were most terrified of were B-52s because they could be walking along and they would not even hear the explosion. They wouldn’t hear the thing coming down. They didn’t have that whistling sound like you hear of with the Germans. They made those things to whistle for terror factors. But these things would
come down and they would explode in the air and in cases they were so big and powerful
that they’d basically just evaporate people up front. So they’d be walking along and all
of a sudden people up front would just evaporate in the hot air. They were terrified of
those. That was their problem. I guess the mortars were the things that scared me the
most.

LC: Even more than booby traps and stuff along the trailside?

GM: Oh, yeah, you’re right there. Bouncing Betties terrified me in that you
stepped on one and when you released it, it would pop up. It would pop up to about your
waist so it not only got the guy that walked on it, but it would get the guy behind you and
it got you in your private parts. Guys were terrified of that part. Frankly, I was more
concerned about being blinded. I just could not imagine being—to lose a male part, fine.
I just don’t want to be blinded. Just shoot me. I don’t remember anybody being blinded,
but—

LC: Why did you have such a fear of that, Gary, do you know? Where did that
come from?

GM: I don’t know. I just could not believe living in a world of blackness and
what a terrible, terrible—I guess maybe seeing guys in World War I and films of those
guys or maybe seeing somebody in the real world walking along with a cane and a stick
and seeing how people treated them. They were treated terribly. Even today they’re
treated with such terrible disrespect. People don’t talk to them. They just kind of give
them away. I’ve seen one in our church. He’s not invited to anything and people just
feel uncomfortable around them and they get treated terribly. They don’t know how to
deal with them, as opposed to somebody who’s lost an arm or a leg or something like
that. They’re treated as badly as I was treated when I had my emotional problems from
post-traumatic. People just didn’t want anything to do with me.

LC: You’re just ostracized in some way?

GM: Yeah. I also didn’t want to be felt sorry for.

LC: Yeah, that’s the other thing that operates. Gary, you mentioned yesterday
when we were talking that your squad was involved in, I think, an ambush at night and
that there was a lot of confusion. It seemed kind of out of control, the events that night,
and that a couple of men in your unit were killed. Do you remember that?
GM: Mm-hmm.

LC: Were those guys killed by these ambush weapons or weapons that were left by—?

GM: They were killed immediately.

LC: By what? Can you say?

GM: Well, we were coming out of a helicopter is what happened. It was a hot LZ and I jumped out. I remember I had turned my ankle. That was when I was telling you I turned my ankle. Two guys behind me, the radioman and the guy behind me both got hit with live fire.

LC: Right away?

GM: Yeah. I remember the drag on my—I didn’t have the radio. I just remember he was there and then he wasn’t there. The guy—there was immediate fire, which was good. The bad thing is I got to know my radioman pretty good and that hurts.

LC: Gary, just as part of the record and to honor his service, can you give his name?

GM: No. He was a corporal. One was a corporal and one was a lance corporal. I don’t want to give their names.

LC: Okay. I understand. Let me ask about the Americans’ weapons. What was most effective? What were you glad that you had or that was available and being used? Was it the M-16 or was it artillery? What were you most relieved to have around when you were out on patrols?

GM: Hmm. Well, I guess everything was all right. There was nothing really great. The M-16 was great when you had it working and so forth. The grenades were all right. I guess the best way I can answer it is I look back now and see what these guys have got today and go, “Oh my God, I wish we had that.” But I don’t know. I guess the thing I most trusted were probably mortars and artillery for immediate support when I needed it. All the other stuff was just basically standard stuff. If we all had machineguns that would be great because you can put out such a volume of fire. I guess that was the most important weapon we had.

LC: Did you trust the M-16 or did you have troubles with it or your guys have troubles?
GM: No, you always had this fear in your mind. I don’t remember having that much trouble, but the guys were always terrified and that’s why we always cleaned weapons. You heard stories and so forth and they got things fixed. The M-14 was nothing more than a rifle that fired off a few rounds. That thing was just not—against the AK what they had it was just nothing. We were outgunned.

LC: Outgunned.

GM: But I think I always felt comfortable in that when you went on patrol you always kept locked-in with your fire direction control, your FDC, and you radioed in. By the way, I didn’t mention, but you always took very frequent water breaks because of the humidity and whatever and also when you did you kept very quiet and it gave you a chance to listen to what was out there. So anyway, knowing that somebody was tracking you back there everywhere you went, every time you called in somebody you really were adjusting your weapons as you went. In other words, you went from location A and you went halfway to location B. You reported in halfway. In some cases the weapons would be moved to in their sites to location B and sometimes they wouldn’t. In most cases they’d move there with you. So if you called in a fire strike when you wanted to adjust fire they could adjust fire from there. You’d say, “I need some rounds two hundred meters from my point two hundred meters east of me.” They would just make adjustments. They would always fire one round first to see where it landed. Then once they got where you wanted you’d say, “Move right or move left,” and then you’d say, “Fire for effect,” which means the other three guns, or whatever they had, mortars, who were tracking identically with that one and then would fire for effect.

LC: And that means let it loose. Let go.

GM: Yeah, but the one I really distrusted the least, and the guys on the air wing side are going to get mad at me, but I can’t say this. There are different types. I was always terrified of calling an air strike because it’s harder to pinpoint dropping a bomb. You never really wanted to drop a bomb unless there was larger numbers. If you just get small arm fire you’re not going to call in an air strike. You’d call in the smaller stuff. You’d go to artillery for larger. Mortars were used for reverse kill operations. In other words, you were going along in a location and you were getting mortared. You’d look on your map and you could determine that the fire was coming from the reverse side of a
hill. Your artillery wasn’t really good because it fired more horizontally. If it hit it was
going to generally hit on your side of the hill. You need something that would go up and
over that would land on the other side. So you’d use mortars for that, you see. If you had
an area and they were on this side of the hill and you needed direct fire then you’d use the
artillery. It just depended on what the situation was and if there were pockets of these
people and they were really dug in. You needed napalm or something like that or five
hundred pounders you’d move back and then you’d call those guys in.

LC: You’d call the location in for a strike.
GM: You’d call the air guys in and boy I tell you, you loved them.
LC: I’ll bet.
GM: You wouldn’t call them in too close. I saw on the History Channel one
night that they called it in. I never thought about this but there was an Army group and
they were in the high-tree area with lots of trees. They were having trouble getting these
guys dug out. But what they forgot was they called the air over the top of them. So when
they dropped the bombs they hit the trees and detonated before they even got to the target
and killed a lot of friendlies. I said, “God, I never thought about that. I don’t remember
anybody teaching that in class.” So they called it off immediately because it just
happened. Somebody didn’t know or somebody forgot or somebody called it in from the
wrong direction or somebody screwed up. This is something else I want to say. People
say, “What were you scared of most? Booby traps or whatever?” I think I can say in
reality that most any person in command, I would say from a sergeant who had a squad of
folks all the way up to a three-star general who was in the field or even a four-star—
Schwarzkopf for God’s sakes—was terrified. Let’s talk about people in the field. It’s not
so much as them being hurt or killed. I didn’t want to be blinded, I’ll tell you that. I was
terrified of that. I didn’t want to be crippled, I knew that. But above all that I didn’t want
to be the person that did like the tree thing, that did a screw-up and caused people to lose
their lives. Or march them into an ambush that I knew better. For example, if I was
stupid enough to march people down a trail. That’s a court-martial offense then. If you
march people down a trail and somebody found out about it you could be court-martialed
for it because the VC knew the Americans were slack enough to go the easy route. I’m
not going to talk about them. I’m going to talk about the Marines. Dikes, we didn’t have
any dikes down south. That was (unintelligible) location. You just didn’t walk along the trail. Even in the bush you didn’t go down through the bush the same way twice because they knew where you walked. That night they would do it.

LC: They would do it, meaning they would put something there.

GM: Right. You were terrified that you might be walking that same area maybe once too often. Maybe the second time in three weeks, I might’ve marched this area too much. Or you might have called in an air strike or you might have made a wrong command and brought in a reserve element somewhere and you’re a screw-up. You’re a screw-up and you caused people their lives. That was a terrible fear, a terrible fear. I admire—nobody ever thinks about this, nobody, but I admire guys like General Carey and Schwarzkopf and people. I had to worry about thirty-six guys and their families and their girlfriends and their loved ones. I was responsible for those. Now walk that sucker up to a captain or a major who’s lining out that operation on a table and putting out on a battalion level, “This is what we’re going to do,” and he’s got to go to bed that night and say, “Dear God, please help me make sure that I’m not walking into a regimental ambush from the North Vietnamese.” You can walk that sucker on up, just all the way up until you get to a lieutenant colonel and a colonel who’s working out the plan for a large program, say at Khe Sanh and stuff like that. Look at General Carey. He had to work out that Super Gaggle and worry about the tremendous risk of planes running into each other. Don’t tell me he didn’t worry about that.


GM: Walk it on up. Then you look at Schwarzkopf who had, there’s the possibility of thousands of guys and hundreds of thousands of parents depended on him. He talks a little about that, about how it was to sleep at night worrying about that. You have to be inhuman. I think one of the things that upset me the most is there was a show called *M*A*S*H*.

LC: The television program?

GM: Yeah. They always made fun of the brass, from colonels and especially generals. They always showed generals with a cigar in their mouth. There was always one of these guys out of the hospitals up on the front line and they always wanted booze
and they always wanted the women. They just made them look like buffoons. I wrote them. I said, “This is not the way it is and I’m mad because you make them look like that. They had to make terrible decisions, and making people’s lives. Please make them look good.” I remember here in Irving, when they had their last show, I remember, I don’t know where you were, but one time when they had that last show there were a lot of parties going around and they had one here.

LC: Yes, I remember.

GM: They called me and said, “How about calling the Marines and see if we can’t get some props and stuff up here?” I said, “I’m not calling the Marines. I don’t want anything to do with that.” They got mad at me. “What’s with you? Why won’t you do that?” I said, “Because I don’t like the way they show the generals.” I was at the chamber board meeting and that was the one that was going to do it. Of course, I was glad I had the opportunity to tell them. But you know those people looked at me like they hadn’t had a clue. They just didn’t understand. It was like I was talking in one ear and out the other ear. I can just bet that when the meeting was over they walked outside and said, “I think that guy, he didn’t know what the hell he—what’s he talking about?”

LC: “What’s wrong with him?”

GM: “What? The generals were what?” They really believed more what was on TV and you could almost hear them say, “I saw this episode where they showed this general.” They believed the TV show more than they did me. It was like me talking—the same old thing about the press. The TV was more powerful than me. So I could tell by the way I talked and the response I got because I do remember this. They said, “Well, do you know anybody else that we could call?” I said, “No.” That’s what told me that they didn’t hear a word I said.

LC: Well, you were trying to make the point and really if you think about it, other than very famous generals for whom things typically went pretty well, even though they were taking huge risks, like General Eisenhower comes to mind, General Bradley, pretty much nobody stands up for, General Marshall, pretty much nobody stands up for the generals who have to make these decisions, which are, as you say, extremely difficult. That’s an interesting point.
GM: But on the side there are people who should have never been in command, who should have been relieved right off the bat. I think of people like—well, I think MacArthur in Korea, he was lucky when he landed there. He was just pure lucky. The way he conducted the war going up north, sending one division of Army people on one side of a mountain and another division of Marines on the other side of a mountain in the dead of winter, splitting two commands that couldn’t even talk to each other—they couldn’t even talk to each other because there was a mountain range. Then him running a war from another country, you don’t do that. Then number three, not believing the intelligence that was picked up from the field that you’re picking up Chinese. I didn’t like him and I didn’t like Westmoreland. I thought he was a terrible general.

LC: Why did you think that?

GM: After he had been told time and time again that his game plan, the body count and all that kind of stuff or he didn’t stand up to MacArthur who—

LC: McNamara.

GM: McNamara, yeah, who was really a total jerk, and really I don’t think cared one hoot about the people. Really, I’m positive of that because what he wanted, from what I have read and heard, he didn’t care. Westmoreland and some of the generals, and this is where I get mad at the generals, didn’t stand up to him and say, “What you’re doing is wrong. This is wrong and I’m not going to stand for it anymore.” He didn’t. So we continued on a warfare front of doing things like allowing this business of which were free-fire zone and which ones were not and what was considered rules of engagements which were not realistic. A lot of cases they must have body counts. I’ll tell you something, a lot of body counts—and I wasn’t involved in this—but a lot of guys I’ve talked to hated body counts because if you won the battle or whatever it was, the ambush, and you had to go out and get body counts, let me tell you something. That wasn’t any fun because especially the North Vietnamese, they might just have a sniper, too, with their group. So you’re out there walking around and counting the dead and guess what?

More than one time you got nailed or one of your guys got nailed.

LC: Because they were trying to collect this information.

