

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam

Personal Experience

O. H. 1228

CHARLES W. MCKENZIE, JR.

Interviewed

by

James E. Duffey

on

July 14, 1989

CHARLES WESLEY MCKENZIE, JR. (Sam)

Sam McKenzie currently resides at 2229 Merle Road in Salem, Ohio. He was born to Charles and Jacqueline McKenzie in Salem on August 9, 1948, and has been a lifelong resident of Salem. Sam was married in 1973, but was divorced in 1977. From May of 1969 until March 3, 1971 he served in the U. S. Army.

Sam graduated from Salem High School in 1966 and for a short time attended Kent State University (1967) and Youngstown State University (1971). He is permanently laid off from Pennsylvania Power in Shippingport, Pennsylvania, where he worked from July of 1982 until February of 1991. Previously, from 1968-1980 he was employed at the A&P Warehouse in Salem, Ohio. Currently, he is the President of Veteran's Outreach, Inc., of Lisbon, Ohio.

Mr. McKenzie has been active in Veterans work as an activist lobbying for Veterans rights in Washington, D.C. He was named Citizen of the Year for Columbiana County for his work on Veterans' issues and his work with handicapped children. He was also a recipient of the Bronze Star while serving in Vietnam.

Sam belongs to the Trinity Lutheran Church of Salem, the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 40, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Archeological Society of Ohio. In his leisure time, Sam enjoys finding and studying American Indian artifacts, local history, and golf.

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES W. MCKENZIE, JR.

INTERVIEWER: James E. Duffey

SUBJECT: South Vietnamese Army; U.S. involvement in
Vietnam; Agent Orange; Post Traumatic Stress
Disorder

DATE: July 14, 1989

D: This is an interview with Charles "Sam" McKenzie, Jr.,
for the Youngstown State Oral History Program, on
Vietnam Experiences, by James E. Duffey, at Austintown
Fitch High School, on July 14, 1989, at 12:30 p.m.

D: Sam, which branch of the service did you serve in?

M: United States Army.

D: Did you enlist, or were you drafted?

M: I was drafted.

D: What year did you enter the service?

M: 1969.

D: Then how long was it until you went to Vietnam?

M: I went to Vietnam in 1970, which was approximately a
year later.

D: So you were in the service for a year before you went
to Vietnam?

M: Right.

D: What rank did you ultimately hold?

M: E-5 Buck Sergeant.

D: An E-5 is a sergeant?

M: Yes.

D: Other than the basic boot training, what kind of training did you receive when you went to Vietnam in preparation for going to Vietnam?

M: When I got out of basic training, I got sent to AIT, which is Advanced Individual Training. That was in Fort Polk, Louisiana. At that time, if you were destined to Fort Polk, you knew eventually where you were going to end up. It was almost the kiss of death to go to Fort Polk. When you got down there, over the gate, it had "Welcome to Fort Polk, Home of the Combat Infantrymen in Vietnam". After that, I got sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, where I went to an operations and intelligence school and then from there, I went to on-the-job training. I put in for Fort Sill, Oklahoma. There were two openings at Fort Sill. That was mainly an Artillery Post, they had one battalion of Infantry on the post. I had a brother who was drafted three weeks after I was, and he followed me the whole way through the service and he was stationed at Fort Sill, I put in for there, and I got it. So I spent on-the-job training at Fort Sill, about two and a half months, and from there, I got orders to Vietnam.

D: As far as the training goes that you had previous to going to Vietnam, do you feel it was adequate for what you were asked to do when you got there?

M: The training was semi-adequate. There was just no way that we were trained, as far as I was concerned, different areas over there required different training. Some of the situations that we got involved with we had no training for. They try to prepare you for a situation but I don't think it was the best of training. It was somewhat hurried, I would say.

D: How much time did they take for this specialized training?

M: I believe AIT was twelve weeks, and the operations and intelligence school was approximately the same, ten to twelve weeks. On-the-job training was probably close to three months.

