

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Project

Air Force Experience

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STEPHEN MATESEVAC

Interviewed

by

Jeffery Collier

on

June 6, 1975

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INTERVIEWEE: STEPHEN MATESEVAC

INTERVIEWER: Jeffery Collier

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morale

DATE: June 6, 1975

C: This is Jeffery Collier. I'm with the Oral History Program at Youngstown State University working on the Vietnam project. Today I'm sitting with Stephen Matesevac who is presently a student at Youngstown State University. We're in Kilcawley Student Center, and the date today is June 6, 1975 and the time is 9:35 a.m.

Steve, tell us a brief history of yourself, where you were born, where you went to high school, your branch of the service that you were in, what you're doing presently.

M: I was born in Youngstown on June 30, 1949. I lived in Youngstown all my life except for the military. I attended parochial grade school, Sts. Peter and Paul. Then I went on to public high school, North High School. From there I was going to give college a try so I tried it. I went for a quarter. I didn't like it. I wasn't ready for it.

C: Did you go to Youngstown at that time?

M: Yes, I went to Youngstown. I knew I wouldn't be able to make it so I quit and went down to check into the services, the Air Force specifically. There was a waiting list so I got a job at Sheet & Tube until I was called in. Then from there I went in. I spent four years around the world. I got out in April of 1972 and I worked at Sheet & Tube again for about four or five months. I started college again, initially went into engineering but decided that wasn't for me and then switched to accounting later on. That's where I am now and I'm a senior.

As far as work, I worked part-time or full-time depending if it's summer or during the year, mainly at the Penney's. I sold shoes for about a year and a half and then I sold men's clothing, which I liked. But then I had an opportunity to get into the internship program here at the university. It's with the political science department and it's concerned with urban development. At the moment I am working for Metropolitan Housing. It deals with low rent housing for the elderly and people who don't make enough money to afford apartments somewhere else.

C: You're a senior and you will be graduating?

M: It should be March of 1976 or possibly June. It depends on courses and how things go along, but that's the anticipated date.

C: When did you graduate from high school?

M: I graduated in 1967 from North High School here in Youngstown.

C: At that time after you graduated and you had tried college, you stated that you didn't like school and you were going into the service. Was there any reason why you chose the Air Force?

M: While I was in college for that short period I got into ROTC. I didn't particularly care how things were run there and I couldn't see going over, if I ever had to go overseas, being under people who were trained in the way they were. I can't go into real specifics, but I didn't feel the leadership was there. I knew the Air Force lived a little better too and I would be trained in a field that I liked. It was four years compared to two but I felt that it was advantageous for me.

C: When you went down to enlist in the Air Force then, what did you put down as your military occupation that you wanted to do?

M: I asked for electronics, but I didn't get it. They said I would. I had a field that dealt a little bit with electronics or electricity. The title they gave me was aerospace ground equipment repairman, which was a fancy name for glorified grease monkey. It was a good field, though, I can't complain about that. I worked on engines from one cylinder engines up to turbines and I worked on hydrolic systems, air conditioning, heating, air compressors that had pressures from 100 pounds PSI up to 3,200 pounds PSI, various types of electrical equipment: alternators, generators. All our units that we used were used to start and maintain aircrafts like the MB-3. It was a generator set. It had ac/dc power

on it. They would hook it up to the aircraft when they wanted to do repairs so they wouldn't have to use the generators on the plane itself.

C: When you went into the service, what was the date that you went, into the Air Force?

M: April 28, 1968.

C: At that time where did you go for your basic training? Could you give us a rundown where you went for each additional training section?

M: From Youngstown I went to Cleveland where I waited around for a little bit. Then they called me off down to San Antonio. I didn't particularly care for it down there. The first morning I just remembered that I asked myself what I had gotten myself into. It wasn't what I expected at all.

C: Why was that?

M: We got in down there late, about 2:00 in the morning. Then they just assigned us a bunk and we went to sleep. At 5:00 three guys from out of state came in, picked one guy's bed up and dropped it. They started yelling. Then they started making us run in place. They said, "Okay, get dressed you guys." So we got dressed. They said, "You're too slow." It was five or six times that we had to dress and undress. I said, "Oh my God, what is this?"

That night too before I went to bed. . . I don't know if you ever heard of short sheeting the bed. Anyhow, they bring the sheet up under so you can't stick your feet all the way down. I was so scared that I put my feet through it. There had to be a little tear in that too because I'm not that strong that I could just bust the sheet open like that.