GM: Yeah. You’re out there counting the dead and they pull back into the brush and bam! We lost a guy. So a lot of guys just would wait and go for count and you would
just guesstimate on what the body count was. It wasn’t worth it. They went out and got
their own. They might have run out there and got the cache of weapons. They got the
rifles and stuff. Maybe you kind of went after dark and went out there and got it, but
they’re not going to risk any lives to go out there and go, “One, two, three, four, five.
You missed two over there, I think.” It wasn’t worth it. That body count of
Westmoreland’s and McNamara’s deal was stupid. It was obvious we were killing more
of them than us, but we were losing people. One family is without a soldier now because
of that stupid body count that he wanted to do.

LC: Gary, have you paid any attention to McNamara in the last, say, seven or
eight years when he’s been publishing books. There was the film called *Fog of War*,
which was a long interview with him about his decision making in Vietnam and even
earlier, actually, in World War II, where he appears at least—I’ve only seen them once
and I’d have to watch it a little more closely, but he appears to be apologizing on some
level. Have you seen that?

GM: The thing I understood was he was apologizing for his part in the war, as I
understood it.

LC: Yeah, that’s what I think.

GM: Yeah. That’s why I didn’t take kindly to him. He never apologized for the
terrible leadership and decisions he made. That’s what he needed to take—that’s what I
wanted him to make an apology for, not his part in the war. That just infuriated me. That
was a pain on the pain. You don’t keep—running the war from the White House that’s
what he needed to apologize on, not turning over the command back to the people who
were in the field. A lot of this I’m getting from documentaries and from people who
were flying over there. I was with air wing. For example, he liked the rules of
engagement. That was probably the big issue—where you could shoot and couldn’t
shoot on the ground, but it was even more dangerous in the air. I’ve seen this clip many a
time, where they would have guys hit the same target. I forgot what they call them when
these missions would come over from McNamara and Johnson and they would have them
hitting the same target day in and day out. They’d just run that target, the same one, and
just keep making bigger holes.

LC: Basically because they weren’t allowed to bomb elsewhere.
GM: Yeah they were told if they went elsewhere they could be court-martialed if they went elsewhere.
LC: What did you make of that? Was there any rationale for that at all for restricting?
GM: No, none. There was no rationale except to leave the command in the field to make these decisions. The pilots come back and say, “Hey, I hit that thing.” So they can make a decision that the intelligence people who have got cameras and so forth and they come back and tell you they hit it and say, “Okay, we’re not going to hit this tomorrow.”
LC: Yeah, got that one already.
GM: Yeah, we already got that. But there was one guy on the television with the Navy. He said, “We just got sick when we knew we all had to run that same deal and not only did we waste it, but the people were waiting on us and we were in the range and not only did we hit the same one we had to hit it on the same flight pattern so they were waiting on us.”
LC: With anti-aircraft fire.
GM: Yeah. It was terrible that we had to run that same flight pattern. It was just ridiculous what they were making us do.
LC: Was there anyone, given that you didn’t think Westmoreland was doing a very good job, was there anyone about whom you knew while you were over there—and I understand the level that you were working at, Gary, but was there anyone, even say in the Marine Corps, who you felt would’ve had better decision making than General Westmoreland around these issues?
GM: I’d take anybody in the Marine Corps.
LC: Why do you say that? I mean, I know you’re a Marine.
GM: I’m just saying they have a better feel of what’s going on. I don’t know. I would probably say in this case anybody—first of all, anybody, first of all.
LC: Right, I know you’ve got to say that because you’re a Marine, but what about, for example, General Carey? He was a very senior general.
GM: I think anybody who had good intelligence and a good feel of talking to the people over here who had flown over here and had talked to the commanders and had a
good brief of what really was happening, that’s the guy that I’d rather have as a general
doing the thing. Knowing what was going over here, regardless of what—I shouldn’t
have said Marine. Anybody who knew what was happening over here.

LC: You felt that General Westmoreland was too busy worrying about what was
happening in Washington, for example.

GM: General Krulak—there was a General Krulak, Jr. and General Krulak the
father and they were both commandants. The father, there’s a book out that I read, there
were just continuous arguments with the way he wanted to run his particular war and it
wasn’t working. I’d have to go back and research. I can’t remember, but the way it was
working, the way he wanted to pacify one area and the way the Marines were working—
they were working very well with the Marines, the way we were working it. He didn’t
like the way we were doing it, but it was working with us.

LC: I think that’s generally accepted, that the combined action platoons and so on
were fairly affective. Most historians would agree with that.

GM: Yeah, you know more about that. I can’t remember. I just remember that.

LC: But General Krulak that you’re talking about is Victor Krulak, U.S. Marine
Corps.

GM: His son’s got one of my paintings.

LC: Oh, is that right?

GM: He gave me a great compliment one time. We had a Dallas Military Ball
here one time. We were sitting at separate tables. I’ve got to tell you a funny story about
it, too. We were at separate tables and one of my paintings was going to go to the head
guest of this High Rollers of Dallas. They had these balls of Dallas.

LC: Yeah, with all the bigwigs.

GM: Yeah, they do these things every year. So they got one of my eagles. In
fact, it was the one that was going to the president and it was sitting up front. It was
going to go to the guest, the person that was in charge of this thing. Right next to this
table was a Remington. What do you call it?

LC: A bronze?

GM: Yeah, it was beautiful.

LC: By Frederic Remington?
GM: Remington, yeah, it was sitting there. People were going to hand it out at
the guest ball over there. So they invited me to come up to give to the guest of honor my
eagle that was there and they invited the general, Krulak, to come up and to receive the
bronze. We kind of angled up and marched up together. I was in uniform and we’d
already met before, but we had a long way to walk. He says, “Hey, Colonel, what would
you take for us to swap those things after this thing’s over?”

LC: No kidding. Now is the guy that you were talking to, the one who has your
painting, he is the son of Gen. Victor Krulak?

GM: Yeah.

LC: What was his rank?

GM: He was commandant of the Marine Corps at that time. This was the father
and son.

LC: Yeah, I’m trying to sort out which one you were talking to. You were
talking to the commandant of the Marine Corps.

GM: Both of them were commandants of the Marine Corps.

LC: I did not know that.

GM: They are the only father and son team that have ever been commandants of
the Marine Corps.

LC: Oh, I didn’t know that. I’m sorry.

GM: I was talking to the son. He’s a little guy and I’ve got a picture of him here
with me. I need to send you those.

LC: Yes, please.

GM: So we angled up there together.


GM: I’ve got another one to tell you about General Grey. That’s even funnier.

LC: Well, go ahead. Unleash it.

GM: Well, let me tell you about the night before. We were at this house. A
reception was given for us guys. I was one of the ones that got to go because I had done
the painting. Krulak was there in this house and it was forty acres and nineteen
bathrooms. The sucker was huge.

LC: I’m sure.
GM: General Krulak was coming from one area and I’m coming from another area. We saw each other and I said, “Hell, General, I’m going to need a compass to get back to get back home.” He said, “Don’t worry about it. I’ve been dropping bird seed ever since I left the front door.” Old country boy.

LC: He sounds like a pretty cool guy.

GM: “Don’t worry, about it, Colonel. I’ve been dropping bird seed since I left the front door.”

LC: That’s pretty good.

GM: What a sense of humor.

LC: Well, it’s great that your artistic work not only helped—I’m sure it helps you and it’s a good thing for you to do, but it’s also appreciated by people like the commandant of the Marine Corps. That speaks a lot about your own character and what you put into it.

GM: Well, I’ll tell you another funny story.

LC: Okay.

GM: General Grey, he was a character, too. There was a function here. I think there was a Marine Corps League national convention. They wanted me to give one of my eagles. I was presented him an eagle and I’ve got a picture of it here where him and myself were there. He kept referring to my date as a movie star. She ate that up.

LC: I’ll bet.

GM: So I presented it to him and when I did it was just about that time just earlier when we’d lost that Marine colonel in Lebanon who had been hung. Remember?

LC: Yes, I do.

GM: Okay. Well, I said, “I’d like to present that in honor of him if I may. I will give it to you and then it’ll be an honor to him.” In fact, I had it engraved at the bottom in honor of him. I got a letter back from him that said, “Thanks very much. Being in memory of him is da da da da.” So about six months to a year later this Metroplex Marines I’m telling you about, we were having a lunch. At the head table is this lady Marine. This Marine sitting next to me, he was at that dinner. He said, “Hey, Gary, you know who that lady Marine is up there?” I said, “No.” He said, “That’s the wife of that Marine that got hung up there. That’s who that is.”
LC: She was a Marine?

GM: Yeah, and also in that letter, I’ve got to back up and say that he was going
to—he told me at the dinner—I can’t remember in the letter, but I do know he told me at
the dinner that he said that he was going to see that she got that. He would give her that
painting.

LC: No kidding.

GM: Yeah, he was going to give her that painting.

LC: Did you know her name? Did you find out her name?


LC: She was a major in her own right?

GM: Yeah. I’ve got the letter here. It’s in my portfolio over at the mag, but I’ve
got that. This is something I don’t want publicized. I think General Grey is still living
and I don’t want to embarrass him, but anyway, I’m sure it was Major Higgins is her
name. She was there and I said, “No kidding? That’s her. She’s supposed to have one of
my paintings. General Grey said he was going to give it to her.” So I walked up to her
afterwards and I said, “I’m Gary Morris. You just might know my name.” She said,
“No, I don’t know your name.” I said, “Well, you have a painting that was given to you
that I did in remembrance of your husband of an eagle that General Krulak has and was
going to give to you.” She just heehawed. She said, “This is not the first time this has
happened.” This is another offhanded compliment. She said, “I love the general very
much. He’s been very kind to me, supportive. He’s taken care of me, but sometimes the
general kind of likes to keep things that I was supposed to get that he likes.” He kept the
damn eagle. She never got it. She never got the eagle.

LC: She sounds as if she was very gracious about it.

GM: Yeah, she was.

LC: That’s a classy lady right there.

GM: A classy lady and another offhanded compliment. He kept my eagle. I

said, “I’ll tell you what. I’ll get another print and I’ll send it to you.” So I thought that
was—

LC: She handled that very well, very smooth.

GM: Yeah, she didn’t say, “What?”
LC: Yeah, right.

GM: Like I did with the congressman, you know.

LC: Right. Everybody does that sometimes, but she sounds like she had been through this before.

GM: Well, I’ll never forget Krulak’s, “That’s all right. I’ve been dropping bird seed ever since I left the front door.”

LC: I like that, too. I like that, too. Well, it may be at this juncture, a good idea, Gary, since we’re talking about some of these big-picture issues to ask you, and in fact you invited me in the forms that you filled out. One of the questions said, “What did you think about American strategy in Vietnam?” You wrote down, “Ask me,” so I will. You’ve already mentioned the restrictions on the rules of engagement, both on the ground in terms of free-fire zones in the areas where you had to be, of course, much more cautious around civilians. You’ve talked about the restrictions in the air, the bombing target selection and all that. In general, as an overall investment of American military resources, what insights can you offer as to whether this was a good proposition, whether it ought to have been undertaken, if it should have been undertaken—what should have been done differently?

GM: Well, I think the war in Iraq showed everything that we should have done right. It shows what we should have done. In other words, we’re going to go into a war. We’re going to go in there where we don’t have to worry about necessarily a free-fire zone and we can fight on the other side of the fifty-yard line. We can go north of the DMZ (demilitarized zone) like we did here. We can go into downtown to fight.

LC: Meaning Hanoi?

GM: Yeah. This business of chasing them up to the DMZ like we did in Korea was asinine. Chasing them over into Laos, which was supposed to be a neutral country, and stopping was asinine because when Nixon finally let us go in there, those guys going into Laos and Cambodia and bomb, that country burned for four days. One of my best friends said he dropped one bomb and got about eight secondaries off of one bomb.

LC: Now was that in Cambodia?
GM: Yeah. The so-called invasion, which was basically nothing more than an intrusion. Basically, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was coming down through there. Well, if they were using it, why couldn’t we use it?

LC: Well, yeah, the question is how much did the Cambodian government control that area.

GM: They didn’t. I mean, I don’t know what you mean by control. All I know is the bad guys were storing stuff over there like crazy. They were letting people come down through there like crazy. All that food and supplies and people were stored over there and they worked themselves in not only by the land, but by the rivers. So not being able to go over there and use that as an area for strategy and not being able to say we can’t go over there, that’s dumb, and not being able to go north is dumb. Not being able to bomb the SAM (surface-to-air missile) sites because McNamara says, “We can’t do that. We might piss off the Russians,” is dumb.

LC: Or piss off the Chinese.

GM: Or the Chinese. Not being able to bomb the harbors, that’s dumb. I mean that was ridiculous.

LC: You didn’t have any worries, either then or now, for example, that the Chinese with their huge military and, of course, they were nuclear capable at the time, you didn’t think that it was worth it in any way trying to not ruffle them and get them involved.

GM: Well, I didn’t even think about it at the time. But when I came home and thought about it I kept saying, “We’re losing all these guys a day. What the heck?” As far as nuclear warfare, I couldn’t believe that anybody would be dumb enough to do it. I kept thinking that Korea would do it. I said, “If anybody’s going to do it, it would be the North Koreans.” I didn’t think the Chinese would do it and I was sure the Russians wouldn’t do it because they had already proven before that they wouldn’t do it.