- D: Are you saying that it would be too difficult to foresee what you would meet over there that they really couldn't train you, they did the best they could do, or do you feel they might have done more?
- M: I feel definitely on the case of the Infantry, they should have had more training. Basic training, basically what they were doing, was knitting us together, teaching us that we should follow command. Your advanced infantry training dealt more with the type of situations that you would encounter. The training was good but it would have been preferable if they'd had classrooms from individuals who had been over there previously to give you little more of an idea what to expect, and in which areas. Like I said, certain areas were notorious for booby traps, where other areas weren't. It all depended what area you ended up in over there, as to what your experience might be, so it would almost have been beneficial to have somebody that had actually spent time in the area in which you would be going, schooled you a little bit in it.
- D: So you actually never talked to anybody that had been in Vietnam before you went there?
- M: Oh, yes. When I was on "on-the-job" training, I talked a lot to people who had been over there. A lot of them just wouldn't give you anything that would really help you. It was almost like, "Well, you're going to find out for yourself and it's not going to be that good." It was almost like they had sympathy for you. They really didn't school you into anything that was beneficial to you.
- D: So there was no real formal help of any kind?
- M: No.
- D: When did you first arrive in Vietnam?
- M: It would have been in July of 1970.
- D: Can you give me some general information about the kind of work that you did there and what your assignments were?
- M: When I first got there, there was supposed to be a...I went to a replacement center. What happened there was you would go out, they would call your name, you would go out and stand in front of a stake and that stake would have the area where you were going. I landed in Long Binh. I was just outside of Saigon, I didn't even know it and that was as close as I ever came to seeing Saigon. I went from there to Quang Tri, which was clear up on the demilitarized zone on the DMZ, just

south of it. We were supposed to have a five day in-country orientation. But was on the third day, they came in and took myself and another individual and took us out into the field into the middle of an operation they had going. They needed somebody to carry a radio and I got that duty, carrying the radio, following a Lieutenant Colonel around. As he needed the radio, I would have it. We came in from that operation and I was put into the scout section.

In the scout section what would happen there, is that it was a mechanized unit, I was on an armored personnel carrier and we would provide security for the tactical operation center when the tactical operation center would go to the field. The times that the tactical operation center wasn't in the field, each of the troops would normally have tracks that would be down for maintenance problems and we were sent out to various troops. We maybe worked with A troop for a couple weeks, the B troop for a week, the C troop for a week, whatever, filling in with an extra track as was needed. I did that for a couple months.

At that time, they needed an L & O, which is a Liaison Officer, which required an officer's rank. I was an E-5, but I got the job anyway. I was sent to a village called Cam Lo Village. At Cam Lo Village I worked with the South Vietnamese Army. There were seven Americans there, each had a different job. My job was to go with the South Vietnamese Army. It wasn't the South Vietnamese Army, they were RF's and PF's. They were Regional Forces, Popular Forces, which were local militia. I would go out with them each day, plot their location, send their location back to my unit, my unit, in turn, would give me the locations of all our elements and I would give them to the South Vietnamese. That way we would avoid firing on each other or getting any of the units in trouble by the proximity of two different units.

I did that for three months and then there was a big operation called Lam Son 719 where the Americans were going to reopen Khe Sahn and make a push to the Laotian border. At that time the South Vietnamese Army was going to invade Laos and supposedly cut the Ho Chi Minh trail off. I was pulled out of the Cam Lo village and I worked on the security element of the tactical operations center, during that operation, and it was from that operation that I was called home. I got out of the service while that operation was still going on.

D: Let me back up a minute. You mentioned the tactical operation center. Could you explain for us what that involves?

- M: Okay. That's the elements...Your S-1, your S-2, your S-3 and S-4, which would be your supply element, your intelligence element, your operations element and your communications element. Each one of those elements provides the operations of your particular unit, and each one of them would have a control armored personnel carrier which was a little bit higher than a normal armored personnel carrier. Inside there would be radios and charts and maps. Each one of the elements would work on their particular needs. The supply needs of the unit while it was in the field, the intelligence needs of the unit while it was in the field, the general operations, and the communications.
- D: You also used the word track.
- G: That's what we called an armored personnel carrier. We just called it a track.
- D: How many would that carry?
- G: I don't know what its capacity is supposed to be but it would probably get ten to twelve individuals comfortably. They are designed to have people riding on the inside, but because of rockets, grenades, etc., most of the individuals would ride on the tops. We'd all ride on the tops of them, except for the driver. Some units had a device where the driver could sit above the hatch and still operate the vehicle. In our unit, the drivers were down inside the hatch.
- D: Is there a reason why they rode on top as opposed to inside?
- G: If you hit a mine, you stood a better chance being thrown off and out of the way, as opposed to being inside. An RPG, especially, which was a rocket propelled grenade. When it enters the skin of an armored personnel carrier, it explodes. If you're inside in that confined space with an explosion, it is almost certain death, so it was safer, actually, to be on the top.
- D: If we can go back a little bit, before you went to Vietnam, what were your feelings about going to Vietnam? Did you want to go? Did you feel it was your duty? Did you feel that it was just something you were going to have to go through? How did you feel about it?
- M: I grew up on John Wayne movies, my dad was a World War II Veteran and I listened to him talking to the neighbor who was also a World War II Veteran and I played a lot of Army when I was young and I didn't think I'd ever be scared of it. The fact is I thought it would be kind