Anyhow, basic was six weeks. It was fun. Some of the things they wanted us to do weren't bad, I didn't think. In a sense too I thought it was like a Boy Scout camp as far as the physical training. It wasn't really that rough but I found out that some people couldn't hack that little bit. For instance, this one guy in our barracks--I don't know what caused him to do it--but he slit his wrists twice on his arm. They found him, luckily, before he died. They rushed him to the hospital. For that little bit of pressure, you don't want people like that working with you--I don't care what kind of job, whether it be civilian or in the military. It could cause a problem somewhere along the line.

I just couldn't believe that people couldn't take that kind

of pressure. There were a couple of other guys in other barracks. One tried jumping out of the second floor window with the window shut. I really don't know. This was all hearsay about this one. I heard somebody caught him before he went, but then I heard he went through. That's too ambiguous; I really couldn't say for sure on that.

The six weeks of basic seemed like a long time, just for the fact that I didn't get to call home or write, call for about two or three weeks. This was really the first time I had been away for such an extended period of time. That bothered me a little bit.

I think I had some extra duty one time because they found something wrong with my bunk. I don't even remember. I finally did get to phone home, I felt a little better then. Things went a little better throughout the rest of the time I was there. I had KP about five, six times, which I didn't care for either.

Anyhow, I got out of basic. They gave us a stripe which meant absolutely nothing except for pay. They sent me up to Illinois, Chanute Air Force Base up there. They told me about the last week I was there where I was going, myself and the rest of the guys. They split us up between Michigan and Mississippi.

- C: Were most of the people that you were in with going into the same MOS as you were?
- M: Well, when we left there were a group of flights, which they called the Air Force subdivision down at the base. It was a group of about forty-nine, fifty men. Anyhow, I couldn't give you any number of how many of us were being shipped out at the time. There were about twenty to thirty of us going up to Chanute for that specific purpose in aerospace ground equipment. Some other guys were going up there too for a different training though, Vietnam jet mechanics or whatever. It wasn't what I wanted either but when I got there it wasn't too bad.

I thought the training up there too was. . . First of all, before I get to that, they sent us up by train and I lucked out; I got into a coach, a little apartment there with myself and another guy. We didn't mind it too much. A lot of the other people had to sit in the chairs and sleep that way for a good two, two and a half days, around that time period.

We got up there and they shoved us around some more. We finally got into the barracks. They put us into what they called PAT's barracks. What the word means, I don't know. It's just that we were new and we would just wait for assign-

ments. They put, supposedly, upperclassmen--in that sense relating to college: people who had been there for a long time--put them in charge.

They made us do some ridiculous things that I didn't go along with. They liked to pull fire drills at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. We went for it. When you ran out for fire drills you had to run along a tile and a half by the wall so you wouldn't mess up the wax job on the floor. I just said, "This is ridiculous. If I'm ever placed in charge, I'll do away with all that." Putting one latrine off limits, you could only use one because they are too hard to clean. When there are fifty guys in a barracks, I thought that was totally ridiculous.

Anyhow, they pulled fire drills. One night one kid happened to slip on the way out and hurt his knee a little bit. There was this one other guy, Wayne Pero was his name. He was from New York; we turned out to be really good buddies. He and I were really upset. He spoke out first of all. He was totally upset. He too had been in college longer than I had; he was in for about two or three years prior to coming in and he just wasn't ready for this. He thought it was a bunch of BS.

Anyhow, they quit doing it; we didn't have anymore. They put us in regular barracks. They put us in a school, it was a C shift which went from 6:00 at night until midnight. We thought that was kind of good because we got out of a lot of duty and it wasn't bad hours really.

Wayne and myself would have to get the same room. We were a lot alike; we didn't let people pull junk on us, let's put it that way. We got over there and they started having a party one night and they were raising all kinds of hell outside in the hallways. We didn't care as long as they left us alone. Then they broke into our room once. When I say broke in, they just shoved through. The second time we locked it and they broke in that time; then we just got upset. We told them; they left us alone and that was the end of that. There were other instances going on too--some good, some bad. In a way, they are kind of funny now. It showed me one thing--you have to stand up for yourself or no one else will or if you can get with somebody, a team, two or three people, you are in good shape.

Getting to the school, it was five months but I could have done it in a month. They taught us on a seventh and eighth grade level. There wasn't much I could do about it. When I saw some of these people who literally couldn't read stuff that a seventh and eighth grader could do, I felt that they

should have separated us before, but later on I found out their logic behind it. They put a variety of people into one career field; they'll put some that aren't very smart and then put some who are a little bit more intelligent and then they will combine them. The way it works out, usually, the guys with some smarts still advance pretty rapidly and take over the supervisor positions where the other guys will do menial jobs.