LC: In other circumstances elsewhere.

GM: Yeah.

LC: Like where? What comes to mind?

GM: Pardon?

LC: What comes to mind?
GM: Oh, Korea.

LC: Okay.

GM: You read back on it and they were the ones that kept them from doing it.

LC: Yes, in fact, the Soviet Union was pretty restrained there.

GM: I had a doctor who was Russian. He was about my age and he remembers back to that time. We talked over dinner and he said, “I can tell you right now the Russians didn’t want any part to do with that Vietnam thing. We wanted out.”

LC: The Korean thing or the Vietnam thing?

GM: The Vietnam thing. Yeah, they wouldn’t go in there. They had some Russian pilots and stuff in there.

LC: But minimal.

GM: He said, “We didn’t want any part of that.” It was proven out when we went into Afghanistan. It was a no-win situation. They really didn’t want to tackle anything with the Americans. He said, “It wasn’t so much of a win-loss situation, it just would’ve been a waste of time, energy, morale and people to fight this thing over this silly country.”

LC: So let me ask you—

GM: “And the Americans were doing enough harm to themselves. Just let them continue on. Why should we go in there? They’re doing a number on themselves as it is so why should we interfere?”

LC: Do you lay that whole situation, the United States basically pouring men and manpower into Vietnam and not in fact confronting either the Soviet Union or directly the Chinese in that war, do you lay that whole thing to President Johnson as having miscalculated and getting bad advice?

GM: Yeah, being terrified of that and also probably with the support of McNamara. He was the one that wouldn’t let us bomb per se. He was a big Kennedy supporter.

LC: Yeah, he came in with Kennedy. What do you think about President Johnson? What’s his legacy, Gary?

GM: I think he was really—I feel sorry for him because I’ve seen him during those shots and so forth. I believe he was a tortured man as far as the troops. He loved
his troops. He loved these men. He was a Texan. He loved his troops. The time he
went out in a helicopter and shook hands with those guys, you can’t tell me that he didn’t
feel hurt when those troop counts came in.

LC: You know of course his son-in-law served over there.

GM: Yeah. He had to hurt. I think that’s probably one of the reasons he resigned
was the pain of losing those people that’s probably one of the main reasons he resigned.

LC: That’s very interesting.

GM: The main reason he resigned was because, as he said, I can’t think of the
woman’s name, but I got a letter from her. I sent her a painting. She was the official
historian for—

LC: Doris Kearns Goodwin?

GM: Yeah, I did a painting of Carl Erskine and sent it to her. She was a big
Dodger fan.

LC: Yeah, that’s right. That’s her.

GM: She sent me a letter, which I’ve got it here.

LC: Oh, really?

GM: Yeah. That was neat.

LC: Well, that was pretty neat of you to take the initiative to do that.

GM: She loved it. I put on there in the letter, I said, “Here’s Mr. Erskine’s phone
number. He wants to talk to you.” She really got a kick out of that, she had his number.

LC: I’m sure she did.

GM: But I remember her saying—I lost my train of thought when she was talking
about—.

LC: She was a biographer of President Johnson.

GM: What were they talking about? Oh, the fact that—and we’ll get to this when
Cronkite came out and said we’re not going to win the war. He came out a few weeks
later, almost a month to the day and said, “If they’re going to believe Cronkite, they’re
not going to believe me,” and he resigned.

LC: Yeah, he decided not to run for reelection and announced it.

GM: In her book she said that he made that decision because they believed
Cronkite.
LC: Well, let’s talk about the press for a little while.

GM: Well, let me go ahead and finish strategy.

LC: Oh, okay, good enough. Go ahead.

GM: That was a big thing. If we’re going to play we’re going to play the entire field. Whatever the rules of engagement are going to be they ought to be done on a local level. The rules of engagement ought to be set and then as far as fire missions are controlled—when you have the rules of engagement let us fight the entire enemy. I mean if we had done that in retrospect with the second war in Afghanistan or Desert Storm where Israelis were being hit with the Scuds—


GM: Yeah. If we had not been allowed to take care of that situation we would have had a major war. But we were allowed to take care of that situation.

LC: Militarily.

GM: Yeah, we were allowed to tell the Israelis, “Let us take care of it” because if the Israelis had fired one shell back, every one of those other countries, our allies, would have turned, quit, and turned on Israel in a heartbeat. But we were able to tell them, “Let us take care of it.” The rules of engagement allowed us to fight.

LC: Now, Gary, I just want to clarify for someone who might not have the full picture of what you’re talking about, and correct me if I’m wrong here, that in rolling back the invasion of Kuwait, U.S. troops were actually allowed to go into Iraq, cross over the border, go into Iraq and do some serious damage to the Iraqi Army, which was the Army that had invaded Iraq. We didn’t have to stop at the Kuwaiti border. General Schwarzkopf had commanded that operation.

GM: Yeah. Also when the situation came in Iraq in which the Iraqis were flying missiles directly into Israel and trying to intimidate the Israelis, who could be intimidated easily, to fire back. If they had been allowed to fire back all the Arab countries who were their enemies for many, many years would have dropped being our Allies and would have turned on Israel. So we were able as a military and were allowed by rules of engagement from the White House to talk to both the White House and Israel to allow us to use our military force to try to knock out the Scuds.

LC: The Scud missile deliveries, right.
GM: Right. By doing so we prevented them hitting Israel.

LC: And provoking a war.

GM: Provoking a much wider war in a heartbeat.

LC: Yeah, I think you’re right.

GM: That’s the kind of thing that we wish we could have had there. I’ll give you another example and I saw this—I heard a captain talk about this on TV. He was doing a bit on McNamara and how much he disliked him. This is very important because you know we had—well, anyway, how it started was the Oriskany and the other ship that caught on fire. I forget which one. There were two ships that caught on fire, but anyway on both ships they were running many, many too many hours of fighter attack times, which not only hurt and endangered the pilots’ time of making errors and getting shot down, but also ran the possibility of the people on the ships of maybe eighteen and nineteen years olds working many too hours, not getting enough sleep and them too making an error. It proved out. Maybe launching an aircraft into another—you’re doing something wrong with lack of sleep. Well, anyway, McNamara came aboard this one ship and I think it was Oriskany. He went in to visit with the officers and the pilots. The captain was going to brief him. After he had his say he was going to tell him that they needed to cut back on flight time because of the dangers and all the facts and the figures that you reach a certain point that errors are going to be made. The first thing out of his mouth was, “What are your man-hour flight time ratios?” They told him and he said, “Well you’ve got to increase them.” Apparently the captain just lit into him. Later on down the line I guess they were going to relieve him. I really don’t know what happened to him but he lit into him and told him, “You’re really fooling with fire here. These guys can’t fly anymore. It didn’t show it in the stats that you’re going to have some major problems here.” He didn’t even listen to him. “I just want you to increase it by one point and so-and-so.”

LC: Yes, that sounds pretty typical of McNamara.

GM: He was a businessman.

LC: Yes, exactly.

GM: He really didn’t care about people, which makes me mad about him talking about sorry about the war.
LC: Let me just stop you there for a moment because this is something that I think is really interesting. Do you think that now, let’s see, he’s got to be in his mid-eighties now, that he’s lived long enough to actually have turned that corner and realized that it was about people, it wasn’t about the numbers or do you not get that from him?

GM: No, I don’t think people have anything to do about it.

LC: You don’t think that, huh?

GM: I think he’s looking for a way out to cover his tracks.

LC: Like what is his legacy going to be kind of thing?

GM: Yeah, he wants to be on the side like the other people in that we lost the war. Now therefore he wants to say, “I know we shouldn’t have done it,” whereas if we had won the war he would’ve said, “Yeah, I’m glad we went in there.” He wants to be on the side of the—yeah, so he wants to put his tracks down on that regard.

LC: Yeah, so the historians won’t just take him apart.

GM: He didn’t want to put down the real story and the facts and figures of how he really screwed it up like wanting to build a picket fence or a fence across Vietnam at the DMZ. Remember that one?

LC: The McNamara Line?

GM: Yeah, he was going to build a fence across there. I guess he was going to hire some West Texas cowboys to run along there and picket that sucker or better yet, might hire some Texas Rangers to take care of it.

LC: That might have been more effective than what he did do.

GM: That was one of his stupid things. I mean, give me a break. Like there was Laos and Cambodia over there. They’d just run around the end zone and run around behind the bench and run around the track field and come right on back on the field.

LC: Back in play.

GM: Back in play, but no, we don’t do that. But him, no, he didn’t care about people. He was just trying to cover his six to make sure he’s on the right side. That made every military man in the world furious. But anyway, it was just a short time after that you remember they had that terrible fire on the Oriskany and Senator—oh, I can’t think of the senator’s name. You’ll have to say it. He was onboard that aircraft. What is his name?
LC: I don’t know, actually.
GM: He was a POW (prisoner of war) for years. He had on his field digger for years. He’s from Arizona.
LC: Oh, John McCain.
GM: Yeah, John McCain. He was on the aircraft next to the one that caught on fire.
LC: Yes, you’re right. I’m sorry, yes, that’s true.
GM: He saw it happen. What caused the deal was there was some seaman that accidentally lit one of those Sidewinders when he was putting it on the aircraft next to him. It fired off into another one.
LC: That started the whole thing.
GM: That started the whole thing. When they did the investigation afterwards they could not blame the seaman and it was whatever. They looked back at his work schedule and they found out the guy hadn’t had any sleep in about three days, which proved out exactly what the captain said. He showed it to McNamara and he had some ridiculous comment. I can’t remember what it was, but it infuriated everybody in the Navy that he never did recognize that fact that what the captain said was true. Then the other one caught on fire the same way. It was a major—I forgot, but I want to say it was the Lexington. Was it the Lexington?
LC: That I don’t know.
GM: That was another carrier that caught on fire—
LC: You may be right.
GM: For the same stupid reason. But the business of that and having these pilots flying the same route same way—
LC: Making them basically easy targets.
GM: I’ll tell you somebody you might want to talk to who would be interesting would be Dr. Lane, Peter Lane of the University of North Texas in the history department. I think he’s decorated for flying those Thuds, many Thud missions up north for the Air Force. Those Thuds were the ones that caught all the—they were flying those missions at the time in which they had to fly straight and true.
LC: Now, he’s at the University of North Texas?
GM: Yeah, they were told to fly straight and true.

LC: Right, which, again makes it pretty—

GM: You know, you can’t fly straight and true, but that’s what the orders say.

They were just sitting ducks because those suckers were just—

LC: Now was he Marine? Was he a Marine flyer or U.S. Air Force?

GM: Air Force. Pete’s very well spoken and a good friend and a patriot. He could give you some very good input about that side of the air war. But that’s kind of the strategy aspect I’m talking about. Let’s play the whole field, let’s look at the rules of engagement and let us fight the war the way it needs to be fought and none of this crap of fighting the war like MacArthur did from another country. We were doing the same thing from the White House. I mean, it was terrible. Okay.

LC: Well, Gary, these observations are very important to record because they come from someone with your experience and credibility. So it’s something that we here as part of the project want to make sure we capture.

GM: Well, it goes a lot deeper. I won’t go into it. I don’t know that much about it, but I know it goes a lot into the M-16 and bringing in the M-16s.

LC: Well, go ahead and say a little bit about that because it’s a very controversial issue.

GM: Well, a lot of guys said—you know they brought it in too quick. It wasn’t ready. A lot of guys were left out in the field with a weapon that didn’t work and there’s nothing more terrifying than being in a situation with a weapon that doesn’t work.

LC: The thinking was that it was approved by the Department of Defense before it was really field ready in terms of design and so on.

GM: It didn’t take much dirt to get in there and crud that sucker up. They made many alterations to it.

LC: Well, it won’t surprise you to know that in other interviews I’ve done I’ve actually spoken with guys who had it jam up right at the moment when they needed to be able to use it, right at the instant in a firefight when they needed to be able to use it.

GM: You know the rules of engagement, and I think according to the Geneva Convention said you couldn’t use shotguns, but when your rifle doesn’t work, hey, shotguns came over from the States and a lot of them came over sawed off.
LC: Could you get one? I saw in your notes that you said you wished you had one. Did you actually have one at one point?

GM: I wish I had a sawed-off and could use it, but your mission was to lead and direct.

LC: Yes, that’s right.

GM: But a sawed-off shotgun would’ve been nice at the point when somebody came up on top of you. Besides that I couldn’t hit the broad side of barn with a .45 if I needed to. I couldn’t hit anything with it. But a sawed-off, yeah, I would have liked to have had that right there with me so I could have reached up and used it. Or better, a pump. I wish I had a pump.

LC: Can you think of—I mean, is there a particular—?

GM: I wish we all could’ve had a pump. I’ll tell you another weapon I wish we really could’ve had. I saw this about two years ago at a reunion up at Quantico. You know about the grenade launcher, the shoulder-held grenade launchers?

LC: Sure.

GM: It looks like a shotgun and you put a shell in it and put a round out there?

LC: Yeah, shoulder launcher.