of neat. As I got older and as the war was going on, I didn't want to go in unless I had to and, I knew if I was called that I was going to go. I had already made my mind up on that fact, but I was not going to enlist. I had a lot of real close friends that tried to get me to go down and enlist with them and I wouldn't do it. I just told them if I get called, I'm going, but if not, I'm going to try to stay out of it. I wasn't looking forward to going in by any means. I still felt that if I was called, there wasn't any way I was going to try to get out of it. It was kind of popular to go down and volunteer for the draft at that time but late in the war, some casualties from our home town were coming home and we had one pretty popular fellow that had been killed and the enlistments were real high because I don't know whether people were going down to avenge that loss or what. I just really couldn't get a grasp at that time on the war. I didn't understand it. I didn't feel like we were threatened in any way to where I felt obligated to go down and join. But by the same token, I had enough feeling inside of me that I knew I wasn't going to try to avoid it either. The path of least resistance was to go when called.

D: Did you have any preconceived notions as to what Vietnam would be like and then when you got there, was it different as far as the country itself? Had you heard anything about Vietnam before you went there?

M: I heard a lot of bad stories about it from people who had come home. I really didn't have any preconceived ideas about what the country would be like. The terrain was vastly different. You went from beaches, to rice paddies that were relatively flat, to huge mountain ranges and real dense jungles. It was a real diverse country for as small as it was. It was hot, I know that. That was probably the first impression when I got there and got off the plane. The heat and the smell...It's probably a standard line, everybody talks about it, other Veterans. But it really was. When that door of the plane opened, you could just feel the heat gushing in, hot and humid, bad stench to the air.

D: What was the stench from?

M: Mostly the living conditions...When we landed, it was a fairly secure area. I suppose Long Binh at that time was built up and well fortified, but the villages around it, the living conditions of people, the sanitary services. I'm sure everybody's aware that they burned the excrement. They poured diesel fuel into fifty-five gallon drums which were cut in half and you actually burned that. That was a job. As we were coming into Long Binh, those fires were burning and they would have a column of black smoke coming up.

They were going on all through the area, probably thirty-five, forty of those types of fires burning as the plane was landing. I had the false impression that the base was under attack. Here they were just burning the excrement around the base. I'm sure that added a lot to the stench that was in the air.

D: I'd imagine.

M: It just wasn't like leaving Salem, Ohio and getting the old country air. Maybe it didn't bother those guys when the mills were going strong, but I noticed it.

D: You were in Vietnam twelve months?

M: No. It was seven months and seven days.

D: During that time, what do you feel was the most difficult part about serving in Vietnam while you were there?

M: Being put in a situation where decisions were made that shouldn't have been made by you but by somebody else, and having to make those decisions at a lower rank such as E-5, making sometimes command decisions that should have been made by an officer and an officer of quite higher rank and you would be left with that obligation. Things are running through your mind, am I going to make the right decision, am I going to do it right, is somebody going to get hurt on your account? Being placed in a situation that you shouldn't have been put in I would say was the most difficult experience.

D: Why were you put in that position? Was it a loss of officers that kind of put you in that place, or why is it you had to make those decisions?

M: I know one particular time was a direct order from a South Vietnamese Major to an American Captain who ordered me to do something that I wasn't familiar with and that was calling in Artillery. We had seven North Vietnamese going through a village and we couldn't pin them down. We had the general area and we were getting fire from them but we couldn't get them out of there. They requested Artillery and they wanted me to fire it and I told them I was not familiar with Artillery that much to be calling it, plus the fact that it was a small hamlet, there were hooches, which were little homes for the Vietnamese that were all around that area and I knew that there was trouble there that some innocent person stood the chance of getting hurt or their home destroyed. I told the Captain of that fact and he went back to the South Vietnamese Major and I could see he was quite disturbed and that Captain came back to me and said that Major may be in the South

Vietnamese Army, but he still outranks me and I damn sure outrank you, now call the Artillery. So I called the artillery and it came in exactly where it was supposed to, but at the same time, the next morning when we went in there were a lot of innocent people that were hurt, not a lot but too many for me, there were five or six individuals were hurt and one elderly lady that was killed. She had taken a piece of shrapnel in her throat. It was just stupid. I knew exactly what was going to happen. Immediately after the fire started coming in, the Major was yelling for cease fire, but by then it was too late.