C: In the class they will be supervisors?

M: No, this extended later on into the service, as you're progressing.

C: Did most of the other people feel that things could have been done in one month as opposed to five, was that the general consensus or not?

M: Not really, just my friend and myself. I had access to our records for a short period of what class. I'm not super intelligent by any means, but I put myself on an average, but after we saw the records Wayne and myself were sort of at the top and everything filtered down. It is strange the way things worked out too because after going through the courses, I ended up first in our class and he was second and it wasn't a big class. I don't want to build myself up too high because there were only eleven or twelve of us in the class. The grades almost seemed to correlate with what they had tested us on and I didn't think the tests were really that great when I took them. When I say tests, I mean the initial tests getting into the service. But apparently they showed something, I don't know what.

Then from there. . . Like I said, I was there for five months, had some good and bad times too. We didn't get in with a bunch of guys. I forget a lot of rotten things we had to go through in this town. They shuffled us around on the base quite a bit too. It had something to do with new squadrons they were initiating. I think I lived in three separate barracks. So I had to move three times while I was there.

C: In five months?

M: Yes. That's a pain just hopping from one place to another. The barracks we ended up in were kind of nice; the ones prior to that were old hospital barracks. They were real long, the halls connected; they were fire traps. That's one reason they got us out of there too. I don't even know if they are still standing. They should have torn them down a long time ago.

C: When you finished up your five months of training did you feel pretty well qualified, do you think, to take and work in the field that had been picked for you or did you go on to further training?

M: No, I didn't feel qualified and as far as further training. . . The next assignment was Luke Air Force Base in Arizona. That was my permanent assignment and I was there for seven months. While I was there, I had to go through additional training, which everyone had to go through. It was called your five level training. They'll give you on-the-job training and have you read some books.

What I learned in tech school, really didn't help at all. In fact, when we got there, a couple of guys said, "Forget everything you did learn there. You're starting over again the way it is supposed to be done." In tech school, they had guys who would just go through the course and then make them instructors.

One buddy of mine, he wasn't in my class, he was in another, was working on his thesis for his master's in science, I think, it was biology. We were in this air conditioning class and this guy was up there telling us about various basic formulas of air conditioning, and all he had done was gone through the school at Chanute like I was going and then they made him an instructor. He knew nothing. This guy who was working on his master's we could have ran circles around him. I didn't like that idea, I thought that was poor as far as establishing where they wanted to put people. They are trying to get some more intelligent people. A guy working on his master's should have been put somewhere else like in research. It was totally ridiculous. Guys with a bachelor's degree in music were there. I could go on.

C: That's the service, I guess.

M: Yes. They don't know where to place the men.

I think I'll hit on my first assignment in Arizona for awhile. When I got there I was kind of thrilled. I wanted to go out west, the southwest for quite a long time. I finally got there and it was kind of lonely because you don't know anyone but things picked up and you make friends. I was put in a squadron, a mobile squadron of communications. We were like tenants at that base. We were out of. . . The squadron was from Austin, Texas. Our equipment was painted like the Army's; we looked almost like the Army.

If an emergency ever broke out supposedly we would be sent first to set up communications and we did a lot of practicing.



We would go out into the desert and send messages back to the base. We had men who would relay messages to the pilots, for bombing runs out in Arizona. It belongs to the government. They do bombing runs there. It was just a lot of practice.

As far as what I learned in tech school, this was all completely different. I had never seen or heard of any of the equipment that I was working on. They were turbine generator sets. I found it interesting; I kind of enjoyed that too, I never thought I could work on that sort of equipment. At first, they didn't give me very big jobs anyhow. I changed the oil and that was it and there was always somebody there watching. I kept working at it and eventually I got a little expertise in it, not much. I just learned some things, that's all.

I spent seven months there and while I was there I had some minor surgery done. They put me in the hospital for about two weeks and put me on easy duty for about six because I couldn't bend over due to where the surgery was. The surgeon I had in the Air Force was really fantastic, Dr. Shelling. In fact, all of the medical help that I had in the service was good. Down there, especially, I thought they were top-notch doctors, surgeons, and nurses. I'm sure you'll hear contrary to that, but that's how I felt.

Four or five months after I had been there, my buddies came back to the barracks and said, "Guess where you're going?" And they told me I was going to Nam. I said, "You're kidding." I didn't believe them. I thought they were joking around. They said, "You check tomorrow in the orderly room." So I went the next day but I didn't have to go to the orderly room because they were waiting for me. There were orders waiting for me in our hutch. They weren't the orders but they said that I was going. I was upset in a way, but what could I do. I had to go so there was no sense in worrying about it.