GM: They had it mounted as a machinegun with a belt. I said, “God, put that on top of a hill on all those areas where you’ve got 105s mounted out in the bush and they’d like to take a hill.” Give about three of those for each one of those hills or give them one. You could just sit there and boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. What damage that sucker would’ve done putting grenades out there a hell of a lot farther than you could throw one. There’s tree line out there, which would have supplemented the difference between mortars and a hand grenade because mortars took too long and you could also get an instant reaction if you put something out there. Also, when you went into an area of an open field and you always tested out an area all the way around it to see if you could get a reaction before you cross an area—you could always put some rounds in there.

LC: Or for an LZ, creating an LZ.

GM: Yeah. But if you needed some heavier stuff you always had to call in mortars or you had to bring along that damn old bazooka type. It really didn’t look like we’ve come up with anything better from what I see on TV. I don’t know why we don’t
have any RPGs (rocket propelled grenade) like the other guys have got. Those things—
but anyway, what we had there was good, but to have it as a machinegun pod, wow.

LC: That would have been helpful to you?

GM: As a defensive item when you had out there in the bush these support
elements, the 105 howitzers to fire support rounds wherever. They placed it where the
hills went back and forth. There’s a famous one you’ve probably heard of. They’re
called the Rock Pile.

LC: The Rock Pile, yeah.

GM: Which is really—I talked to one of my buddies who was up there. It was
just really not much bigger than the size of three ping-pong tables at the top. All the
foxholes digging was down around the side. We talked about if you had one of those it
sure made a lot of difference.

LC: Man, oh, man. Well, Gary, let me ask you, now that we’ve sort of surveyed
the problems with the strategy—the flip side of that, of course, is what was going on in
the States and particularly, I think, to your mind, problems with reporting about the war
and what was being conveyed to people in the U.S. You returned to the U.S. from
Vietnam in what, the middle of 1968, am I right?

GM: May.

LC: In May of ’68. You went to—you had a year’s additional service
requirement, is that right? So you went to—

GM: Six months.

LC: Six months? I’m sorry. So you went to Camp Lejeune. Yesterday when we
talked I asked you about if you saw any sort of elements of the growing anti-war
movement and you said, “Well, not really.” In Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, there’s
not a lot of that going on and then you were back in Texas. But no doubt you were
watching at least some of the television coverage of the war during ’68, ’69, and ’70, and
on it goes. Can you talk a little bit about the impact that that had as you see it now?

GM: You mean after I left Camp Lejeune?

LC: Well, yeah, and at that time, as you were watching the television reporting
from Vietnam.
GM: I don’t remember much about being at Camp Lejeune. All I can tell you about it is I wish I hadn’t gone back at that time. I will tell you that when I landed at LAX, I was there in an area with a couple of other Marines that were going back to Dallas. There was two guys with Notre Dame sweatshirts on. They were prettied up. They came up and starting harassing these two Marines, enlisted. They were in another area. It was still the same thing. We talked, but they kind of kept to themselves.

LC: What were these guys saying? Do you remember?

GM: Names?

LC: Well, what were they saying to these enlisted men?

GM: Oh, they was just harassing them. I can’t remember what the deal was. But they got in their face and they were harassing them. I can’t remember what they were doing. But it was obvious they were harassing them.

LC: Giving them a hard time.

GM: Yeah. I started to get up and go over there and get them and say something to them or I was going to go get the police. I can’t remember which one I was going to do. But before I did anything one Marine decked one of them. I mean he was out cold. He was stretched out. The other one took off like a rocket and I’ll never forget it. I remember that OJ (Simpson) commercial. You remember when he used to run through that airport and jumping over the suitcases?

LC: Yeah, with the Hertz commercial. Yeah, I remember.

GM: That’s what that guy was doing. I mean, he was flying. He was launched. People in the deal there started laughing at how fast he was moving. Every time I have seen a Notre Dame football game I just wish they’d get their butt beat 150 to nothing. I’ve hated Notre Dame ever since. So anyway, I remember that. When I came home I had talked to my monitor. Your monitor is the guy that’s the head of your MOS (military occupational specialty). The Marines are small. We were actually drafting people by then. That was not a good time. This is ’68. Things are going downhill. The president’s already resigned. Walter Cronkite has already issued his proclamation that we’re not going to win so we’re looking at a longer war. I’ve lost my train of thought.

LC: That’s okay. We were talking about what the press was kind of showing and telling about the Vietnam era. You were talking about your own return to the U.S. and
those incidents that happened at LAX and then Walter Cronkite and then LBJ decided not
to run again in ’68. The buildup is happening. The number of people getting drafted into
the Marine Corps—

GM: I know what I was talking about. You’re going to have to stick with me
here because—

LC: I’m going to stick with you, Gary, no problem.

GM: There’s a point in time here where I had some medical treatment that really
shocked the hell out of my memory system. When we come into areas like this my
memory is really going to be hurting. I’ll remember the stuff, but I’ll be talking and then
I’ll forget where I am.

LC: Well, can you tell me what medical—this is again at your discretion, but can
you explain a little bit about what happened to you so that people have a context for this?

GM: Yeah, I had I think it was twenty-one or twenty-four shock treatments.

LC: Okay. Because why?

GM: Hmm?

LC: Why was that prescribed and why did they do that?

GM: I’ll explain to you when I get there.

LC: Sure.

GM: All right. Anyway, what were we talking about? Oh, I had talked to my
monitor about when I was going back. In most cases you were going to go back no
sooner than twelve or thirteen months. I was going back in, I think, like seven.

LC: Back to Vietnam?

GM: Yeah. Quite frankly, I wasn’t ready to go back in seven months. So I made
probably the biggest mistake of my life. That’s probably the biggest mistake of my life
because it affected my career or it affected my life up until today. Because what I
attended and went through during this time as a civilian caused me major problems. I’ve
often thought if I went back, if I got nailed I got nailed, and if I came back maybe I
might’ve stayed in. If you would’ve had two tours in Vietnam it would’ve pretty set you
well up for a good career. I would have been in long enough already. I would have been
in at least seven or eight years and at that point with two tours in Vietnam you’ve got a
pretty good career going. Of course, I don’t know. Maybe there was a possibility to go
back a third time. I don’t think so. But anyway, I didn’t go. I went home.

LC: Back here to Texas?

GM: Yeah, and we took a tour. I can remember we went through New Orleans
and that was my first taste of hippies. I was looking for a fight. It was the first time I
realized my wife really didn’t appreciate it and really didn’t care. I remember there was
one time I was walking down the street and here came these two guys. I didn’t care how
big or how small, but they were hippies. I heard about them, knew about them, and I
made an effort to walk right between them. They were arm-in-arm and I walked right
between them and did a 180 and I was ready take them on. They didn’t do anything but
look at me like, “Who is this fool?” and then turn around and walked on. I remember she
and I had an argument about it. I realized then that she didn’t want any part of it. She
didn’t care about it.

LC: You mean she didn’t care about you?

GM: She didn’t care about my actions. She didn’t care about the war. Her life
was going to be built on family, going and building a house and doing the civilian thing.
Whatever was happening outside her front door and anything on the other side of the mall
or past her mother’s house just didn’t count. Politics was nothing. That proved to be the
case all the way. She didn’t know the difference between a DMZ and a driveway. That
was my first inkling that there was not going to be any love or assistance in this program.
So anyway I remember I asked his lady at this store I was buying some stuff from, I said,
“Where’d you get all these damn hippies?” She said, “Probably from your town.” I
thought that was a great line.

LC: That was pretty quick.

GM: It was a great line. Anyway, we went to Irving. But before then—I’ve got
to back up. When I first came home from Vietnam, before I went to Camp Lejeune, I
came home first for a couple of weeks.

LC: You had some leave, probably.

GM: Yeah. I remember I came home from LAX going, “My God, what’s it
going to be like in Dallas?” I came home and I saw some hippies and I didn’t see any of
them doing anything wrong. Everything went fine here. In fact, I went to my father’s
Rotary Club, which I’m a member of now, and I was well received. I thought everything was fine and there’s not going to be a problem. It was and I stayed a couple of weeks and Irving was great. So I took off and then fast forward to coming back through New Orleans and I can’t remember anything that happened there other than that. So I got a job in Irving with the phone company selling switchboards. First of all, coming out of the military was a different life and coming back from a war was a different life, two different things. Then coming back into an environment of dealing and sitting across the table from these hippies and some of them weren’t really anti-war or whatever. They just had long hair down to their knees. It’s the way they were and I didn’t like them. Even though they may have not been anti-war they were just those kind of people. It was hard for me to get along with them. So I can remember after they hired me I’d go out to dinner with my boss and some other people. They’d be talking about PBX equipment and things that were going on in town and all this kind of stuff. I tried to relate and I tried to understand. I sat there and I couldn’t. I’d be quiet because I didn’t know what to say. My boss told me one time, “If you’re going to be a salesman you’re going to have to learn to talk up.” I said, “Okay.” So the next time we went out I started talking about some of my adventures over there and some of the stuff that went on. I remember one time we went down to a gathering of all the salesmen in the company down in San Angelo. Oh, and I can remember on the way down I was riding with my boss. I started talking about my adventures—

LC: Your adventures in Vietnam?

GM: Yeah. I had a thousand stories and everybody just got quiet. He said, “Gary, I don’t think anybody really understands what you’re talking about.” I said, “Yeah, I guess you’re right,” so I just shut up. I couldn’t do one way or the other way. It was just this time I realized I had really made a mistake. My wife didn’t care. If I had gone back she probably would’ve left me anyway. It would’ve hurt but at least it would’ve been over with. Then, too, I’m in an environment where I can’t talk about anything. Also I had left Irving, which was a mistake. I should have gone to work. My father had a business and I should’ve gone to work for him. As I look back, he gave me opportunity. But so young, I was still his son. I was three years earlier, I was still just his kid. I just wasn’t ready to go work for my dad and I should have.
LC: Right. That’s tough, though.

GM: So I went down there and there were about fifteen, twenty guys there. I can remember after the meetings we’d all go out to dinner. They’d heehaw around. They’re having the best old time heehawing and having these drinks and telling dirty jokes and laughing and just having just the best old time in the world. I’m sitting there thinking about what’s going on with my guys. What are the guys going through right now? What are they doing? I’m reading the paper and that’s far out of the loop to find out what’s happening around where and all I can read is bad news.

LC: Bad news from Vietnam?

GM: Yeah, things aren’t looking good. I’m seeing these guys having the best old time and stuff. So I finally just didn’t say anything. I remember one time we’d go out and we went out in this parking lot. Everybody was leaning against their cars and drinking and having a good time. I kind of just moseyed away and just kind of looked at things. So I just walked across the street to this old, old building. I was just kind of looking at it and looking at the bricks and this kind of stuff. I guess I was over there for a while. I walked around and came back. This time the general manager came over there. I guess his boss had seen me. He was an older guy and he didn’t have a clue. He said, “Why don’t you come over and join the fun and have a good time? My name is so-and-so and what is your name?” He didn’t ask where I was from or anything. He was half loaded. So I said, “Okay, I’ll come over.” So I went over and kind of stood around and got tired and couldn’t wait until it was time to go to bed. So I remember that, just how out of tune I was with all those guys. Really I didn’t get angry at them, I just wanted to go over there and grab them and say, “You guys need to kind of keep it quiet. You need to think why. You need to kind of cool it. There’s something else going on.” So the next day we had a golf tournament. I hadn’t played golf in years, but I had in college. I guess it was one of these deals where you hadn’t played in so long—and this is true. When you first play golf and you haven’t played in a long time you play a great game. When you play your second game it’s absolutely horrendous. So we went out there and we played. I just played unconscious. Everything I hit went in the hole. The rule was, “Don’t beat the general manager.” Well, I didn’t think anything about that crap. I thought they were all kidding. I beat him by two strokes. People were looking at me.
Sure enough, when he came up and handed me a trophy this guy glared at me. I mean, he actually glared at me. He was not happy. So I put it in the trunk of the car and we were driving home. Jerry said, “You know, you shouldn’t have won that sucker.” I said, “What?” He said, “It might present a problem.” I said, “I didn’t know anything about it.” “Well, didn’t you hear people talk about it?” I said, “Yeah, but I don’t know how to lose. I thought they were kidding. I’ve never heard of losing to anybody in my life.” He said, “Well, it’s called politics and when you’re in the corporate world you’re going to have to do it.” I thought, “Ding, it’s the third reason I need to get out of this program.” So anyway, I went home and I took the trophy. I remember sitting down and she asked me what was going on. I told her what had happened. It went in one ear and right out the other. She didn’t find it amusing or anything and she changed the subject about her mother or about something they were going to do with the house. It just didn’t even make a dent about where I was coming from. So I remember taking the trophy and took the garbage out and I took it out there with it because I didn’t want to see it. So then one night, the next thing I can remember we were in Denton. I can’t remember—I think it was really before we were in Denton. I think it was in Irving and we were watching TV. Or maybe it was North Carolina. Again, the treatments I took wiped out a hell of a lot of memory factor. In fact, I don’t think they even hardly do these shock treatments anymore.

LC: No, sir.
GM: I had twenty-four of them.
LC: When did this happen?
GM: I’ll get to that.
LC: Okay.
GM: So anyway, it was around the time—I do remember the man landing on the moon. I do know that. But that’s about all I remember. But I do remember Walter Cronkite. I remember coming home and feeling very good about myself in that I knew we had won the Tet Offensive. Well, all I had heard and going out on patrols and hearing people talk and Khe Sanh was held and we took back the embassy. I heard the goal was to take over all the cities and they didn’t take over any of them. My philosophy was you can take it, but you’ve got to hold it to win it. The last man on top of the sandbags—the
last man on top of the sand pile is going to be the winner. You could bomb it and strafe it
all you want the way the Marines look at it the man that’s standing on it is the one that’s
holding it. We used to throw that to the Air Force all the time. Dig as deep of a hole as
you want but the guy that’s sitting at the bottom of the hole is still the one holding it. So
I remember Walter Cronkite coming over there and getting on TV and saying that the war
was un-winnable. I go, “Where did he get this? What did he know? What? What’s he
talking about?” We were talking about coming home. They didn’t do anything. They
didn’t keep anything. It wasn’t until years later that I did some digging and realized we
had killed in that three week period of time around fifty-four thousand people. No, fifty-
two thousand people known killed. Fifty-two thousand people in three weeks’ time
which was almost the total number of people that we lost, which was like fifty-six
thousand, in the entire war. We also learned a few years later on that General Giap was
on there. He’s now dead. I know the chair I was sitting in. He said, “Yes, we lost the
Tet Offensive. No doubt about it. Our attempt to take over all the cities and villages in
which we hoped that the local villages would rise up and which some of them did and
take over the cities, which we were able to do, but we were unable to hold them. That
was our mistake. We were not able to hold them against the massive firepower of the
Americans. We weren’t able to take over Khe Sanh. We were trying to turn that into
another Dien Bien Phu.” Now, you understand what Dien Bien Phu is? Do you want to
explain what that is?

LC: Well, most people will know that was the major French defeat that caused
them to withdraw.

GM: That’s why they wanted to capture those hills so bad.

LC: Sure, the hills around.

GM: Yeah. That’s why the general did such a great job with that Super Gaggle
because they needed those hills.

LC: General Carey.

GM: They needed those hills. Anyway, he said, “Yeah, we didn’t win that, but
we did win,” in so many words. I’ve been trying to find this. I don’t know where it was.
It’s been almost five years since I’ve heard it. It probably was on the History Channel.
He said, “But we did win. We lost the battle and we lost the war in that we won the
psychological minds of the American people through the press by the American people
being told that the Americans weren’t going to win the war.” When I heard that years
later I just got that much madder because that was Walter Cronkite. It shows just how
much power the media had and how much power that idiot had. As a result the war went
on another five or six years and it ended the way it did. The channel that I was watching
this, and I remember this, he said they lost the Tet Offensive. It would’ve been a good
time that this channel made this—and it’s not the press it was this historical document. I
can remember it probably was true that it was a good time that the North Vietnamese
probably would’ve been more willing to make a more negotiated settlement. We
could’ve ended the war right there. They were whipped. But he made the judgment that
we were not ready when they attacked, but the people saw on TV that we were fighting in
our own embassy. We made a point of that. We were not ready and unable to hold
anything. They didn’t bother to tell them that we took it back. It was just a simple way
of rewording the thing and saying, “Yeah, they attacked, but we took back and their
objective of taking over”—the intelligence people knew this. All you had to do is talk to
the intelligence people. They probably knew this and would say that their goal of taking
over these cities had failed. You can also tell how many people they probably lost and
say that the American forces that shined did shine their best. But no, within thirty
seconds he cost us so many lives, so many lives, and cost us the war and on top of that
caused guys like me pain and misery for years. Even today, a friend of mine told me he
was out on the West Coast. He said there’s an area just outside of San Francisco and this
is in the Long Beach Wall. You can drive along that area and about every hundred yards
you’ll see guys sitting on that wall looking west for miles and they’re all Vietnam vets
just looking for miles. They just sit up there, all those guys, thanks to Walter Cronkite.
So thanks to him he cost us the war. That’s why I hate the guy so much. I tried to tell
that to a friend of mine who is a well-known author, columnist for the Dallas News,
extremely liberal, extremely liberal. We’re best friends. I’ve told him my story and he
feels for me. In fact, he told me, “I wish you were president.” But when I told him about
Walter Cronkite and this, you can see that it’s kind of like, “Boy, this is really off the
wall. Does he really believe this?” I said, “You think this is off the wall and this is
something that did not happen and I’m going to tell you one more time. I want you to
listen. It makes sense because after all this happened, within a month the president resigned. It was said on TV.” I couldn’t find it written down because I just didn’t have the time and energy and didn’t care about looking it up, Johnson resigned because he said, “If they believe Walter Cronkite they’re not going to believe me.” So once he resigned it was downhill forever for the war. All American troops hear that our president resigned, North Vietnam hears that our top leader has resigned. You know we’re not going to win that sucker.

LC: Gary, did it pave the way, though, for President Nixon? It’s unclear, of course, because history that didn’t happen is a guessing game, but if President Johnson had run again, Mr. Nixon might not have been elected in 1968. If I’m gathering correctly what you’re saying, Nixon did a good job. He opened the way for the incursion into Cambodia. He took some of the bombing constraints off by 1972. He ordered the bombing of Hanoi. I’m not confronting what you’re saying, I’m just trying to open a new way of asking you about it and seeing whether you think that there’s any good that came out of it.

GM: Out of his resigning?

LC: Yeah, out of President Johnson stepping aside.

GM: Well, I think that there was some major good out of it because Nixon was elected. As far as saving guys’ lives it was too little, too late.

LC: Yeah, I hear you. I hear you.

GM: If you talk to any military guys, especially the POWs and the guys like me—and a lot of us guys there, Nixon’s our hero. People say, “How can you stand Nixon?” I say, “Let me tell you what he did.” First of all, he did what he was supposed to do. He went and bombed the hell out of North Vietnam which was what we were supposed to have done. Those guys were sitting up there and what he did, he basically bombed those guys back to the negotiation table and we ended the war. He bombed them and bombarding is what he called it. We lost a lot of people. Also, he opened it up and let the people in the Air Force set up their own bombing runs. In fact, from what I understand from Pete and some other people, they set up their own bombing runs at different altitudes and different directions. They didn’t do the McNamara thing, straight, high, and level, same route, same everything. They did their own bombing routes and
just bombed the living whatever out of them. Which, they were terrified of them. They
finally came back to the table and we supposedly negotiated a peace treaty, which they
violated the minute we left Dodge. So we all admire him for doing that. Also there was
intelligence reports coming back that we found out later that had been so long since we
had been up there and bombed anything that there was some input that there were some
people beginning to lose it. They thought that the war was really and truly over and they
were actually forgotten.

LC: Now, do you mean POWs?

GM: Yeah. So therefore he definitely wanted the battle or the bombing to go on
because they were losing it because they also were telling them, “The war’s over. The
bombing’s over. We won. You’re going to be here the rest of your life.” They were
beginning to believe it so he went north and bombed them.

LC: Gary, how did you feel when, and again, this might be something that you
don’t remember spontaneously, but when the POWs were released do you remember
that?

GM: Extreme anger. But let me go back to the other thing. He also let us go
with an incursion into Cambodia. I couldn’t understand why people were—of course, I
understood also the hippies were running the world now. I was just so happy that the
guys over there in Vietnam were finally getting a break for a few days because they just
bombed whatever they had over there and took out so much stuff. So the guys in
Vietnam had a few days’ rest. It’s just sad we couldn’t continue doing it. So yeah, I
think he did us some real good. But if he had stayed in office, I don’t know what might
have happened. We might have gone out with a better program. Now, what was your
next question?

LC: Well, I was just going to ask if you remembered about the POWs being
released.

GM: Yeah. I was angry at what I had heard about the way they had been treated
up there. I was angry about that and even more angry when I found out how badly they’d
been treated. Then when I heard about what Jane Fonda had done when she’d gone up
there the anger just ripped me in two and watching her on TV. I watched TV at the time.
Linda again just could’ve cared less. She was watching *Days of Our Lives* or something or going to the mall. Anyway, what’s your next question?

LC: Let me ask about time going on in 1975. Of course, the final evacuation of Americans from Saigon and then the overrunning, really, of Saigon by North Vietnamese troops. Certainly General Carey, who is a friend of yours, was deeply involved in making sure that as many Americans and South Vietnamese employees and supporters got out as possible. How did that hit you? I get that you were having some difficulties during this period. I just wonder if that contributed to things.

GM: Being the first of my family and the first of the Americans to lose a war at least in terms of not being like other American service people made me feel like a loser even though I knew that I don’t remember a battle of us ever losing. But not winning, it hurt. I can remember staying up at night and saying, “God, why did I have to be the generation that lost?” I always thought one time that if I ever went to war would I ever be of the generation that lost? Well, guess what? I was. It was a hard pill to swallow. I’ll tell you, even as recently—I’ve got to mention companies like BBC, the British Broadcasting Company—I’m doing so well now with the news. Like how I’m handling it so much better. I still don’t watch it, but I can just see it. I can just say, “Give me a break.” This year was the anniversary of the war being over. This British broadcaster was talking about the Americans and how long it took for us to learn how to lose a war and to handle it. Okay. You’re touching something right there, how long it took us to learn how to become accustomed to losing a war and how we’re becoming accustomed to do so. Maybe perhaps we could learn to now maybe open the doors for free trade and all that and really get along with our former enemies. Of course, the thing that pops in my mind is, “Sure thing, pal. Just as soon as they give us a very formal apology for the way they treated our POWs and secondly for the way they piecemealed our MIAs (missing in action) during the latter four years of the war with the remains that they found. They did that to the utmost in getting what they wanted because they knew by the relations that they found three more remains. I’m sure they had a bunch of remains up there that they were willing to let go if America would do whatever. That was basically blackmail. Of course the American families would say, “Do it. That may be my father. That may be my brother.” They used our MIAs for blackmail and that infuriates me. Also for another
country to look at us as saying we are just getting used to losing a war, that infuriates me.  
If I could talk to the guy I would say, “You guys in Britain have lost so damn many wars,  
maybe you had gotten used to it, but we haven’t got used to it because we haven’t lost  
any and we don’t know how to lose a war. We don’t know how to lose one graciously.  
We haven’t lost one.” I wonder why he said that. It was either out of just pure stupidity  
and ignorance or he was just taking a jab at us. I don’t know which one, but he got his bit  
in.

LC: But this is partly why, Gary, isn’t it, that you try to avoid watching the news  
anymore?

GM: Yeah. The only news I watch is Fox because they’re fair. In fact, if they  
had that bit on TV they’d probably get the guy on there and they’d nail him. They’d nail  
him to the wall as to why he’d do something like that. They’re constantly criticizing the  
other media, the big media for the way they—they’ll show things that they’ve said. They  
showed one that I saw on my cover page. I used to have a cover sheet when I was  
turning on my computer and it was CNN. They’d have the hotline of the day and one of  
them that they had one there—and this is when I got rid of it—it said “One hundred  
thousand civilians killed since the Bush war.” I mean, if that’s not a political statement  
and a slanderous statement by saying, “the Bush war,” and then saying, “one hundred  
thousand civilians,” which they don’t know and not telling you how many of those one  
hundred thousand was killed by their own terrorists like dropping a bomb when those  
twenty-six kids were standing around, how many of them were used in front of them  
when they crossed the street—

LC: Yeah, shields.

GM: Shields and not telling the full facts and grouping them together, they  
showed that. Of course, I ripped it off. I don’t have anything to do with CNN anymore.  
But that type of stuff, that is unbelievable. The liberal media is still there and alive.

LC: Well, let’s turn to something else for a minute, Gary. Let me ask you about  
the artwork that you do.

GM: Let’s go back to the beginning of where we get to artwork. Let’s go back to  
the beginning, if we can.

LC: Sure.
GM: We need to go back to what happened afterwards and this will lead into the art world. I think the art world is kind of the last thing, if you don’t mind.

LC: Okay.

GM: After I went to work for Denton and went to work for the phone company, I went back for those training schools, I went to work. I noticed when they introduced me to the ladies at the front of the office who handled all the residential accounts—this was after the My Lai massacre—that a lot of the ladies didn’t have much to do with me. They just said, “Hi, how are you?” I got the bag and I thought, “Man.” I called a friend of mine who was in plant department and he said, “You’ve been over there. What is this thing?” He said, “It’s this My Lai thing. They don’t know what you are. They don’t know whether or not you’re a killer or a massacre or what you are. They don’t know what to make of you. They’ve heard so much about you being baby bombers and all this other stuff. On top of that you’re a Marine. They don’t know what you are, whether to run from you or congratulate you. They’re just not going to have anything to do with you. Right now they don’t have anything to do with you.” So I found that somewhat disconcerting. I had a boss who was rather large, but he had a little man’s ego, as I call it, and he also didn’t like being upstaged by a Marine combat officer in his town because he was the big man on campus in that town. He was chamber president and he was everything. The other guy that I took the place of was easy going, laughed a lot, kidded around, had a good time, they’d chuckle a lot, told jokes, went to places. I come in and I’m pretty solemn. It’s, “Yes, sir, no, sir.” He’s not my boss necessarily. He’s the general manager. My boss, the one I was telling you about, he was back in another city. I report to him in marketing. He’d come over and if there was something he doesn’t like he can’t tell me what to do. He could just report to my sales manager. It got to the point several times where I almost got replaced because he got tired of hearing about me, but I defended myself. It was nice. I had his boss and the manager in my office, his boss became really—I don’t know how it happened. He became a big supporter of me and I never talked to him. He became a big supporter of me and he defended me in that office to my boss and to the general manager, this manager here, and saved me a lot of times. I didn’t know it ‘til years later. He died and I wished I could’ve thanked him. For some reason he defended me and said, “I’m not letting him go.” So I came back and things
just—I wasn’t comfortable with these long hairs coming back here. There were some
adjustments I had to make. I had to learn to let these guys—I didn’t like these long-
haired hippies coming in there. I didn’t want them coming in there, but I had to make the
adjustment to let them come in there, that worked the plant department. I just didn’t like
hippies, but I was told I had to deal with them. So I said, “Okay.” I’m trying to think of
all the instances that I can start telling you, but I’ll just tell you in general. There were
times that I would go out on campus. It became known that on North Texas in particular,
that I was in a yellow and white car and I had short hair. It wasn’t after long that people
knew me all over campus as a Marine.

LC: That was a bad thing?
GM: Yeah, I’d come back and find my car keyed. You know what that is?
LC: Yeah.
GM: Go up and down the side of your car. I’d go back and my boss would blame
me for it. It got to the point after a while that he wanted me to let my hair grow out so
that this wouldn’t happen. I’d also get along better with the people out there. I told him,
“I’m still in the Reserves and I can’t do that.” He said, “Well, I think you better consider
whether or not you want to stay in the Reserves.” I said, “Listen, the Marines come first.
This job is second. You need to understand that right now.” So he told my boss. That
was the first time. “We want to get rid of him because the Marines come first.” I don’t
know what my boss did or not. He never talked to me about it and nothing ever
happened through, that but I do know through this other source he went trickling off to
my boss. I do know after a period of time he screamed Chicken Little so many times he
lost his effectiveness. Every little thing he went running off to my boss. My father even
came up there one time after all this. Again, my father, being very protective, and I
didn’t know he was here—my cousin told me years later he came up and closed the doors
on this man. He was basically on a patriotic deal. “He served his country. He doesn’t
have to fight with this country any more being up here. If you harass him any more about
his service over there you’re going to have to deal with me.” He walked out the door.
Guess what, he called my boss. He said he’d been harassed by my father and that’s how
he left it. He didn’t tell what it was about or anything. He said he’d been threatened and
had been harassed and threatened by my father and also that it had been put up by me,
which made me look cheap. I didn’t know about it because my father wasn’t going to tell me about it. I had no way of knowing. But it came back to me later that that’s what was said, years later. So anyway, things like that and I was beginning to become very edgy to people by the way they treated me. There was one time I was talking to this professor and he just guessed and said, “You’ve been in Vietnam?” I said, “Yes, sir, I have.” He said, “Get out of my office.” I got out and I can remember I went out to my car and I just steamed. Here I am a Marine officer I felt like I was being treated as somebody and here’s a jerk office guy with long hair and probably the only thing he ever known in his life is bugs and he’s telling me to get out of his office. Well, about six weeks later another guy told me to do that and I in turn threw him out of his office. This was my first official affair that I got in trouble in. Fortunately, the guy who was our technical liaison with North Texas was a good guy, a country boy about my father’s age that I had met several times. We took an instant liking to each other. He hated hippies as much as I did. In fact, one time, I’ll never forget the story, there were some hippies that came in one time that were complaining about the fact that they were mowing the bushes too low in the park and they had no place to sleep. They asked him if they wanted John Matt to take care of the situation and he said, “I’ll take care of it.” So the next morning they came out there and all the bushes had been cut down.

LC: Wow.

GM: Anyway, that’s the kind of friend he was. When I threw him out I called John Matt and I said, “John Matt, this guy threw me out of his office because I was Marine and I in turn threw him out of his office. By the time we finish this call security will already be on its way down here because I’ve already called security. I’m sure they’re calling and I wanted to call them first and tell them I threw this guy out of his office. If you want to call them too”—so he did. He knew how to call security. He came on down, too, and he was laughing as he came in. He made a joke out of it to this guy. John Matt, when they knocked on the door it scared him. I opened the door and he said, “You’re going to let this guy in?” I said, “Sure, he can come on in. No problem.” Boy, the guy was just steaming and John Matt was laughing and the security—I think most of those guys were former service guys and knew what had happened so nothing happened except this guy, he flirted with fire and got his fingers burned. But anyway, he called the
phone company. He called my boss and technically I was in trouble because I was not
supposed to do things like that and I got my first warning. “You can’t do that.” Then
there were so many things. I’ll just try to remember—because again, the shock
treatments wiped out a lot. I remember one time I was in church, First Methodist Church
of Denton, which is just a good old standard Methodist church. This preacher was kind
of a hippie. He had a thing tied in the back of his head and he was young, but I liked
listening to him preach. He seemed like a nice guy. My wife’s in the choir. But during
the Lombardi raids he got up there and to make a long story short he called the pilots
murderers in the sermon. So I turned to the lady at my left and I said, “Did he say what I
think he said?” She said, “Yes, he did.” So I got up and four or five other people got up
and I pointed at Linda and I said, “You need to get up.” She didn’t move. As I walked
out I got his sermon and I went home and, boy, she didn’t say anything, but I could tell
she was mad. We had another discussion and I said, “How can you not be angry about
what he said? Your dad was in the Air Force?” She said, “I don’t care. You
embarrassed me.” I said, “Embarrassed you? After what he said? How come you never
support me? Why don’t you support me? I’m your husband. I’m the one that’s catching
hell on this thing and these other guys are catching hell.” She just didn’t care. She just
didn’t care. Like I said, she didn’t care about politics, she still didn’t care about politics.
It’s a day-to-day thing with her.

LC: You were just on a different wavelength.

GM: Yeah, she just lives in a different world. Unless somebody’s landing on the
nearest mall, communist troops, she might pick up a banner or a sign and protest. She
just—and I think what was so bad is that on top of that she just never helped me. I
helped her on a couple of occasions. That brings up another occasion is that my daughter
had ear problems and she went to this doctor. The guy made her wait three or four hours
out in the deal. It made me mad. He did it a second time and I went up and talked to him
and he wouldn’t let me talk to him. So I got a call one night from one of my Marine pals
who is a friend of mine. His wife was a nurse or worked in this office out there and he
said, “I want to tell you why he’s making you wait. He reviewed your file and she had
written down there in the form something about you were a former Marine something or
other in Vietnam. He didn’t like the war and so forth and this is his way of punishing you
through your daughter and your wife. You can’t tell anybody.’” I said, “I won’t.” So I waited until after hours the next day and I knew where his car was. He came out there and I said, “I’m Major Morris. I’m the one you don’t like and I’m the one who made my wife wait out here in the lobby and all that. You remember that?” “Yeah.” I said, “Why did you do that? It isn’t the war, is it?” He said no and I said, “Well, you’re a liar. Are you going to do anything about it?” He did nothing so I cold-cocked him in the nose and bloodied his nose. I said, “You don’t mess with my family like that, pal. If you want to get up and do something about it, you can, but you don’t mess with my family.” I didn’t tell Linda because she’d be furious. In fact, years later this thing came up and I was talking to her and this was about last year and I was talking to her on the phone. I said, “I’m going to ask you something. You remember the time that doctor made you wait? Did you ever know what he did it for, because he was punishing me through you guys? I went out there and told him, ‘You don’t treat my family that way,’ and that I knocked him down?’” She kind of gasped and I said, “What would you have done if I had told you that?” She said, “I would’ve gotten mad.” I said, “I figured you would. What would you have been mad about?” She said, “You would have just embarrassed me,” and I said, “That’s what I thought. You were truly useless.” Even after all that time her feelings were to be left alone, nobody bother her. I can remember a neighbor got under her skin one time over my daughter and her son. She’d come home crying about it and wanting me to do something about it and so forth and I said, “Well, I’d do it, but it seems like every time I do something for you or try to do something you say I embarrass you. It’s between you and her. You leave my daughter alone here and you go over there by yourself. I’m tired of getting embarrassed.” Anyway, that was another time I got in trouble and he reported it. They all reported it to the phone company. Of course, they couldn’t do anything. He reported to my boss and he couldn’t do anything. It was after hours. He reported it to the police and it was the first time I filed out assault charges. This was the first time I met the police chief. We actually became pretty good friends. It was actually the beginning of a friendship. Anyway, the pastor infuriated me. So the next morning I waited for him and hoped he’d show up before eight o’clock and he did. This was the second time I hit somebody. He came in there and I was fuming. I told him, I said, “Those guys are up there fighting a war and I’m who I am and I’m here to
defend them. I don’t like you and if you’ve got anything to say, say it before I hit you.”

He kind of looked at me and he said something. I broke his jaw and knocked him across
his desk and he fell down behind his chair and so forth. Before I got out to the car here
came the police and I’m back down at the jail. The chief walks in the jail and they
unlocked the door and said, “Come on out.” We had another cup of coffee. So he let me
go and sure enough I was fired again by the time I got to the office. Boy, he was gloating
this time. “This time you did it. You did it during hours. It’s 8:35. You’re fired.” I
said, “I hate to pop your bubble, pal, but it happened about 7:15.” He said, “Well, this
time you hit a preacher,” and I said, “Well, whatever.” So he reported it and so forth.
Then my boss came down and said, “What’d you do it for?” This was the next day and I
said, “I’ll just show you what he said. If you want to fire me, that’s fine, but I am going
to appeal it. I will go to the local newspaper with it,” because I knew that the editor of
the paper here, I had met him because he was an Iwo Jima vet, Marine type. I said, “I
will go to Mr.—I forgot his name. I said, “I will give him this piece of paper and I will
expose that bastard. I will expose that bastard for what he did. He’ll print the fact that
how many people over there might have had kids over there or relatives over there with
this.” So he took it and come to find out later he was filing the papers to do it. Word got
back to the area manager and he saw a copy of what was done. He killed it on the spot.
As time went by I was going on a two-week leave to Florida with the Marines.

LC: Because during this time you were in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves.

GM: Reserves, yeah. So I’d been taking my own two weeks to go on Reserve,
my own company time, my own military time so I could make company time money, too.
I could draw both pays. But this year I decided I was going to take company time off. So
I went in there and told them and they said, “No, you’re not.” I said, “Yes, I am.” “You
can’t do it.” “Yes, I can.” So I went and got the federal regs and said, “It’s a federal law
that I can take my time, I’ll get my pay. I won’t draw the pay, but I’ll get my same job
and position back when I come home. There it is, black and white.” Of course, now you
look at it and it’s almost ridiculous because everybody does it now, but at the time
nobody was being activated. So I went and about Saturday night at two o’clock in the
morning I got a call from Linda. She said that she got a call late that night from one of
the ladies in the front office who had gotten word from one of my plant guys. My plant
guys turned out to be some of my best pals because by this time we had a manager that he
had hired himself who was an alcoholic and a real jerk. I mean, he was a jerk. I once
invited him to meet me out in the middle of the football field at Fouts Field just him and
me. He was an older guy but he was a—so anyway, he—no, this was a later case. That
was a later case. She learned from somebody in the office that he was bragging to his
secretary. His secretary was out in the open where the ladies were and that he was going
to pitch me this time. He was going to transfer me to Sherman and still be in good with
the law because I’d get the same job, same money, same position. When she heard it she
called Linda and she called me. So the next morning I walked out. We always carried a
legal officer with us. We never did use them, but just in case. I said, “Hey, I best put you
to work,” and so I told him. So he called the Marines and they put him in touch with the
Navy and next thing I know I’m talking to the Navy folks in Washington because this
was such an unusual case. I can remember this admiral coming on and he said, “You
want to tell me this thing one more time because I don’t really believe it.” I told him, I
said, “Yeah, this guy doesn’t like me. He doesn’t want anything to do with me, he
doesn’t like the Marines, doesn’t like the war. He’s transferring me.” He says, “Give me
this guy’s number.” I gave it to him. He said, “I want his home number.” So he called
him at two o’clock in the morning on a Sunday morning and just harassed the hell out of
him. He told me what it was. He told him, “This is Admiral So-and-so and I’m calling
from the Navy Department in Washington. I heard what you’re doing. Just wanted to let
you know you’re in violation of the law. If you commence to do this by the time Major
Morris comes back to work Monday morning you will be fined $50,000, General
Telephone will be fined $500,000 and their doors will be closed. Goodnight Mr. So-and-
so.” He hung up the phone, didn’t give him a return number or anything and that was in
the middle of the night. I thought that was great because the guy probably went back to
sleep and the next morning said, “Did I dream that?” I’ve done that before. “Did that
really happen or not?”

LC: Gary, let’s take a break there for a minute. Go ahead.

GM: Well, this went on with the school and the office and
so forth for about six or seven years. As time was going along the last two years,
especially the last year, I was reaching a point to where I was coming in and I wasn’t—I
was getting depressed. I was watching a blank TV. I didn’t really much care about anything. One day instead of walking in the offices, there was a psychiatrist’s office out front and I just walked in to see her. We didn’t have much contact because shortly after that I did crash. I do know I did sit down and try to talk to my wife one time. It didn’t work, but I did talk her into going to see the doctor. The doctor did tell her to not—PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) really wasn’t known at the time. She did tell her, I learned later, that she was not to corner me, which was a very stupid statement because I have never touched a woman in my life. I never touched Linda in my life. All I know is she never once gave me any support, helped me at all. She’s probably I guess maybe like others. I never frightened her, but I just know she never carried out the vows of her marriage. I am not bitter anymore. I’m just stating the facts.

LC: How long were you two—I mean I consider that you must be divorced now.

GM: Yeah, we were married about ten years and I never received one ounce of support from her like, “Hey dear, let’s go in there and sit down and I’ll be with you. I’ll help you all the way.” Nothing. None of that at all. So finally one night the girls were just babies, three years old and five years old.

LC: Your daughters?

GM: Yeah. What’s so funny is that her daddy had been suffering for quite some time from depression so she knew what depression was.

LC: Linda’s father had that.

GM: Her father. Then so finally one morning I woke up and realized that in the middle of the night she had abandoned me. She had taken my two girls in the middle of the night and abandoned me to her mother’s. My girls told me years later that she left because she was afraid that I was going to hurt her and her girls. Her doctor told her not to corner me. I tried to explain to them and I’m going to here now that it was not the truth because I spent—well, immediately I crashed and was found walking around either the den or walking around the cul-de-sac in la-la land and was immediately put into the Fort Worth Hospital and was immediately given shock treatments. The doctor had tried numerous times to get her to tell him what the problem was. She refused to talk to him at all to give any kind of indication of what was going on. Later on, after the shock
treatments were done I was out. Then I went into another hospital after I was out for a
while. I couldn’t even go to the barbershop by myself.

LC: Gary, were you able to talk to the doctor yourself or do you not remember?
GM: No, I don’t remember. I just don’t remember. I don’t even remember the
shock treatments. I just know I don’t remember anything. In fact, it locked up my
memory even past—we had gone to New Orleans a year before with the girls on
vacation. I didn’t even remember that. Then I don’t even remember a long time past
that.

LC: Did they tell you—Gary, this is your personal information so it’s up to you,
of course, whether you answer or not. I’m just trying to be clear as to what happened.
Did they tell you what was wrong with you? Did they give you a diagnosis?
GM: No. All they had down there—as I look back and see all the stuff I’ve got
and I’ve got all the medical records is all they have down there is his wife left him.
That’s all. That’s all they had and nothing from her.

LC: No information?
GM: Nothing, nothing.
LC: That’s very sad.
GM: Nothing, which makes me infuriated about her. She left a sunken ship, a
dying ship.

LC: Yes, sir.
GM: Which is equivalent to leaving a guy in a wartime situation. Even today she
has no comprehension of what that means.

LC: Do you have any contact with her?
GM: Oh, I have to. I have a granddaughter and my daughter. If I mention it to
her she wouldn’t have anything—she’s a weird cat.

LC: Yeah, I think that’s becoming clear.
GM: She teaches school, but she is one of the most unemotional people I have
ever met. Cold, I guess, is the word I would have to say.

LC: Yes, sir.
GM: So anyway, that kills the argument about me hurting anybody. She just
didn’t want anything to do with me. In fact, she married I think within six months which
is always—a good friend of mine who was a very good friend of mine in Denton who
said he had strong belief that she had something else going on that he had indications that
she was, but I can’t prove that. But she was married I think within a very short time after
that.

LC: Are they still together?
GM: No, he was found stealing money out of her teacher’s fund.
LC: That was the end of that.
GM: That was the end of that. Now she lives with her mother. So I just know
that she never once helped me and she refused to help. Then when I went down to the
hospital the doctor had nothing to work on and he was trying—this time I remember the
doctor and I remember a lot of the hospital stay. It was after the shock treatments and all
that. Dr. Tripp, he kept trying to figure out what was wrong. He finally made me call
and beg her, beg her to tell him what was wrong. It was so bad that her husband came on
the line and told me that he wanted to talk to my doctor. He talked to my doctor. This is
probably the lowest point in my life. I’m talking to my wife who I still loved. He told
him that she had no information to give and do not bother them again. I was so
embarrassed. From that point on there was nothing much you should use for clinical
depression other than lithium and some other drugs. I was so bad off that I would wet the
bed. I would stay in bed for days. It took a major initiative to get me out of the bed to
walk a few paces. This is the time when insurance would allow you to stay in the
hospital and the phone company let me stay. I think they might have got a possible, even
then, a possible feeling that they could have their butts sued off for what had been going
on. Maybe then, I don’t know. I would happen now.

LC: But your insurance coverage was still available?
GM: Yeah, it was still available.
LC: What about the VA (Veteran’s Administration)?
GM: I didn’t go to the VA.
LC: They weren’t involved, then?
GM: We didn’t know what post-traumatic syndrome was. I didn’t even think
about that. They were treating me and I had a good doctor. All I can remember asking
him “When I was going to get my drive back, when am I going to get my drive back?”
So I can remember I was in the hospital two or three times in the next three years. The last time I was in I came out, we made an agreement with the phone company that I would not go back to work and they would give me an additional three months off. I would find my own work. I can remember that I was in such depression I never once considered suicide because of my girls. I will tell you this. There were many, many a night that I wish I would go to sleep and never wake up. I remember that the depression—and I’ve talked to groups about depression. They say, “What is depression about?” I’ll say, “The only way I can possibly describe it it’s a nightmare while you’re awake. Nightmares at night are bad, but there’s a good side to that is that you wake up and say, ‘Thank God I woke up.’” In the daytime you can’t wait until you go to sleep. If you can’t go to sleep you take sleeping pills and it is, to me, I have not had other pains like it. It’s the most painful pain I’ve ever had. You can’t roll. You can’t get into position. There’s nothing you can do. You can’t walk. You can’t do anything. You just have to sit there and you have to sit there and take it and pray to God, “Please take this thing out of me. Whatever it is, get this thing out of me. I can’t take it. I can’t take it.” Well, after a period of time I guess the lithium took its effect after a few years. Anyway, it was hell. I dealt with depression all the way up until about two years ago, at which time we finally found the right medication, a combination of medications that worked.

LC: That takes a lot of time and patience on the part of the doctor.

GM: Well, it took a lot of other things.

LC: What else?

GM: I’m bouncing ahead here, but let me go ahead and finish that part of it.

LC: That’s okay. Sure.

GM: What happened is one day I’m walking along and I just kind of started feeling pretty good after thirty-some-odd years. It wasn’t like a bulb of light came on or all that. I was just feeling pretty good and for some reason I’d always felt—my basic good feeling when I was depressed was I would just go to the store and come home and do this or do that. This time I felt pretty good to the point I think, “I’m going to out and trim the trees.” It didn’t dawn on me. My drawing was pretty much something I had done years earlier and had not ever wanted to do anymore. So I went to bed and the next morning I woke up. It was the first time I heard birds chirping out on the trees. I said, “I
“I don’t have birds out there.” I went out and looked and I felt pretty good. So I went in and started drawing and it still hadn’t dawned on me. So then I went to the store and I was beginning to see things that I hadn’t seen before and observe things I hadn’t seen before. I went in there and talked to the guy, the clerk, about something. I was actually listening to this guy and what he was talking about. I said, “My God, I’m well. I am normal. I am normal.” I called my doctor and told him. I said, “I’m well. I can’t believe it. I’m well.” He said, “Well, the last thing we’re going to need, Gary, I saw some stages I think I saw you coming out of that were kind of like the last stages. I think we’ve found the right medication, but we’re not for sure. We may have to increase or decrease over a period of time and you’ve got to stay in touch with me. If you fall back we may have to increase” or whatever. I did and had a fallback. But the big deal was my concentration was back. I could remember entire phone numbers now where I used to could remember only the 9-7-2 and the first three digits if I was lucky. I had for years—I’m getting way ahead of myself so you’ve got to take me back now.

LC: That’s okay. All right, I will.

GM: I was able to go out and carry on a conversation with somebody. I was probably, my doctor says, the greatest actor of all times. He said, “We used to come out in the lobby and we’d see you with your head between your knees and we’d say, ‘Gary, come on in,’ and you’d pop right up and you’d come over and say, ‘Hi, Doc. How are you doing? I’ve got a funny story to tell you.’ You’d come on in and you’d start talking and we’d be talking around and you’d be fine. We couldn’t figure out what the hell’s the matter with you? Why you were out there and how come you’re doing here? Now we know what the deal is, is that you had this automatic response of a cover-up of your depression.” All during this time since I had in my period of recovery—and I’m going to go back and touch on something and tell you when I started recovery—a period of recovery started at ground zero when I was feeling okay. My father had retired from the advertising business and was just doing some engraving. God save my father. What a man. He fired up his business after he had retired for me. I can remember starting up. We had advertising specialties, pens, pencils, calendars, and so forth. He had a very good business at one time. I remember starting off at MacArthur Road, parking my car, and having a pencil catalog in my pocket. I went door-to-door selling pencils, selling pencils.
Somewhere along the line, the fifth or sixth door somewhere, I sold some lady five hundred pencils with her name on it. It was just like somebody shot me with some adrenaline. The next two or three doors I turned into the old salesman I was because at GTE (General Telephone & Electronics) I was the salesman of the year. I mean I was your best. I was your best. Despite all the terrible stuff I was going through I was their best salesman.

LC: It just started coming back to you.

GM: It started coming back and it came back. Then the business started growing and then I started doing stuff, joining the chamber and the Heritage Society. Since that time I have got more damn awards in here than you know what to do with from the Rotary Club to the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotarian of the Year to the Ambassador of the Year twice for the Chamber of Commerce to the Irving Parks and Recreation to the Irving schools Golden Apple award of the year and God knows what all I’ve got in here, the City of Irving High Spirited Citizen Award. I’ve got three boxes full of awards out here and I did that after I had recovered. All during this time I was putting on this acting job. Now I had some ups and downs, some terrible ups and downs.

LC: I’m sure. I believe it.

GM: But I hid them. What I would do, I would go up and talk to people and say, “Yeah, how are you doing, George? Good to see you,” and we’d talk and I’d talk and so forth. I could walk out the door and you’d say, “What did you talk about?” “I don’t know. Haven’t the foggiest idea.” I would go places. I couldn’t remember where I was going. I’d go in the grocery shop and I’d take my list. Sometimes I’d forget my list. Then sometimes I’d forget my billfold and it was terrible. That’s the way it went for years and years and years, but I was a great actor. I’ve got to go back to one other thing. One of the most terrible parts of my life was after I got out or while I was—during the hospital stay, and this is what I’m probably the most proud of myself of, is that I had to go over and keep my visits every two weeks with my daughters on weekends and pick them up while she was living with this man, who I still loved, and tremendous anger and jealousy.

LC: You still loved her?

GM: Now?
LC: No, then. You still loved her?

GM: Yeah. Hell, she hadn’t been gone that long. I mean, she’s sleeping with another man. I’m having to go over there and knock on the door. She comes to the door and my wife is coming to the door and tells me to be sure and have them back. This is heartbreaking. This is killing me. It was so bad I couldn’t drive or come back driving because I was crying all the time. I couldn’t drive because of the tears in my eyes. I would still—and before I would go, like a Thursday or Wednesday of that weekend that I had to go pick them up, I was just miserable. I was terrible because I hated those weekends, but I went and I picked them up. During those weekends, a lot of those times my father and mother would entertain them and I would go to bed because I was so terribly sick. Headaches and just sick.

LC: But your parents backed you up?

GM: Yeah. My friends would entertain them in another room. By the time I’d get calm I’d have to take them home. I’d come back and I’d cry and I’d cry. I was depressed and, oh, that was horrible. That went on for months and months and months. It was terrible. So anyway, all that went along and meanwhile I don’t know what happened for about a year or so. By the way, it took me a year to learn how to run between two goalposts. Now here’s the guy that had the NAIA record for stolen bases. I could almost run to first base as fast as Mickey Mantle, true. I mean, I could run. I loved to run. Now I’m talking about I couldn’t get my mind in synch with my legs and my body because there was a chemical disorder. That’s what it is, it’s a chemical disorder.

LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

GM: I’m talking about the goal post on the same side of the field, twelve feet a part. I slowly worked up to that and slowly learned how to walk fast between lines, worked up to jogging on the football field and eventually learned how to run and eventually learned how to run. During this time, at the first of this when I went down I still continued to go to the Reserves. My buddies covered me in the Reserves. When I went to the Reserves I was in no shape. I was so drugged up from the hospital. My shoes were untied. My shirt was untied. I was unshaven. So my buddies would report me in to my CO. They’d say I was in and on a job. They would take me over to Q and at first they’d just tell me to lay down. One day they found me walking back over toward the air
wing. They took me back over and locked me up. They had the key and locked me up
and told the BOQ (bachelor officer’s quarters) director to not let me out of there under
any circumstances. They left me food and water in there for two days. They’d make up
excuses and so forth. Anyway, somehow the CO found out about it. He wrote me up a
bad fitness report and then the next CO wrote me up as a bad fitness report. Well, two
bad fitness reports and you’re out of the Marine Corps. So the next horrendous thing that
happened to me is I’m back in the hospital. I have no family. I have no job. I don’t have
my Marine Corps. That was probably I guess the next lowest point in my life.

LC: What year was that? Do you know, Gary?

GM: About 1979. I don’t have anything and I’ve got the depression. I just think,
“Why? What did I do to deserve this?”

LC: But you later were able to come back into the Reserves, is that right?

GM: Well, it took a year and a half of fighting. I mean hard work and paper. It
took about fourteen inches of paperwork. We don’t have time to talk about it, but I had
to start at the bottom. I did it all myself. I basically—unless you want to know how I did
it.

LC: Well, go ahead and tell me. How did you do it?

GM: Well, I first had to go back and I talked to my two men who wrote the bad
fitness reports. I said, “If I were able to prove to you that I was sick and prove to you that
I should not have been on duty, would you have written those fitness reports?” They
said, “No, we wouldn’t have written them.” So I went back and took the letters from my
doctor in the hospital and took them to the medical doctor there at the Navy Dallas and
showed it to him and he said, “You shouldn’t have been on duty.” “Thank you very
much. Write me a letter.” I took them to the COs and they wrote a letter and said, “After
we see here, we would not have written these reports.” One doctor said, “After I know
him now, he should not be out, but now I think he should be promoted.” But one of them
was a former Blue Angel. So anyway, then I took those two letters and other material
and made up a book. You know the Board of Correctional Review?

LC: Yes, sir.

GM: Okay. I had that package. I went to D.C. and met with the board. I went
beforehand, carried that thing with me and presented it to him and went over it with him
as to what was happening and what happened and that I would like to present it to the board as to what happened. It took a year and a half of paperwork flying back and forth and denial of this and that. Finally one morning I got a call about six o’clock in the morning from the XO (executive officer) here. He says he knew what was going on and so forth. “Gary, congratulations. You’re a Marine again.” I cried. I hung up the phone and I cried. I mean by God, I was a Marine again. All during this time I also was attending meetings. I was telling them I was continuing to go to drills for no money and that helped.

LC: Just to sort of round it out, Gary, you retired from the Marine Reserves then in 1999, is that right?

GM: Yeah.

LC: As a lieutenant colonel.

GM: Well, see, after I got back in I even got promoted to lieutenant colonel.

LC: Yes, sir.

GM: So I was still doing good, but I wasn’t well. All along, more and more drugs are being made. More and more meds have been coming along. So it was taking a business—and meanwhile, after that I was single and I was doing pretty good. Then I got remarried and then I went back downhill because the marriage was terrible. I was living with a woman who was just terrible to live with. She had a boy who like to burn flags. He was gay. He was obnoxious. He knew everything there was to know. He liked to tell me what to do. He knew everything there was to do and basically she cared more for her son than she did me. Every time we’d go to the hospital with her he would take over. I finally told him one day, I said, “I signed the papers. I am now in charge of her. You are second. You understand that? Don’t be going to the doctors and don’t be taking over.” I lived with her only because of the fact that she was basically a wino. She was abusive and we lived like roommates. It was terrible living conditions I was in. Terrible. The only reason I lived with her was for two reasons. First, because I wasn’t going to do to her what my first wife did to me. I was going to try to help her. That was a mistake. Number two, I was terrified of getting a divorce because I didn’t know if I’d fall apart again. Finally my doctor said, “I’ll tell you this. Be aware that something will happen and when it does happen you jump on it and you do it. You get out and then you stay
out.” Well, something did happen and I was at the hospital. She got sick and I was up
there for two days. Then I went home one night to take a rest. I told the boy to come up
there and stay with her. I called up there the next morning and I said, “You can tell Eric
to go home. I’m on my way up.” She says, “Oh, please. Give me a break.” God, that
was it.

LC: That was the end of that.

GM: That was it. When she came home I said, “You people are out of here.
Take your flag burner and get out of here.” The boy said something to me and I almost,
almost hit him. I told her, “If you don’t get this boy out of this house right now I’m
going to hurt him bad.” He already knew. He was already scared of me. So they left.
Things started getting better and that’s when we found the meds and the doctor said, “It’s
not just the meds that helped you, but you have had for years. You might’ve gotten well
and better but for the last ten years you’ve had some broken bridges in front of you that
needed to be repaired that have kept these medicines from working. When you got out of
this marriage then these bridges were fixed and somehow these medicines, in his opinion,
were able to work. Now you don’t have to play act anymore. You concentration is good.
You’re fine. You’re getting along well.” I’m doing well. The one thing I miss is
probably the relationship with a female. Now, the artwork really came in many years
ago. It just kind of came in by strain. It was during a two-weeker down in Florida. It
was a bad two weeks. We had a terrible mission to run. We were looking for a missing
girl. We had F-8s and we were running red-eyed missions and heat seeking trying to find
her. We were working all hours. One of our Marines was paralyzed from the neck down
on a wreck that he come down there driving his car down and we had to deal with that.
One night I was in the club and there was this huge mural on the wall. It had three A-4s
doing a tac mission at night and it reminded me of the time when I was there. I said,
‘I’ve got to have that.’ So I started sketching it on a couple of beer napkins.

LC: So you started sketching.

GM: Yeah. I sketched them out pretty good so I took it back to Denton and I
took it to this lady. She said, “That’s not bad. Why don’t you do it yourself?” I said, “I
can’t do it.” She said, “Yeah, you can.” So we started working in oils and, sure enough,
I did it with a lot of help. She did about half of it for me to do it and I still have it here. I
show it at all my shows. It’s my first and last oil. Then I met another lady who
introduced me to Prisma pencils, Prisma colored pencils, which I’ve been at ever since. I
still do straight pencil. I like straight pencil, too. Now I’m going into straight pencils of
the same color. This is going to be really fun. I haven’t started it yet. I will be later on,
but you do straight pencil, black and white, but how you make the different shadings is
that you use not so heavy—there’s about three different pencil color strengths that you
can use for shading. Well, with the Prisma colors there’s about two or three different
colors you can use and one’s a gray. It has six different strengths. So I can do that gray
on a different type of matte board and I saw one and it’s gorgeous. It’s great. So
anyway, I started doing Prisma colors and never had a lesson. I just learned like building
a house.

LC: Who are some of the people that you’ve either given your artwork to or have
requested it or who have it now in their collection?

GM: Well, I give most of my stuff away. Most of them I’ve given the prints
away and I’ve kept the originals for my kids. But the people that have got them have
been two Texas governors, as you know, the two commandants. I’ve got one former
Secretary of the Navy. Troy’s got some, Aikman.

LC: Troy Aikman of the Dallas Cowboys.

GM: Yeah.

LC: I’m just clarifying Troy Aikman.

GM: I’ve got numerous baseball players that I have not only done that I have
done of and for. It’s a thrill because I love the game of baseball. Duke Snider and Carl
Erskine, two Hall of Famers for the Dodgers. I’ve done Goose Gossage of the Yankees,
Bobby Richardson of the Yankees, I’ve done one of Roger Maris for the Roger Maris
family. I got a letter from his wife that Bob Richardson said that they wanted to open up
a museum up in North Dakota and they were looking for paintings. So I did one for
them. One is hanging in the museum at Parris Island. One I’ve got, as soon as I finish
this one it’s going MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot). One was hanging in the Dallas
Museum of Natural History. Gosh, I did one for Rusty Greer for the Rangers. I did one
of Dick Bosman, the former pitching coach for the Rangers. I’m sitting here looking
around the room. I’ve done musical instruments that are in some clubs.
LC: Gary, how important is the artwork now to you?

GM: It’s become major and I’ll tell you why. Because there’s a creative side in there that is as important to me as going to the bathroom because I want to do it. If I don’t do it, especially if I’ve got something to do like this one going to California and I need to do it I’ll get down and I may even reach a point to where I may have trouble going in there and starting. I mean getting up out of the chair and doing it. Once I have gone in there and done something for two or three hours and once I sit down I’ll sit there for two or three hours, maybe four hours, working on something and doing it. Unless I reach a point where absolutely I can’t deal with it anymore, I’ll generally go to a point where I’ll say, “Hey, I’ve done more than what I thought,’ or reached the point where I thought I wanted to go for today. Then I’ll come away and I’ll feel pretty good.

LC: Yes, sir.

GM: I’ll really feel good. I feel like I have done what I needed to do with my artwork for the day. So I need to do it and just like today, we finish talking here, I’ll rest up a while. Then, by God, I better go and do about three or four hour’s work because if I don’t, if I don’t, I’ll starting getting down at myself. I don’t know if you know what the classic definition of depression is. Do you know?

LC: No, I do not.

GM: It’s anger turned inward. From that it leads to chemical disorders and lots of other things. So I have had lots of that. A lot of that has been because I have gotten mad at myself because I have sat on my butt knowing that there’s artwork in there to be done, I’m not getting any younger, I need to do some stuff that I need to leave for my kids and I don’t do it. So every night I go to bed angry. The next morning I say, “Today I want to do it.” As the day goes along, I get angry, and I get that much more depressed. I will reach a point where I might end up in the hospital. That’s because I get my hours turned around. I can’t sleep. I’ve got my days mixed up and I’m back in the hospital. I also got to mention during the second marriage, when I was going to the hospitals, I had a wife that never came to see me. She never even went. I’m talking about if I got sick. I’m not just talking about emotionally. She never showed up. She just wouldn’t go with me. She tried to get my daughters to go, take me and she got mad. She didn’t understand why my daughters wouldn’t go. My daughters wouldn’t go because they thought that
was her job. So that was that type of relationship. So with the artwork, it’s important.

Now I want to get mad at myself for not doing it because I think of so many people, people who live across the street and next door or whatever who live and die. They leave a good name and grandfather so-and-so okay. You leave a tombstone and they’re slowly forgotten. Well, I’m fortunate enough that I’m leaving some artwork that hopefully my kids will pass on down the line, down the line, down the line a long way that I can leave. I’m having the opportunity to leave something other than a tombstone. I get mad at myself because I don’t do more for them to keep. That’s what makes me angry. So having this ability or talent or whatever you want to call it, leaving this stuff for them and not doing it is almost anti-religious, as my pastor told me one time. He said, “God created this thing for you to do and you’re not doing it. He’s not going to be a happy camper because He knows you’re giving it away, your prints. You’re making people happy with it. It’s not just for your family, but you’re making people happy with it. Get excited about it. If you don’t do it you’re not doing what you’re supposed to be doing.”

Since I’m not married I need something, I need this creativity for some reason, to go in there and make something and make this thing work.

LC: Well, I think you’ve explained it very, very clearly, Gary.

GM: So yes, I would be honored to have something in your place or two things in your place to have you show forever. I’ll give you probably both of them and you can make the decision of which one you want to hang up to deal with, either the eagle or the Iraqi. You can do both.

LC: Well, Gary, one of the things that you have done that will last beyond both of us is you’ve given your time to doing an oral history interview and discussing your experiences in Vietnam.

GM: Well, see, the kids can go—I might have great-great-grandkids that go to Texas Tech. They’ll go through the museum and say, “There’s my daddy’s painting.”

LC: Yes, sir.

GM: Other parents that live around me can’t go to Texas Tech and say, “There’s something that my dad’s done.” Nothing. I’m able to do that.

LC: It’s a special thing, both the painting and the interview. Gary, I want to thank you for taking the time to do the oral history interview with us today. I just
appreciate the time that you spent and want to thank you for your service to the country
as well as for what you’re doing now, feeling healthier and better about yourself and
doing the artwork that you’ve done. It’s an important thing and it honors the service of
other veterans as well.

GM: Well, I would just like to say finally that I thank you guys for having the
place to do something like this because as I told a person the other night, I said, “You
know, I can finally go to bed and know that this story—and I haven’t even talked about
you to the press—other than the fact that I know that the press, i.e. Walter Cronkite, and
all the stories that they do and don’t tell and there’s one story I didn’t tell that was
important that they don’t tell cost us a war. Also the lack of support from your spouse,
those two things are now on print for people to understand how important those two
things can play in a war and in a person’s life are now on paper. They’re now
somewhere. I don’t have to worry about writing it up and putting it somewhere to give to
my kids somewhere to read later. It’s somewhere, not only for them but for other people
to read. I can die tomorrow and know that it’s somewhere and that is so neat and that is
only because of you guys.

LC: Well, it’s an honor, sir.