Other times, like on an operation, I had known that there was naval air support over us during an operation and run into bunker complex. That is quite extensive. Having a Lieutenant Colonel asking a Major what they would do in a situation like this and get the map out and try to reroute yourself around a bunker complex or something. I would take advantage of that air support and call in an air strike which was beneficial at that time. There were no friendly casualties there. We were way out toward the Laotian border, but those types of decisions are not something...Only as a last resort should be made by a low ranking person, like that. They shouldn't be put in those situations.

D: I can understand that. I've talked to a number of Vietnam Veterans and a lot of them see a difference in attitude of the American soldiers as the war went along. The ones that were there early said everybody that went there were gung ho, they wanted to fight communism, they thought it was their duty, and as it went along, maybe because of being exposed to the anti-war movement or what you saw on television every night, what you heard from guys coming back, there was a change of attitude as you got closer to 1970. Now you were there in 1970. What was the attitude of the American soldier at that time in Vietnam? How would you characterize it?

M: I would say the majority of them that I knew that were draftees at that particular time, we probably had forty percent of the people that were in Vietnam were draftees by 1970 and out of those forty percent, they occupied fifty-five percent of the casualties. General attitude at that time, I would say the majority, was a feeling that it was obvious that the United States was pulling out, the units were going home, getting sent back to the States, they were taking entire divisions and deactivating them, it was obvious that the United States commitment was dwindling down and the attitude was basically that no one wanted to be the last one to die in Vietnam. That was the general attitude that a lot of us took. We were extra careful in the things we

did, or tried to be anyway, and like you say, there were three different time periods when the war first started. It was an all volunteer Army and everybody was looking for advancement and Vietnam was the place to be, and everybody was going over there to get a tour in and the money was better, the new cars at the NCO club came from the people that were over in Vietnam. Our commitment was relatively light, and was generally an advisory role and those people came back, they were gung ho. The second group of people went over, a lot of them went over avenging losses and senior NCO's that had been over there for one tour and had had enough, the majority of them didn't go back and it was just a general decline from the early time to the later. We lost all our volunteer Army and you basically got down to the draftees which were every bit, if not just as much more capable of fighting the war, and just as good, but they had a different attitude. They did not have that career mentality that earlier people had.

D: What about the Vietnamese soldiers, the South Vietnamese that you worked with. How would you characterize their attitude about the war?

M: That is a hard question. A lot of people say that they weren't good fighters. There were good South Vietnamese units, there were a few good South Vietnamese units but probably one of the biggest problems of the war I think, it was a corrupt Army. There were South Vietnamese leaders who were not experienced military leaders, that were in top positions in the military simply because of their family status. What it did was breed a totally inept and non-caring military unit. They really weren't that good soldiers. The basic fact was that it came from their leadership, it was not the South Vietnamese soldiers as much as it was their leadership. High positions could be bought. There was a lot of influence if you were a higher ranking military man in your district or your province and there were a lot of benefits that came from that, monetary benefits. They made money with the identification cards of the South Vietnamese. They made money on the expended ordinance. So those were positions that were sought after. It didn't matter if you were a capable military leader or had past experience when the French were there or any of the things that should make you a good military leader. It was more of what your family status was, and could you buy yourself that position.

D: Two things occurred to me based on previous interviews and some things that you just said. During this later period in 1970 were you aware of drugs being used in Vietnam, and if so, how extensive?

M: They were really extensive in the rear. At times I

felt much safer in the field. My area was pacified it was still dangerous to be in the areas. You still had contact, you still ran the risk of mines booby traps and enemy contact. But with the good troop spirit that we had and the looking out for each other, it was actually safer in the field. As a rule, I know of very few instances that I ever heard from anybody that no matter what time period where there was a problem in the field with drugs. Now when you got back to the rear, that was different story. Even the people in the field would party and that would include the drugs. But as far as the rear area personnel they seemed to have a big problem with it and I think that was because they took a lot of orders from their superiors. In the field, you were generally on your own and you knew what you had to do and like I say, there was many times I dreaded going to the rear because of the drug problems. They created a lot of hassles. Fraggings going on at that particular time and fights in the mess hall. There was a problem with drugs. Drugs were a problem.

D: One of the interviews that I've done previously, one of the Vets talked about racial problems. Were you aware of problems between blacks and white in the American Army?