C: Were most of the people that were there with you going to have to go to Vietnam or were there duty stations all around?

M: They were spread all over basically. There were a lot of guys that went over there. In fact, one of my best friends--my roommate down at Arizona--wound up over on the same base with me. He was in another squadron; he was communications. It was really weird. I wrote him a letter back telling him about my experience flying over, how long it took and what Nam was like for the couple of weeks that I had been there. Anyhow, what had happened was the letter had gotten crossed but by the time it got there, he was already at home on leave for a month and then he would be shipped over to Nam. They

forwarded the letter to Nam and so when he got the letter over there, he was shaking his head, "Yes, that's how it was."

C: Did you have a month's break between going to Vietnam and getting out of your seven months down in Arizona?

M: Yes, they gave a month's leave. Prior to finding out that I was going to Nam, I was going to come home anyhow during that time but for my sister's graduation, which was in June and I did miss because there wasn't really much sense flying home for a week, flying back to Arizona for two and then coming back for a month. Financially, I couldn't afford it. If I could have, I would have. I spent the month at home.

Then I found out about Nam. I didn't tell my parents either. I kept it secret for a good month before I had to come home. I didn't feel like worrying them. I told them about it. My father wasn't home at the time. I told my mother, she broke up and my sister picked the phone up--the older one who was seventeen at the time--and she broke up. Then they put my younger sister on and she was nine or ten and she was the only one that could talk. She really didn't know what was going on. She saw that they were crying and that but that was all. I told her to tell my father when he got home that I would call again to explain everything.

C: How did you feel when you got the orders or saw that you were going to go to Vietnam? Was there any reaction on your part? Like you said, you had to go over there, perhaps, or you felt that you might have been going anyway; but do you remember what you felt like when you saw those orders?

M: Not really. All I can remember was that I was surprised. I kind of anticipated it in a sense. I was surprised and I just shoved it off as something else. I talked to some of my friends who had been over there to see what I could learn about the area.

C: Did they tell you about anything to anticipate that you found to be true?

M: Yes and no. One thing that really sticks with me, believe it or not, is the fact that I knew that I could buy a lot of things cheap, like stereo equipment, camera equipment. I know that sounds ridiculous but that just sticks in my mind. They told me it really wasn't all that bad. I was going to Bien Hoa and they knew the base and said it was pretty stable, pretty well protected. They said, "Don't worry." They said, "Consider yourself lucky that you're not going to Da Nang," which I did. When I saw Bien Hoa as compared to Da

Nang, that made me happy because I heard a lot of stories. That's about all I can tell you about the initial feelings.

They brief us and all that before going over both on specifically what to look out for.

C: Such as?

M: They told us to watch out for the black market; they gave us quite a bit of talk on that. Then they tried to scare us as far as VD and that. They said it was very high and they showed really gross pictures of it. Also at one briefing they showed us a movie of Bien Hoa, the base I was going to--well, actually bases throughout Nam. They picked a good one, it showed it getting torn apart. It really didn't make me feel that good. This was in 1968 when most of Nam got pretty well torn up. That kind of scared me a little bit. The whole base literally was going up and you just couldn't believe it.

A lot of things had changed and I had to go talk to somebody who had been there so they could tell me what it was like now. They said, "It's kind of mellowed a little bit," so it made me feel better. But that movie, all I could see was that one plane. A couple of them were going up and guys were there trying to get them out of the fire area and a lot of them got killed by doing that. It wasn't my idea of a good time.

C: When you came back from your leave, how you flew over to Vietnam and also your reflections on coming into Vietnam? You said you went by air. You flew out of San Francisco, San Diego?

M: I'll start from the beginning. When I left Youngstown that was a bad time. My mother especially broke down. I felt bad but there was nothing I could do about it. I got on the plane and I met this one guy from the Navy and he was on his way to a base in the States. He found out I was going to Nam and he felt kind of bad about it, but what can you do. Then out at Chicago, I happened to get seated with a couple girls; they were on their way to San Francisco and Hawaii for vacation. They were pleasant but I was pretty much quiet. I talked to them a little bit but not very much. When we got to San Francisco, they said good-bye and wished me luck.