M: I was aware of it. Before I went over, there was somewhat of a general attitude that probably depends on everybody's experience. Salem is not a big ethnic town and I really wasn't that familiar with people, but I always seemed to get along. I never had any problems with it. Stateside, you could feel it. You knew it was there. When we got over to Vietnam in the field you never saw it. In the rear, there were a couple racial incidents, in the mess hall where there were fights. At one time I had a fatigue shirt that had caught on fire when I was in the field. When I came back, I tried to turn it in for a new one and there was a black supply person there, I don't know what his rank was, but he gave me a lot of static about the shirt and that kind of miffed me a little bit, that here he was in the rear anyway and then he had a nice clean uniform on and was giving me some static about getting a new fatigue shirt. He threatened to call some racial group on me, I don't know what they had, some kind of a black power structure over there, I don't know which one of the organizations it was, but he threatened to make my life miserable for me in the rear so... There was a certain amount of racial tension, I guess, it was nothing really that worried me or anything. But again, like I say, it was there, and you could tell it was there.

D: What parts of Vietnam were you in? Was there any particular place? Can you give me some place names that

we could identify with?

- M: I was in Northern I Corps, I was attached...I was in the 9th Infantry Division, 3rd of the 5th Cav. Mechanized. They were an element of the 9th Infantry Division. The 9th Infantry Division was deactivated and sent home. They took the mechanized unit of the 9th Infantry Division and attached it. At one time it was attached to the 101st Airborne, it was attached to the Marines. When I got over there, it was attached to the 5th Mech. After I left, it was reattached to the 101st Airborne, and then permanently attached to the 5th Mech. At that time when I got over there, the 5th Mech. was stationed in Quang Tri, which is just south of the DMZ. I spent no time in Quang Tri. Immediately I was shipped to Dong Ha, which was a little bit northwest of Quang Tri, maybe six miles. That was the 3rd of the 5th Cav rear area (Dong Ha). I spent most of my time working out of Dong Ha, places like Cam Lo, Mai Loc, Calu, Vandergrif, Camp Carrol and Rockpile. Those were all areas around Dong Ha, mostly west and north of Dong Ha.
- D: You mentioned a term, DMZ. For the purposes of identification, can you tell us where that is and what it was?
- M: It's a demilitarized zone. That divided the north and the south, North Vietnam from South Vietnam. There was a line of firebases where there was artillery, there was Charlie II, Alpha IV, all those, Cam Lo, Quang Tri, they're all just south of that demilitarized zone. We could not cross that. We had towers where if you could get up in the tower high enough to where you could actually look across to the demilitarized zone and see the North Vietnamese flag flying. It was the same as Korea. They had a demilitarized zone too that divided the north from the south.
- D: What did the DMZ look like? Physically, how did it look?
- M: There was a good sized stream, river, that defined parts of it until it got too far west. On the side of it, it was basically desolate. There was no growth, no green, anyway. In some places it was actually dust where the artillery and bombing raids had just decimated everything to where it was almost like a lunar landscape. Other areas, there was vegetation, but by that time, late in the war, it was pretty well decimated.
- D: Looking back, it's been nineteen years, have your feelings about the war changed or the way it was conducted, have you had second thoughts about it?

M: I've had a lot of second thoughts about it. It was a total waste as far as I'm concerned. It was failed military and political policy. The military blames... People like Westmoreland say the resolve of the people was lost, people say that the military should have been able to have a freer hand in the war, military blames it on politics, politics blames it on the military. It was a combination of both. We had a very poor military posture over there. It was very poor coupled with the political system over here that failed to ask for proper actions, so it was just bad news for our country at the time period.

D: Now you say that the military had a poor posture. How do you mean that?

M: I don't believe that war is morally wrong. If you look at the country today, the conditions are pathetic. They are in the bottom five economically. After the war the reeducation camps, the genocide, people over there, the whole history of that country was based on land reform. Land is dear to those people, the same way it is to us. For us to go over there in an advisory role I think was quite honorable, but as to go over with draftees, it actually wasn't a war, it was a conflict. You know that Johnson got the Gulf of Tonkin resolution as an excuse to get us into war, which was really illegal. It was just that the military fought almost like to perpetuate the war, they had military people going over there punching their tickets to further their military careers, they were sleeping in the same bed with the defense contractors, it was a corrupt military at that particular time. I don't think it had anything to do with the resolve of the people. The people probably would have been on the side of the military if they would have just went in there as advisors. The military in my mind has to be, but you have certain people...It's a different breed of cat-- a policeman, a nurse, or a doctor, but there are people who are actually career military people and they can go over there in situations like that and build a good military leadership in an advisory capacity and actually could have helped that country. But we started drafting people, we corrupted our morals by...We had attorneys who for a fee, could keep you out of going to Vietnam, we had people that took any kind of deferment imaginable to stay out. The whole time period was just full of corruption. Our constitution was abused, our military was abused and our morals were abused. It was just a dark time in our history for everybody.

D: Lately it seems that there have been a lot of movies about Vietnam made. I don't know how many you've seen. Some of the Vets I've talked to have seen them all and

some don't want to see any of them. I'll ask the question for the sake of students who are now going to a lot of these movies. Is there any that you think are really accurate?

M: I'm trying to think of the ones I've seen. They made such a big deal of "Platoon" so our Chapter rented out the cinema to invite any Veteran who wanted to go see it to go see it for free. I saw it and some of the scenery was realistic and some of the firefights were realistic but there was so much in there that just couldn't possibly be. You don't shoot somebody in the chest with an M-16 and blow a hole as big as a pie plate in his back and have that person get up and run another half mile or whatever. Like those scenes...There is just no way things like that happen. I don't think there's been any movie that I've seen that really, truly depicts the way it was at the particular time period when I was over there. Like I said, war means so many different things to so many different people. It encompasses such a long period of time, so many different types, such a big slice of the American society, it means something different to everybody. Those are my feelings though that there really hasn't been anything that gives a true picture of it.

D: Looking back on the war in your experiences, how has it affected your life personally?

M: Well, to be honest, I guess that's what I better be here, but, it probably ruined me for about ten years after I got out. I wasn't socially functioning the way I should have been. I was more or less a hermit. I locked myself in my room, I really wouldn't get out and socialize. If I did it was to get drunk or something and then go home sleep it off to go get drunk again. I started to think how a measly seven months could affect my life to where I would ruin ten. I just couldn't believe it. I said what the heck is wrong with me. I just started getting involved with other Veterans and it means something different, there again, to everybody. A lot of Veterans will not have anything to do with getting involved. They're out there, they're all over the place, you don't even know of them. Other people are just superactive. I guess it's whatever is the most beneficial to that person. It maybe even more beneficial to that person not to get in anything that might bring back an unpleasant experience. To me I found out that I was so much better off when I got out and started mixing it up with guys and it's funny, you start listening to some person and it's just almost like that person was there at the same time it happened to you, that is how similar the experiences are. You start realizing that it wasn't just you, that it just

happened to you. You get out and you get involved, as what I've done. Now I've become a Veteran's activist for the last seven or eight years. I've done nothing but lobby in D.C. on the case of judicial review. We went over six times. Within one year we were probably the most influential element in getting judicial review passed. We've taken on the local Veteran's Service Commission, Veteran's Administration, there are so many abuses. Again, we go back to abuses. Many of the Veterans aren't getting the proper care they should be. There are a lot of abuses in our system. Basically that's what I feel good in doing is trying to correct those things.

D: When you said for a long time you didn't feel like you were socially functional, obviously your experience caused that but could anything have been done for the Veterans when they came home that would have helped them adjust back into society better?

M: There were probably many things that could have been done. I think basically now, it's way too late. I'm not interested in praise, and I probably wouldn't have been interested in praise at that particular time either. When I got off the plane when I got home, a lot of big things were happening in life...Graduations, birthdays, marriages....The biggest thing in my life when I got home, I landed in Cleveland, I got off that plane coming down the ramp, and that was the biggest day of my life, and it was business as usual. People were going by in their three piece suits and it was just another day. I couldn't not believe it. I felt like grabbing somebody and shaking them and saying, "Hey, do you know what's going on over there?" It was just certain people. If it was a unified war effort like it was in World War II, it would have been different where it affected everybody. But if it wasn't one of your family members or yourself, there were those people where it never touched any of their lives other than seeing it maybe, on TV. There was a lot of things, PTSD, (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) that has been known in other wars as Battle Fatigue in World War II and Korea, and Shell Shock in World War I, and Soldier's Heart in the Civil War, and we have it today with accident and trauma victims or catastrophe, major catastrophes. It was recognized in World War II, there was a book out called Doctors of the Mind, they recognized the problem and they said any future times that the United States would get in a conflict, there should be beds available for the people coming home that are going to need counseling. Here we were a measly fourteen years after that and had none of those facilities available to anybody coming home. There were so many people that needed it and they were just literally overnight thrown back into society. At the time of

your arrival, when you got out, there was nobody there saying, "Hey, if you get home and you have problems, go to a VA facility. My dad being a World War II Veteran, I didn't really understand what the VA was about. Nobody was there to tell you about the traditional service organizations weren't there when you came home to say, "Hey, if you're having problems come down here to the VFW, or the American Legion or the DAV and we'll see what we can do for you." None of that. The whole burden of that war was placed on the people that were over there and that was it. When we came home there wasn't even anybody over here to share that burden of trying to help these people that might have health problems or mental problems or anything else. You carried the load when you were over there, when you get back, you carry the burden either inside or do what you can for yourself. That's crazy.