I went up to the base outside of San Francisco. I had to wait about five hours before I caught my flight and I was never so lonely as at that time. I knew absolutely no one and that was bad. Just before I was to leave, this one nurse that I knew in Arizona was going over to the Philippines. I had gotten to know a lot of them in the hospital. I was talking to her for just a few minutes. I wanted to talk

more. I was hoping we could get the same flight because I was stopping off at the Philippines, but it didn't work out that way. She got on another flight and I went on mine.

Riding over, it was ten hours. Five hours from San Francisco to Hawaii, I met a couple of guys there and I was talking. It was a pretty smooth flight. Got to Hawaii, we were there for about an hour. From there we took off and it was approximately ten hours to the Philippines.

C: Are these all service people that you were flying with now or commercial?

M: We were all service, and we were on a commercial plane though. It was about fifty-fifty as far as Army and Air Force personnel. The first seven hours of the trip were pretty smooth and then we hit some bad weather and the plane was bouncing around quite a bit. That's about the extent of what really happened on the plane. I got sick. Then we landed in the Philippines. All I can remember about that was hot and humid and I just wanted to get out of there. I couldn't take that humidity, it was unreal. Then it was about three more hours to Nam.

Everyone was talking on the plane; there was quite a bit of noise until we hit Nam. Then it was just like total silence over the whole plane. It was weird; I can't explain it. Everyone was looking out of the windows and all you saw were those big craters on the ground from where bombs had been dropped, the B-52's. You wonder where you are headed and what's happening.

I was lucky. Most of the Air Force, we knew where we were going to be but I felt sorry for a lot of the Army because they were shuffled around quite a bit. They land at one base, stay there, and then get orders from there. That's how they found out where they were going.

We landed at Bien Hoa and they had this whole portion of the base with their colonel. It was really run-down and looked just like in the newsreels and newscast--all these tents, just a run-down area, water tanks.

We got out and they processed us and sent us to our barracks to sleep for the night until the morning and then we could be put where we were going to stay permanently. It was just weird. It was night when we arrived. You couldn't really see anything and you thought, oh, this is war. When day-break came it was a little different. We saw a little better side of the base. They had done some reconstruction and it was a lot nicer for Nam. The barracks were nicer and we

had the facilities, which the initial pictures don't. We went through about four days of processing. They were just getting us ready for the base and that.

C: When you came into Bien Hoa, did you know you were going to be stationed there?

M: Yes. My orders read Bien Hoa. That's how I knew I was going there whereas the Army didn't. Any one of us had those type of orders.

C: How long were you at Bien Hoa?

M: A year to the day.

C: And that was your full-time in Vietnam, you were stationed there?

M: Yes. I only left twice. I left the squadron for a little bit too. I was there for a year. We weren't allowed to leave base. The base was about two and a half by about three or four miles long; I'm not sure on the figures. We were confined. All I did everyday was go from the barracks to the chow hall to work, walking back and forth. There was a theater on base too. You got to see movies. I only left twice, like I said; I went on R & R to Australia once. Then I got to go to Saigon for one day. About two weeks before I left I went to Saigon. It really didn't turn me on a whole lot; it was something different to see. I can just say I was there and that's about all.

C: Was the city right outside the base, Bien Hoa city?

M: Yes.

C: It was restricted. You couldn't go in there?

M: Right. Some guys had gotten killed. They were afraid, I think too, of the black market and drugs. Drugs were bad-- the way it was on the base anyhow. I wasn't into that but I knew some guys who were.

C: A lot of grass?

M: There was a lot of grass but a few were on the hard stuff too. I never actually saw anybody but I saw them afterwards.

C: Heroin or something?

M: I would just have to guess.

- C: Drugs were pretty easy to get over in Vietnam? How would they get them if they weren't allowed off of the base?
- M: Vietnamese were allowed on and there were connections; you could get anything you wanted over there. It seemed that way anyhow. The fact that they allowed Vietnamese on too, I couldn't believe it because you couldn't tell south Vietnamese from north Vietnamese. How would they know who was enemy or foe? Who was your friend, who was your enemy? Anything on that base you wanted, you got.
- C: How was the base set up, first of all, in terms of your location on the base in the Air Force? Were there perimeters around you to protect the planes?
- M: There was one large perimeter and that encompassed. . . One area was the Army; it was on the other side of the base. We couldn't even go over to that side, just one portion. We had some Army on the other side of the flat line too. Then we were on the other side. It was a helicopter squad from the Army over there. We could go there, it didn't mater. There wasn't anything to see, just a few helicopters. We had for a while there some green berets on one side of the base, but I think they moved them out. I'm not really sure how that happened or what was going on; I wasn't into it. All I was worried about was that I wanted somebody around the perimeters other than the Air Force. Air Force is fine as far as technology goes, but as far as weapons and protection of ground forces, I don't think. Planes are fine but on the ground, I guess you could find a few that are good.
- C: Could you describe a typical day as to what you would do when you were stationed in Bien Hoa?
- M: I would get up about 5:30, get dressed, go up to have breakfast at the chow hall. I would be there for about twenty minutes to a half hour. A couple friends would come up and we would just BS, talk about what we might have to do for the day, talk about home. Then from there we could either ride a bus over to work or walk. It was about a mile. Usually we walked because it was good exercise and it wasn't quite as boring as taking the bus and we didn't have anything else to do anyhow.

We would get to work about 7:00 and we would have roll call. Our roll call wasn't that stingy as some of the other places were; they just checked to see that we were there. They wanted us to keep neat, but it wasn't on the extreme like some people expected shined shoes everyday.

We had a board where we would go see what had to be done.

For the mos part, we could pick what job we wanted but once in a while we would be told by our supervisor what they wanted us to do. We would work until we finished that and then got another job.

During the day we had two breaks, coffee breaks, one at 9:00 to 9:15. We kept pretty well on that schedule. We didn't go over. Then we had lunch for about an hour which would move us back to the other side of base and back again to work. In the afternoon we had a break at about 2:00. We worked until about 4:30, 5:00. Once we got back. . . We were able to get beer. We would either sit outside on the bunkers drinking beer, talking, listening to the radio or else go to the movie. That would start around 7:30, 8:00.

I was fortunate because the guys that I was stationed with were pretty decent. We figured while we were there we might as well make the best of it if we could. If we complained all of the time, it wasn't going to help matters. There were a few who did complain and their whole year there was terrible, miserable. They were always sick. They said the food was lousy when in actuality it was probably better than some of the food most people eat here in the States.

A lot of the guys were out in the bush and they didn't get good food all of the time, but we were lucky. I can't say that I had it that bad. During the course of the year, we were attacked approximately twenty to twenty-five times. When we had attacks, they were rocket attacks. I was scared on the first one.

- C: Did the first one come pretty soon after you arrived or had you been there for a while?
- M: It was August 12th.
- C: I can't believe you remember the date.
- M: I remember that one and one other.
- C: Do you remember just because it was the very first one?
- M: It was the first one and I was scared. To this day I feel that I ran out to the bunker and I didn't wake up until I got out there. When I got there initially, they said, "If you hear a siren go out to the bunker," and that's what I did. The thing must have júst went off. During the rest of the course of the year, I used to run out to the bunker but some guys really went nuts. After that I learned to control myself a little bit. I figured if I got out there fast and watched myself I would be all right.

Some guys went berserk. They would get out in the hallways-- when I say hallways in the barracks we had partitions. They tried to make it look as much like rooms as they could, which gave us a little bit of privacy as compared to some. When the siren would go off, these guys would get out in the hallways and just run. Anything in their way, they would run over. They wouldn't think. There were more guys hurt the following day from falling off steps to bumping their knees or breaking their arms from just running without watching. I just learned to roll over off my bed, put on my flight vest, and roll underneath the bed. I figured I was safer.

One time, up in the chow hall the siren went off. Everyone ran out for the bunker. One guy happened to fall down right at the doorway and to this day, I swear twenty to thirty guys ran over him. They were so afraid; they wouldn't let this guy up. When people panic like that I don't like it. You get hurt more. About the only time that I got scared. . . After our first rocket attack I just took it as an everyday affair if it happened.

- C: How long would a rocket attack last, thirty rounds in coming fifty in 115 minutes?
- M: Usually they were thirty or less. Timewise I couldn't tell you. It would seem like eternity at times, but in reality it was maybe a minute.

After the first rocket attack, I really wasn't scared anymore. I related it to like being here in the States driving a car. It's just as dangerous when you really get down to it. In fact, driving a car is probably more dangerous.

The only time I got scared again was Mother's Day. We were going into Cambodia; when I say we, the military. They really tore our base up that night. Supposedly, I don't know for sure, at 6:00 that evening, Sunday evening, we were hit. This was unusual. We were never hit during the day like that. I happened to be in church. I had gone to mass, a late mass. The time was about 6:10, 6:15. Everyone just hit the floor. After the rockets finished, a lot of guys who were on special duty had to run to get rifles and go out on the perimeter and be extra guards in case something would happen.

That shook us up because no one expected that. That night you could see all these guys all around the barracks. Usually they would be inside. Everyone was outside, it seemed like everyone. You could see that they were all scared, they were. That night about midnight, 12:30, in that range again, we got hit again and that scared us more. "What is this? Two



times within twenty-four hours or within twelve hours;" it was unreal.

I had one buddy. He slept on the second floor but that night he said he was going to stay on the first floor. He slept on the floor of another guy's room because he didn't want to go upstairs. When rockets go off they expand and go outward and he figured he would be in a nice place to get hit so he stayed downstairs. He stayed down there until about 5:00 or 5:30 and figured that nothing was going to happen so he went back upstairs. A good half hour or forty-five minutes later, we got another attack.

C: Did the rocket attacks do much damage? After a rocket attack would occur and you would go back to your barracks or come out, were there a lot of planes hit or a lot of buildings destroyed?

M: No, the base was so big that if a rocket came in it had to be. . . First of all, I think it was just potluck when they set the rockets. They had some idea. They could get the rocket usually in the general area, but there was a lot of open space and they usually hit that. I only saw one plane get hit while I was there and it really just tore it up. It was just a ball of metal after the fire. The plane was loaded down with bombs too though, with napalm and that.

C: And exploded it when it was hit?

M: Yes. In fact, the guys that put the fire out from the fire department, they gave them all bronze stars. I felt they deserved it; they deserved something more than that actually because there was variance violence--I'm not really sure--sixty caliber shooting out of the jet itself and this was going on while they were still trying to put the fire out. Those guys had guts. That was about the only plane I saw that shrunk when it was hit because of the fuel truck. It just totally wiped it out. A couple of buildings were hit. One guy--this is hearsay--supposedly lost his hearing. A rocket went off and he hit the ground and the shrapnel went over him but the noise was so loud that it popped his eardrums.

C: Did you have much intermingling with the other services? Like you said, you go to a movie or anything like that. Did the Army and helicopter groups and the Air Force get together like when you had a beer or anything like that?

M: No. Even within the Air Force, the guys I worked with were the guys that I socialized with. We were really a tight bunch and I don't think I will ever have as close of friends as I did over there. Maybe it's because we were forced to

live together; we worked, partied, whatever. Everything we did together.

C: Did you have an opportunity to talk at all with the pilots?

M: No, I didn't. I just saw them going off, that's about it.

C: What was the general feeling of the people on the base when you were there, of your peer group that you said you hung around with as far as their feelings about Vietnam, pro/con? Did they care about being there? Did they think we were right/wrong? Any feelings there?

M: The group I hung around with?

C: Yes.

M: Most of them thought we were right. Some thought maybe we were wrong. That is a hard question to answer because at the time what we thought and what we think now are two different things. Prior to going over there, I didn't know if the war was right or wrong, so I said until I find out and know from my own view then I'll put my sign on and say it. A lot of these people were narrow-minded in a sense and maybe I was too.

I remember one incident about the Kent State. When we got the news over there I felt it was promilitary in a sense and you would expect it. A lot of guys were really upset with college students; they were really tearing them down. Myself, I kind of take a view all the time until I find out for sure for myself, I'm not going to make any judgments. First of all the shooting, I could understand that to a point because if you are scared you can do anything. Maybe when these guys were concerned it was just enough to get them going. The students too, there was something maybe that interacted with them. I just felt it was one, big mistake that started. It wasn't just on campus. I could never prove anything by this or by what I say. The news that we got over there was sort of tending toward the military side.

C: How did the other ones feel?

M: I would say most of them felt that they were American and they had to do something for their country. That's not saying that they are going to go around and kill and do this and that; they were good people, very good people. There were some-- these weren't my close friends--who really weren't as liberal. They would always look at their side, never at someone else's. This could go either way. The people who really feel that America was in Nam, "They should stay there and all this." Then the other guys who were really down on it said, "What

are we doing here," and they're always complaining. It seemed like neither side would take a look at the other side and see where the mistakes were being made and try to work it out. They always just went off of what they saw or thought when they came here, and I think that caused a lot of troubles there and caused a lot of troubles now.

- C: How about the people in Vietnam? Even though you wouldn't be able to go into Bien Hoa city, you did say that you had Vietnamese on the base. What was your impression of them and also any intermingling that you had with them, how did you find it? Were they different than you expected?
- M: I had very little contact with them. I felt their friends were whoever gave them the most. That's general, it didn't hang true for all of them. They are really big on the black market. Every one of them, I felt who was on the base, had something to do with it. They were okay people for their country, but it's their country, first of all. I don't know if we should have been there or should not have. It is going to be told in the future. It's just a big mix-up. I can't give you any definite answers on that either. I was scared of them at first because you didn't know who was who.
- C: As far as in the south area, you dealt mostly with VC (Vietcong). As far as attacks on the base, I don't think they had any north Vietnamese Army people down there?
- M: Not that I know of, maybe some leaders.
- C: Advisors or something like that. Other people were suspicious too of them. Is that the feeling of most of the people there?
- M: Yes, I would have to say that they were suspicious. When I landed there, I was going to work for the first day. I saw this one guy. It looked like he was pacing something off, I'll swear it until the day I die. I couldn't prove anything about it, of course. He could have been just walking, but that is the impression I got.

The first time I went to get a haircut over there, I sat in the chair and this Vietnamese was giving me a haircut. He was there with a razor and anytime he felt like it, he could slit my throat. This went through my mind and I talked to other people and it happened to them too. You don't know what is going to happen. It's just a weird feeling. They are supposed to be your friends but you don't know for sure. At the end of the haircut, he grabbed my head--I wasn't ready for this--and he snapped it. I guess it is some way to relax you. I thought, what the heck is going on? I felt like he was going to snap it off. I found out later that

they give you a little bit of a massage after they're through. I could have done without it, to be honest.

- C: In looking back now you had been over there for twelve months in Vietnam. With what has happened right now with Vietnam falling, Cambodia and also Laos now, do you have any reflections on that? When you were over there did you get the impression that it would eventually fall or did you get the impression that the south Vietnamese could hold on by themselves? Do you have any feelings whatsoever because you were over there? X amount of people died for this country over there. Now do you feel that we were right?
- M: As far as the south Vietnamese defending themselves, no way. Then and now I thought that they couldn't.
- C: Why did you feel that way if you didn't have that much association with them, from stories that you heard?
- M: That and there were a couple newscasts that I had seen over there. They had a television station in Saigon, run by our government for the GI's over there. They showed newscasts of these Vietnamese, the south Vietnamese and the Americans under attack; the Vietnamese run. I didn't care for that idea at all.

On our base, we had to work seven days a week; around the clock there had to be somebody at our shop. There was a Vietnamese shop right next door and they had a lot of holidays; they did absolutely nothing, and they wouldn't work. You're working your butt off and these people whose country it is are not doing anything. It irritated me and a few others. That's why I got that impression.

You could see, the Vietnamese the way they dressed they weren't. . . Our military dress is sharp for the most part; you have to have a good poise. It's not the one thing that makes it the military, but you see these guys who are really sloppy: shirts hanging out, shoes haven't been polished in months, years. They can't be effective, there's no way. They have no leadership whatsoever.

As far as us being right over there, I thought at the time it was a lot of politics and still even now. But a lot of these people who made the decisions to go over there. . . Maybe at the time things were right or they thought that they had to go. They had to make a decision, that is apparent, and they thought that was the right decision, only it turned out to be wrong. I get upset at times, but I feel if I was in that position where I had to make decisions, I don't know what I would have done. I may have done the same thing. We can look back

now and say it was wrong. We can't at the time say it's going to be wrong or it's going to be right.

C: The day that you spent in Saigon did you find it any different than being in Bien Hoa? Of course, as you said, Saigon was a little heavier area for Americans as well as that area being attacked and things like that. Can you remember anything out of that day that would impress you with the fact that things were a little bit different in Saigon than they were in Bien Hoa or was it pretty much the same?

M: It was different because I was out with more of the people and the people that I came in contact with tried to rip me off, except for one guy. For some reason I went to this one park. They had this one building that was really sharp. It had all of the Oriental designs on it. I wanted to look at it. There was a young kid, a sailor at Vietnam. He was really a nice guy. When I say young, too, I mean about fourteen or fifteen. But if everyone was like him things would have been great, but they weren't. I guess I went to the wrong areas, that could have happened. There were bars with hookers in them and people on the streets would literally take things off of you. One buddy of mine had his \$250 camera stolen off of his shoulder while he was riding a cycle. But, that one guy, I do remember him. He was the nicest person I met over there. That would be about the extent of it. Saigon didn't impress me a whole lot, just the fact that I could say that I was there.

C: Pretty much like a city over here?

M: No. It is another country for one thing and their way of life is a lot different. It's a heck of a lot more crowded than Youngstown is for one thing and there are more slum areas. All these people couldn't afford to build themselves a nice home, but yet they had television.

C: Thanks a lot for taking the time to give me some of your reflections of what you remember about Vietnam when you were over there.

END OF INTERVIEW