D: What do you think are the biggest problems faced by the Veteran today?

M: There are so many of them. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is definitely a big one. There is so many people that carry that emotional baggage around with them to this very day. I've talked to older World War II Veterans and they say that really you just have to learn to deal with it because it doesn't get any better. For some, they say that it gets worse. We should be dealing with problems like that, there are so many people out there and I stop and think of the last fifteen or twenty years where people have actually blown their brains out because they couldn't deal with it. It's something that has to be addressed and there has to be facilities and there has to be a way for those people to go seek help. Vet Centers have been effective. It has been a fight to keep the Vet Centers open. Politicians want to take them away from us. Some of them want to keep it but put it in conjunction with a VA facility which a lot of Veterans mistrust the VA and would never go to a Vet Center if they had to go to the VA to do it. They are extremely cost effective. Probably the most cost effective thing that the government has ever done. It is a successful program but yet we have to keep fighting to keep it. Agent Orange, there is probably no doubt in my mind and a lot of peoples that there were a lot of health problems associated with herbicide exposure. There have been so many people that have died since the war. It's incredible. I think an incredible statistic would be to find out how many people actually set foot in that country, they say the Vietnam era, and that encompasses anybody that was in the service from 1962, I believe it is, to 1975, it doesn't matter whether you were in Korea, Alaska, Philippines, Germany, wherever, you're considered a Vietnam era Veteran. I would like to know how

many people actually set foot in that country and how many are left. I think our country would be shocked, literally, be shocked. First of all, there are a lot of funky cancers that people have died from, and an unbelievable amount of heart attacks, and suicides. When I got out as a twenty-one or twenty-two year old person with all the physical training I had, I should have been in my prime, and I tell you, that was probably the worst I have felt in my entire life. It was probably for the first three years after I got out of the service, everything was going haywire with me, my hands started crippling up, my fingers actually bending in arthritis conditions, gastrointestinal disorders to where I couldn't keep food down, still to this day, I haven't gained a pound. I weigh less now than when I went into the service. When I went into the service I weighed 158, within a month of getting out I weighed 140. I haven't gained a pound since, for nineteen years. I know what happened to me and I know I didn't go seek any type of help. I've talked to other people. I know how I felt when I got out and I know it wasn't the way I felt when I went in. I know something had an effect on me. I would say it was exposure to...They say the worst things you could do is eat native foods over there. I worked with the South Vietnamese for three months and we had Vietnamese cooks and everything else. Who knows what was in the native foods, who knows what was in that. Unemployment, there is another big issue, a high percentage of the unemployment figures are made up of Vietnam Veterans.

D: Why do you think that is?

M: Some of them can't hold down a job. Some of them bounce from job to job. Tempers mean a lot. I know to this day, if I can correct one flaw in my personality, it would be my temper. I seem to get mad for no apparent reason. It played a big part in my divorce. I have a perfect family that have always been supportive of me. At times I find myself lashing out at people. It's just like I have no tact. A lot of times I'll fly off the handle when I shouldn't. I think that's not good for a job situation either. If there are a lot of Veterans like that getting mad at their fellow employees, their workers, their employer, whatever, it makes it hard to stay in a job. They get out of it. A lot of things, I don't know, but unemployment is a big issue. Homeless, the vast majority of the homeless people in this country are made up of Veterans and their families. I came back and saw the people that I graduated with were Attorneys in law firms and Pharmacists and Doctors and successful people, and here, a lot of us were just starting our lives. A lot of those people never really got to start anything. They remained homeless, that's another big issue.

D: Let me ask you something about your friends. One of the other Vets that I've talked to recently said that he hadn't maintained any friendships with any people that he'd gone to high school with, that somehow they didn't seem to think the same things were important that he did. They hadn't gone through what he had gone through and what they were interested in seemed so trivial to him. How does that square with your experience?

M: That's pretty close. I'll tell you, I had two real good friends in high school and after I got out of the service, we made contact with each other but that's as far as it ever went. I have know these people all of my life and we don't associate anymore, we don't keep in contact anymore. My friends were a real close knit group and it probably only represents outside of my chapter in fellow Veterans, they're about the only way I can keep myself straight, my temper straight anyway. I'll go a long way with a Vietnam Veteran and I'll tell you it's pretty hard to get Vets to agree on anything but it seems like I can really go a long way with them and so short a way with somebody else. Most of my friends are Vietnam Veterans or else people I work with. They are just real close knit, but it just represents two or three people as friends as far as having a social life and a lot of friends out there, I really don't have what I would consider a lot of close friends, they are very few.

D: As far as the government is concerned, you mentioned the Veterans Administration and you sounded a little skeptical, what is, if anything, the government doing at all today to help Veterans?

M: The VA is in shambles. It has been elevated to cabinet post now. Now it is the department of Veterans Affairs. It's in shambles, there are very few places in the country where VA facilities are operating the way they should be. There is a critical nursing shortage, improper care, a lot of these people are literally signing their death warrants when they go to VA facilities. The beds are being cut back. You talk to some Veterans who are getting outstanding care, most of them are World War II Veterans. It may be only on one ward, or one individual VA facility. You may get good service on the upper respiratory ward, but you go to another ward of the hospital and it's unbelievable. If you've been reading the paper lately, the death rates in VA facilities are way higher than the national average. The money is not being spent. If you don't have the money there, you're not going to attract the medical people and they're not going to work for nothing, so you're going to get substandard care. The

question of what priorities the government wants to make if they want to make them. They priority on defense or do they want to cut that money and spend it on the Veterans that went out there and did all this stuff for our country. The whole thing boils down that this whole country ever since the war has become so morally corrupt. In our government there is so much corruption that goes on in it. All our systems, the VA is a great thing, social security is great, every system that comes along, the intentions are great, but by the time bureaucracy gets done with it and greed gets done with it, they're left in shambles.

D: If America were to become involved in another Vietnam type of a situation, what would your feeling be about the U.S. becoming involved?

M: I touched on that a little earlier with advisors. I don't see any problem with an advisory role because you have career type people....Like Central America, I can't agree down there, we're having....You don't cultivate goodwill with Army tanks. You don't go down there. We had no idea in Central America who we were dealing with. How can you choose to support a side and get involved militarily when you don't even know who to talk to, there is no representation. The government down there, the ideal situation would be to wait until they set up some type of government down there and then go down and try to deal with them. If you can't deal with them then you can start your subversive action or whatever to get the type of government that would be more beneficial to the people, and even to us, but to get involved militarily like we were in Vietnam, I can't see that.

D: I hope this tape, or parts of it, will be used for school students to listen to and for university research. What do you feel is a lesson that you would pass on to students or even your own children if you ever have any about the war in Vietnam?

M: I think the people have to get morally involved in the government and understand the government, understand how it works. If we would have had our act together, the Gulf of Tonkin resolution wasn't a legal way to get us involved in that war, it was illegal, if we understood our political system, if we were doing our jobs, we could have recalled all our congressmen, had congress vote on that and if the people mandated that we declare war, then congress could have done it and won it legally. We can't let a political system run amuck to where they are doing what they want to do. They got us involved in that war and it was actually illegal the way they did it. You have to get involved with your system, you have to work with your system so that

Vietnams don't arise. If we were doing our jobs as people back then, Vietnam never should have happened. If we were doing our job as people, they should have been doing their jobs when the Veterans came back. We would have demanded and the facility would have been there to take care of them, we wouldn't be dealing with the problems we're having today. So we have to be a little bit conscious of the political system and we have to be conscious of what makes it work. We have to be conscious of how to get involved, how to make our voices heard so that the system works the way it's supposed to work. You have protections against all these things.

D: Well this is pretty much the conclusion of the interview. Are there any subjects that I haven't touched on today that you can think of that maybe we ought to talk about?

M: The only think I can think of is that this idea of history of the Vietnam War is great. I think people would read books, there are quite a few books out on Vietnam, but I mean if people would learn the history of that war, I think we have to educate ourselves as to how we got into it, and have a better understanding of what went on in that particular time in our lives to carry that on. We can't look at that as just a conflict and base all our history on the Civil War and World War I and World War II. There are a lot of lessons to be learned from the Vietnam War and there's a lot of leadership that's out there that's been involved in the Vietnam War. A lot of the people that are influential in making our decisions today in government are relatively young people in their early forties. They never participated in the Vietnam War in any way shape or form. These are the same people that are going to maybe commit troops to Central America or whatever. You know there is a lot of good leadership out there that came out of the Vietnam war. We have to work with those type of people and try to put those people in positions where we can learn from what happened. I think that is the only message I would have. There is a lot to be learned from the Vietnam War you know, if we just take time to do it.

D: Well, thank you for coming down and being with me today and submitting to the interview. I appreciate your time. I know that it's difficult to talk about those things but my students here at Fitch, who I'm sure will hear parts of this, appreciate it.

M: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW