

Pat McGregor's Oral History

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### Summary of Pat McGregor's Oral History

Pat McGregor, Lexington, joined the Army in 1968. As a part of the college option plan, he avoided the draft. However, after completing college and realizing he would inevitably go to war, McGregor planned on being an Officer in the Army. At the completion of basic training, McGregor was off to AIT, Advanced Individual Training, where he would specialize in Artillery fire direction. Harassment by the drill sergeants was inevitable, however, McGregor faced a new hurdle in OCS. He became sick and thus got the name of a quitter or whiner in OCS.

Panama was McGregor's next training site, in which he learned how to make it in the jungle. Shortly after this, he flew over to Vietnam in a TWA commercial flight. His orders called for him to be in 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, located on the DMZ. His Army division was a brigade and became under the control of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division.

He talked about how quickly he was processed through when he got to Vietnam. This was an on-going thing. Processing went on twenty four hours a day. There were many things to be processed through and it was a quick process by the time McGregor got there.

Pat McGregor really felt safe when he was with the Armored Cavalry Unit. They were like a breed of their own. They did crazy things to pass the time, but were always there when it counted.

One of the first things he did when he got there was attend a wake. It was strange for him, even though the wake did not last very long. They went to Quang Tri and a battle took place. There was very intense fire. His job was trying to find out where the mortar fire was coming from and how far away it was.

He talked about race relations and drug use and people he came in contact with. He was never in contact with the Rocks (South Koreans), but he did know the Aussie's. He thought they were fun people.

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Ernst: Why did you join the army in 1968?

McGregor: Well, I didn't really have a whole lot of choice. I had just graduated from college. I had transferred after my sophomore year and was a little bit behind throughout college. The draft board knew that because I had a student deferment. I think partly due to my family connections and by dumb luck, they held off and did not draft me because possibly on the basis of not making adequate progress and when I transferred I probably lost the equivalent of close to a semester. I had to double up and go to summer school in order to graduate on time, which I did in four years. I didn't even have my cap and gown off before the draft board called my mother and told her that I would be called up on the next go around. This was before the lottery system, so I had not been in the ROTC or anything like that. So I knew I was going into the service one way or another.

I took the option of joining the Army because the program in which they offered called the college option program, in which guaranteed you that you would go to OCS, assuming of course you would be physically qualified to remain in the service and so on and so forth. The deal was that of course, you could turn it down because of course taking commission is voluntary. If you decided you didn't want to go to OCS, then your obligation would be two year active duty obligation as any draftee. So although I had a so-called RA status, Regular Army Status, I was not. If you joined voluntarily at the time as I recall, it was a three-year obligation, but as a draftee you had two year (intelligible). And you could fall back on that if you wanted to. But I had no intention of not going to OCS; I wanted to I never had any doubt that I wanted to do that. In answer to your question, I didn't have a whole lot of choice.

Ernst: I have heard that a lot of times, that people would rather have control over their lives and select and enlist as opposed to being drafted.

McGregor: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that gave me some more flexibility. I figured I was going to Vietnam anyway. You know I just saw that in the stars, but of course a lot of people didn't. But their perception was that your inducted one day and in the jungle the next. You know it is just an automatic thing and so in my case, I thought I would go. If I'm going to be in the service and go to Vietnam, then I'm going to go as an officer. That gave me a pretty much guaranteed option to do that.

Ernst: Sure. Now, was your brother in the Air Force at this time stationed in Japan?

McGregor: Yes, that's right. I'm not sure how long he had been there, not long when I joined. Cause he was in the Air Force for four years and he probably spent two and a half to three of them in Japan. In fact, I visited him once there. Did I have that on the umm? I must have told you that at sometime.

Ernst: Yes, you said your brother was in the Air Force and I was curious.

McGregor: Yes, that was one of the questions. Yeah. He was a Communications Officer. He was in charge of maintaining a bunch of equipment that was used to transfer a lot of communications from Southeast Asia back to the States. It was kind of a relay point there, as I understand it.

Ernst: Did he ever do any service in Vietnam?

McGregor: No, he was never "in country." He and his wife in fact, their oldest child was born there. They had a small Air Force contingent there.

Ernst: Interesting. What was your training like? Did you feel like you got good training at OCS and not just at OCS? I know you were trained at a number of areas, if you could talk about the whole process.

McGregor: Well, of course, the prelude to OCS is the training that any enlisted man gets. You get basic combat training in your specialty and from there you can go to additional training. Or you can, you can go to your unit. Basic combat training was the same thing for everybody. It is one of the great things about the army; it is the same task. Everybody gets the same deal.

(Laugh)

It was no different from anyone else's. It was an adjustment for sure. Looking back on it, it was a fun time in a lot of respects. Cause you never knew what was going to happen.

The friendships you make the dealing with people that are very unfamiliar. There were even people in basic training that didn't speak any English, for heaven's sakes. There were mostly Puertican kids from the inner cities in Chicago and New York. They were not fluent in English at all and some of the things you have to do to get through basic training does require paper and pencil responses. You gotta sit down and take tests, so they had a hard time getting then through. But they did. I don't think very many of them didn't make it.

Ernst: Was that an odd experience for you? Obvisouly someone with a good educational background, I mean did you...?

McGregor: It was different. Cause most of my educational experiences were pretty white bread, pretty much vanilla. You know?

Ernst: You had gone to good schools, too. Transy and Vandy are great schools.

McGregor: Most of the kids were middle class kids like me. They never had been in inner cities before, never had to deal with these folks. We really didn't have many serious problems around, that I was aware of. I'm sure there were some that were taken care of. But it wasn't like there was a gang warfare in basic training. Everybody was in the same boat. There wasn't any reason for there to be any conflict. It was a matter of cooperating with each other and making life easier rather than the other way around. It was good, I was thought. It was very physically demanding. You know sometimes we'd be up at three in the morning, for sheer harassment. You know? Taking your footlocker out and dumping it out in the middle of the road and forest marches. But of course, we felt that we were being harassed to the brink of insanity at the time, of course.

The funny things I think of is the harassment, the drill sergeants put you through. I was a little bit older, 21 or 22. Was I that old? I guess I was. Some of these kids were 17 or 18 years old. They had a different outlook on life.

Ernst: I think it is a big difference.

McGregor: Oh, yeah. That's a huge difference. Yeah. Some of them didn't know how to take all this stuff. Some of these drill sergeants were younger than I was.

Ernst: (Laughed)

McGregor: That certainly wasn't uppermost on my mind. But looking back on it, I realize these were young guys. They were doing their job. They were having some fun with it. You know after a while, you kind of catch onto the joke that they are just messing' with you. There was this one drill sergeant. I was truly afraid of this guy. A good friend of mine and I ran into each other. We were in high school together. He was a year older than me. He still is. He graduated a year earlier. But he and I went into the Army at the same time. We were sworn into together.



I didn't know he was going to be there and he didn't know I was going to be there. I knew him pretty well, but he wasn't one of the people I ran around. Cause we weren't in the same class. But knew him and liked him. He looked at me and said what are you doing. I said, "well, I guess the same thing you are." We were together. He went through a different unit in Vietnam. But we came back together and went back to **Fort Seal**. So during most of our Army time, we were together.

Ernst: That's good.

McGregor: That was good. I consider him to be one of my very best friends in this world. In fact, I named my middle son after him. I talked to him yesterday as a matter fact, but haven't gotten to see him in the past several years. But at any rate, we've laughed at all the funny things that happened in basic. This one drill sergeant that I'll have to say, I was truly afraid of this guy. He was calling out the names on the first day you were there. He called "McGeorge." And of course, everyone looked around and there was no "McGeorge" that raised their hand. He said "McGeorge, you better by God answer me." Said, "McGeorge, M-C-G-R-E-G-O-R." Oh, that's me drill sergeant. He had this big stick and he said, "Boy, I'll knock those God damn eye glasses right off your face. See when I call your name, you better by God answer me," he says, "Sweet Lip, your ass is mine, get over here."

Ernst: Oh, Gosh. (Laughs)

McGregor: (Laughs) I'll have to say that was my introduction and I thought this was going to be a tough eight weeks.

Ernst: Did you dare say, it was pronounced, McGregor?

McGregor: No, no. No, not a word. His name is Sargent Jones. I ran into him a couple years later.

Ernst: Do you think he was harassing you because here is an educated guy and I'm going to go ahead and pop him? Or do you think he is just mispronounced it?

McGregor: I think he just mispronounced it. But it didn't matter to him, if he was mispronouncing it or not.

One thing I remember when we were inducted into basic. We were inducted in Nashville. It was funny to here people tell stories of how their transportation between basic. You know some people had very long distances to travel. A lot of people flew, but we took the bus. It was a milk run all the way from Nashville to the little town outside Fort Leonard. I think it was called Waynesville, Missouri. We got on that bus at 6 A.M. and got their at 3 A.M. the next morning after just stopping at one little place after another. We got to the reception center at the basic training center. We had a video, we had to watch on the UCMJ, Uniform Military Code of Justice. There was a guy going around to make sure no one fell asleep. It was kind of absurd because it was 3 A.M., sitting there watching the video. You know? And your not suppose to be sleeping. They harassed you into staying awake.

Fort Leonard Wood is the training combat for engineers. All these guys were bragging, fussing, and fuming. It was just more harassment. As soon as we got off the bus, they were onto us. At the reception center, anyone who has been there two or three days is a General. Some of these guys, if they had something on their sleeve, boy they had a lot of power.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: I remember after the video they hurried us up into one of the barracks . They typically when a person leaves a bunk, in order to secure it, so to speak. They would just roll the mattress up. I don't know why. But that's how it has always been. So they told us to go ahead

and sleep until breakfast. Well, I didn't know if it was okay to roll the mattress back down and he didn't either. We were so afraid of doing something wrong.

Ernst: Sure.

McGregor: We didn't even roll the mattress down, we slept on the springs.

Ernst: Oh, my God.

McGregor: (Laughs) I will never ever for get that. Well, actually we were there a couple of days before we actually went over to our unit, our basic training unit. But it was fun. Looking back on it was like, I say the great thing about it, it is the same. The same as everyone else gets. It was good training. You know on the sense of changing. Not only of giving you the skills that you presumably are going to need, but it's more of an attitude adjustment. So to speak, going from a civilian to a soldier. They do a good job of it. It is very much a brain washing thing. Its well designed for that reason, to turn you into a soldier and try to make you think like a soldier. You know you have limited contact with the outside. They play a lot of head games with you in the sense of starting rumors. Rumors were always rampant.

Ernst: (Laughs)

McGregor: Of course, the rumor in every basic training unit was that our cycle was going to be cut short because they were going to ship us straight to Vietnam. Every unit in the whole world has that rumor.

Ernst: Sure.

McGregor: Of course, they don't. Its always the same thing. But at any rate after that I went to AIT, Advanced Individual Training, and that was at Fort Sill. The other people at my basic training unit, actually there were several there that I knew. One was a fraternity brother of mine, who is actually the one who talked me into joining under the College Option Program. He is

from Atlanta and was down there visiting him. He said this is what you oughta do. This is a good idea and so I said, "Well, sounds pretty good to me." He was in my basic training unit as a matter of fact. But he and several other friends, you know a good friend of mine from home and several other folks from there, that had come and was in the same deal as I was. They went ahead because for whatever reason, my security clearance was held up and they wouldn't ship me. They wouldn't send me out until I was...

Ernst: Right.

McGregor: So I was there, gosh maybe a week. Gosh, two weeks? Just kind of there in a holding pattern. Just doing errands and being a gopher. Took the bus from Fort Leonard Wood all the way out to Lawton, Oklahoma. That was another one of these long bus rides. Got there in the middle of the night. Finally found my way to the right spot. AIT compared to basic training was like vacation. There was a fraction of the harassment.

The particular AIT I was in, the MOS, it was called. Now I forget. 1380 or something like that? I was a fire direction specialist. It was a lot of technical aspects to it. There was a lot that needed to be taught. It was not a matter of teaching you some general principles about things. There were things, you had to be able to do. That you couldn't make a mistake on. And so the training was very intense in the sense of academically making sure that nobody got through without really knowing what they were doing. And able to do it without errors. I mean there are a lot of checks to make sure that you don't make an error. But I mean that is part of the system. You gotta be, just really... It was very demanding in that sense. But it was easy we didn't have that much physical training requirements. There wasn't much harassment. Some of the terminology is escaping me. I want to say chores, I mean that's not it. It is details.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: Details had to be taken care of. But other than that, we had most weekends off. We were there in the fall of the year. I joined in late June, so by the time I got to AIT, it was getting to be fall, late summer. You know, the weather was nice as I recall. So that was good. We had some very good training there. A lot of what we did there at that training was also part of our OCS training and so it was very helpful. Some people came to **(unintelligible) OS** already under their belt. They just had to work a lot harder to learn that stuff.

It got into another holding pattern after that. After AIT because our OCS class that I assigned to, wasn't going to start until gosh December, maybe. Late November, early December? So again, I was doing details. But mostly just kind of messing around. We were assigned to a, I think it was called holding battery.

Ernst: (Laughs) Yeah.

McGregor: It was for the people who were just there.

Ernst: Right.

McGregor: And no place to go, yet. We had a good time, too. I had a car out there.

Ernst: I bet you were popular.

McGregor: Mmm, Huh. (Laughs) We found this little town out in Oklahoma called Chickasha. There was a girl's school there. There was also a Holiday Inn with a bar. So we use to go up to Chickasha every chance we got. And met some girl's up there. It was kind of an on going joke in a way. In a way, you know let's head to Chickasha. Its about half way in between Lawton and Oklahoma City.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: Went to Oklahoma City a few times. Went up to campus at University of Oklahoma there in **Normand**. Yeah, we had a good time. To tell you the truth, we had a real good time.

As a matter fact, we had such a good time that when OCS started. I might have gotten sick anyway, but I know I was run down. I wasn't getting much sleep and I was staying out late at night.

Ernst: Having too much fun?

McGregor: Having too much fun.

Ernst: (Laughs)

McGregor: That's right. The first or second day of OCS, I became acutely ill. Of course, they assumed that I was just wanting out of it.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: I don't know why, they would have assumed that. I was voluntary. Maybe they thought I was ambivalent about it. I'm sure they had people come in that didn't really want to finish. But that really marked me for most of my time in OCS, as somebody who was to be weeded out.

Ernst: Really? Wow. Just because you got sick.

McGregor: Yeah.

Ernst: Couldn't the doctors just like say he's got the flu.

McGregor: I don't think they asked the doctors. (Laughs) I don't know. I guess the doctors saw me. The doctors saw me because I whined and complained about this for years. The fact of the matter is, I don't think any of the medical people realized how sick I was. There was a flu going around at that time. I think it was a flu going around at that time. I think it was the Hong Kong Flu. That's what I had. I just had a bad case of the flu. My temperature shot sky high and they put me in the annex of the hospital because I didn't require all that much care. I mean I don't think there was too much they could do, I don't suppose. Certainly it's a good thing

because in the annex there, you didn't get any care. You rarely ever saw a nurse. The corpsmen would come in and they assumed also that I was kind of laying out. When they would come and take my temperature, they would get furious because they insisted that I had taken a match to it. Got no aspirin and no blankets.

Ernst: Wow.

McGregor: My tack officer came over to see me and I told him that I didn't think they were doing quite as much as they could to help me. Apparently he did talk to somebody. Of course, that made them mad, but they did give me aspirin and after that I did get a blanket. That was a real miserable time. Actually in retrospect, I was not given the care that I should've been given. But you know, it was a busy time. There were a lot of returnees, there in the annex from Vietnam. They were in some rehab type of status.

Ernst: Right.

McGregor: A lot of the activities there and what they were trying to do there were geared toward them. But that a pretty miserable time. I never will forget that. In fact if I had have had a progressive illness, I could have very well have died in that situation. I don't want to be overly dramatic about it, but they just really didn't believe I was that sick. Eventually I got well. I remember that night. I was there for close to a week. I remember the night my fever broke. I woke up in the middle of the night, it was like somebody had taken an anville off of me. I could take a deep breath. I realized that I was going to be okay in the next couple of days. And I was. I went back to the unit and to the battery. Of course, they were all over me, but the fact is, I did miss some of the worst harassment of the whole OCS period, which is the first week. So they were after me. They thought I wasn't going to cut it because I had missed all the instruction that week, I failed the first test.

Ernst: Well, sure.

McGregor: I remember it was on drill and ceremony. That was another reason, they said he's not going to make it. Its kind of like the shark. Once they've got somebody that's kind of weakened, they go after that one. I was kind of identified as somebody that got weeded out. There was a lot of pressure. It didn't bother me that much. You know I was getting somewhat more harassment than the other people at that level.

Ernst: Were you more determined as a result.

McGregor: No more, no less because it never dawned on me to think about quitting. I had no intention of quitting. It wasn't in me, it just wasn't an option. There is nothing they could do, legally...

Ernst: Right.

McGregor: To shake my resolve. Everything turned out fine. I didn't very many leadership positions in OCS. My grades were fine, but by the time the tack officer... He told me later he thought I would never make it. His name was **Newmon Coalmon** and we called him Newmon the Nuke behind his back. (Laughs) He told me, he just didn't realize that I was obviously determined to make it , till kind of the end. OCS is 23 weeks as I recall. In a way, the leadership positions while its good training, were a lot of work and a lot of anxiety. By not getting any of the top leadership positions, it made it easier, a lot less stressful actually. I never complained to them once about not getting a leadership position. I figured if they wanted to give it to me fine, if they didn't it would just be easier on me so...

Ernst: Sure.



McGregor: That worked out fine. I got orders for Vietnam straight out of OCS. The jungle school in Panama and I went down there for two weeks. Then came and went straight over after that.

Ernst: Did you feel prepared? Well prepared?

McGregor: I felt well prepared. Yeah, I was very well trained for what I was asked to do. You know, people always tell you, the Army trains you for one thing and you never get a chance to do it. (Laughs)

Oh, I got lots of chances to do it. Everything you studied, with a few exceptions. Everything that we worked on in OCS were things we must know in order to do our job. Artillery is a pretty technical kind of thing. There is a lot to it. Not only in terms of battery, the firing battery operation. You know taking a projectile and **sheading** it anywhere from 5 to 30 miles away at a target you can't actually see, is a pretty technical skill.

We were well trained and Army artillery is an awesome thing. It can really bring a huge amount of ordnance to a target in a short amount of time.

Ernst: What was your first impression of Vietnam? Did you come in on a commercial flight, like a lot of them?

McGregor: Yeah, I did. Flew over on a nice TWA. It was nice. My friend and I went over to San Francisco for a week before, we were to fly out. Kind of a last harrah, kind of thing. Fun time in San Francisco. I tell you what, too. We had a fun time in Panama, too.

Ernst: Really.

McGregor: Oh, God. We had two weekends free there. The middle weekend and the weekend we left. They let us go for a couple of days to Panama City and we came back and caught flight

back. We did our thing in the jungle. But we also did our thing in Panama City. We had a lot of fun there.

Ernst: (Laughs) Was that good training, I mean the jungle training?

McGregor: You know it was an acclimation primarily. It was to give you an idea of what it is like to actually adjust to the heat and adjust to operating in that kind of environment. We did some fun things like repelling. We repelled down a waterfall. It was a very small little waterfall. But it differed in that respect. We did repelling in OCS, too a little bit. We did that and we did some other river operations to kind of teach you how to move forward and save yourself. You know, these kinds of things that was important to know. Things like the nature of a jungle stream, which in tends to be very, very deep. You know, you think you're just going to walk through this little shallow bit of water. Which of course you've got like 50 pounds on your back. What happens is you'll drowned, if you're not prepared for that sort of thing. The main thing was just learning to deal with the jungle and the heat. It was pretty uncomfortable at first. It was good training. We had some Aussie's there and they were a hoot. They were funny. A lot of different, mostly young Officers and middle NCOs, mostly young people. Most of us had never been to Vietnam. Some of them had been. You know the ideal was for people who weren't accustomed to it.

Ernst: Right.

McGregor: Mostly young Officers. We saw a good bit of Panama. Took a train. I've always been confused a little bit about the geography about where we were relevant to the canal and to Panama City and so on and so forth. We crossed from one side to the other, I forget which side we were on and which side we crossed over to. But at any rate, it was very interesting.

But at any rate, going back to your question about what were your first impressions of Vietnam. Yeah, I took a... Oh, well I went to San Francisco and it sounds like I'm just going from one party to another.

Ernst: I know so far...

McGregor: You know Chickasha to Panama City to San Francisco.

Ernst: You probably just had a great time except for just being sick for a little while.

McGregor: (Laughs) Yeah, I'll have to say I did have a good time. I did have a good time. No question about it.

Ernst: During any of this, did you ever fret or feel concerned about the fact you were going to Vietnam, which was not the garden spot of the military at this point in time.

McGregor: You know, I always thought it was my destiny to go. I didn't really worry too much about it. No, I really didn't fret too much, but the end of OCS. I think its about a week before you graduate, they call everybody and they give you orders. You know and a lot of us in my OCS class, a lot of us did get Germany and got other units in the States. With very few exceptions all of us ended up in Vietnam and at one time or another. We all knew that. That that was going to be the case. That's what we are being trained for. But you know hearing that, hearing them call that out, you know. I remember having, kind of a sinking feeling in my stomach. You know, but it didn't last long. And you know several of us were going at the same time. You know the Army is a big organization, but its kind of a family thing. You don't do anything alone.

Ernst: I suspect, but I maybe wrong, once you let it go. It was like a relief or a freeing experience to say, "Well, I'm going so I might as well, just not worry about it."

McGregor: Yeah, it is. And another thing, I was young and single. You know if I had been married, there would have been other bouncers. I didn't have anybody to worry about, but myself so what's to be anxious about.

Ernst: I have heard that before.

McGregor: Another thing it was 1968, when I joined. You know there was a lot of stuff going on in 1968. It was a very exciting, at times overwhelming. In some respects, in terms of the change and the race riots and the assassinations and so forth. It was stimulating. It was exciting and it was a great time to be in your early 20s.

Ernst: Yeah, really. I have often told my students, when we get to that point that 1968 and much like you said it, were to the most exciting years America ever had. But at the same time, one of the most tragic years.

McGregor: Mmm Huh. Mmm Huh.

Ernst: I mean the TET Offensive, the assassinations, the 1968 democratic convention. I mean...

McGregor: Mmm Huh. Mmm Huh.

Ernst: But yeah, I can see the excitement of it all. There was always something going on.

McGregor: Mmm Huh. Yeah. Yeah, it was not dull. It was not dull. Now there were plenty of years in the 70s, now that was pretty dull. (Laughs)

Ernst: And bad music, too. (Laughs)

McGregor: (Laughs) Yeah, and bad clothes... But that was an exciting time.

Ernst: Well, what about your first impressions of Vietnam?

McGregor: Well like I said, we went over on TWA. And I even remember the name of that movie we saw was *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* with **Alan Arken**. It was a very sad movie and why in the world they chose that movie to show, I do not know.

Ernst: (Laughs)

McGregor: **Alan Arken** played this deaf guy and it was a very sad movie. But I don't know maybe, they just wanted to take our mind off of other sad things. But it was just a regular commercial aircraft. We used to laugh. There was a kind of standing joke about what they would say when you landed at, I guess that was, **Tonsinute Air Base**, there outside Saigon. I think that it was... That they would get on the intercom and say "Welcome to Vietnam. Temperature 120 degrees in the shade. Ground fire moderate." (Laughs) But they didn't. They had a regular stewardess that said, "Bye bye, Bye bye."

Ernst: Wasn't that a weird experience?

McGregor: It was bizarre. And she said to me. She looked at me and said "See you later." And I said, "Certainly hope so." (Laughs)

(**Unintelligible**) But that was really, really bizarre. At any rate, we got there to another reception station. We got clothing issued.

There was absolutely nothing to do. (**Unintelligible**) You got your orders to go. It seemed like invariably you got your orders in the middle of the night. And they would come through, a guy with a flashlight saying, "Where is so and so, where is so and so." He would find you and say, "Yeah, your orders came in, let's go." As soon as you got your orders, you had to pack up and get out and get your transportation to get to your unit. It didn't matter what time it was. They didn't wait till after breakfast, to do that. I wasn't there very long. I was there less than 24 hours. The thing about it was, not only was this a station for people coming in, but it was also where people processed out.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: Or one of the places people processed out. I don't think that's where I went. No, I went to Cam Rhan Bay when I left. But you know, some of the guys when they were leaving saw fit to harass the young lieutenants who were just coming in. Saying nice things like, "You're probably not going to survive." Especially this one particular warrant officer, he was really obnoxious. He was saying, "you are artillery lieutenants, you won't be over there, but 15 minutes." You know, stuff like that. He says, "You might as well just hang it up right now." He went on and on about that. At any rate, I wasn't there very long before I got my orders. We scatter different places, all the people I knew.

I got the Fifth Infantry Division, which was up in the DMZ. Everybody was saying, "Oh, boy. You know that sounds bad." It probably wasn't any worse than a lot of other places, but it was certainly the furthest away.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: So early the next morning, we caught a C130. Flew up the coasts and dropping people off at each of the spots. I never will forget this one guy. I don't know why this story is a ... I've told this before to my kids just to see who can gross each other out, I guess. This guy got sick and we didn't have any of those air sickness bags. Yeah, for some reason. For obvious reasons, he had no place to vomit, so he vomited in his hat. Then he had nothing to do with it, so he swallowed it.

Ernst: Oh, God!

McGregor: Talk about making you sick. We were all saying, "God! Why are you doing that?" I felt sorry for the guy. That was really disgusting. But it was hot and stuffy in the back of that thing. And all of our stomachs were churning.

Ernst: Yeah.

McGregor: That was pretty miserable.

Ernst: Ahh, man.

McGregor: That was terrible.

Ernst: I didn't think you were going to tell me that.

McGregor: It was a lot grosser than you thought it was going to be.

Ernst: Yeah, I didn't know what you were going to say.

McGregor: (Laughs)

Ernst: It made it hard to breathe. Yeah, I'd say.

McGregor: Yeah. But at any rate, we stopped at all these little places. Little, I mean they were just different air bases where everybody got off at their assigned spots. I was the last spot. I don't remember if I went to **Qwan Tree** or if I got off at Da Nang. I might have gotten off at Da Nang. But at any rate, my unit was up. You know, right on the DMZ. Brigade headquarters was at **Qwan Tree**.

In fact, the Fifth Infantry Division was a brigade. The whole division wasn't there. It was a separate brigade. The other two brigades were, I believe still at Fort Riley, Kansas at the time. **Fifth neck** is now at Fort Pope, Louisiana. No actually, Big Red One was at Fort Riley. I forgot where the rest of **Fifth neck** was. But it was a separate brigade. When I got there, it was commanded by a full Colonel.

The so called TONE, Table of Organization and Equipment for a separate brigade actually calls for a Brigade General to be the commander. Now why we didn't have a BG commander at the time, I don't know. But we were operationally controlled by the Third Marine Division, so they may have had some say about that. They might not have wanted some Army General there telling them what to do or telling some of their Generals what to do. But later on,

we did get a BG. We left the Third Marine Division and became part of the Army 24<sup>th</sup> Corps, which made a big difference in the kind of support we got. The kind of operations that we were involved with.

Marines and the Army are two separate organizations. They think differently. They operate differently. They have different missions. And it just doesn't work very well or didn't seem to, for us to be part of the Marine Division. Our support from them was not good. When I say support, I mean field support, getting food and dry socks and stuff like that.

Ernst: Do you think you were last on their list?

McGregor: Yeah, I think we were. We weren't their top priority for sure.



McGregor: One of the things that I guess my biggest impression when I first got to Vietnam, other than how hot it was, was how quickly I was processed through. There was a lot of processing to be done. First, I had to process through at the brigade headquarters and then I had to process through my artillery unit. Actually, I started out at the artillery battalion level, I had to process through there. Usually there's a young officer needing a commander, kind of getting an orientation to it, to the unit, to what's going on. So, I started at the brigade. Then, I went to my artillery battalion commander. Then, I went down to the battery level. Then I went over to my assignment, which was with the infantry. But as a UNINTELLIGIBLE observer, I'm attached to infantry. That's the way it works. There's one UNINTELLIGIBLE observer to every infantry maneuver unit. Since my artillery battery is, so called organic to the brigade, that means we provide that support. So, that's what we did. So, then I had to process through there. So that's about, I don't know how many different things. This was pretty much around the clock. You didn't quit at 5:00. You just continued to go.

I guess I slept some. It was so hot out, I probably didn't feel like sleeping too much. At any rate, I remember that as soon as I got to the infantry...Oh...there was another level I had to process through. I went from my battery over to the infantry battalion, and I had to process there and I had to meet that commander. Then I was assigned to the infantry unit. I was with the First 11. This is maybe of no real consequence...

Ernst: Oh, please, everything you've said so far is...

McGregor: A separate mechanized infantry brigade is made up of an infantry battalion, so called leg infantry, not air borne, not mechanized, they walk. An armor battalion, a mechanized infantry battalion, a 1-5-5 self-propelled UNINTELLIGIBLE artillery battalion in support. There is a cav regiment, I believe, an armored cav regiment, another armored cav troop, and a

variety of other support organizations. It's very heavy. It's a very, weighted over strength brigade because of the fact it's a separate brigade. So they would put together different combinations of those things. They would call them task force. Task force this. Task force that. They would combine tanks and back infantry. So on and so forth. Sometimes the cav, well, usually operated by themselves. They were a different breed. Having worked with them enough, I found that perfectly okay with me.

Armored cavalry unit is a legacy of the UNINTELLIGIBLE cavalry, and they've got that mentality of shoot first and ask questions later. That's a wild bunch. I probably came closer to getting killed by the cav than I did by the enemy at times. Because of the fact that for one thing, they move too fast for you to coordinate people on the ground with people on the tracks. You go with the cav, you're on the tracks but you couldn't possibly keep up with them. Lightning speed is their calling card. It's a matter of them seeing how fast they could drive those tracks. Well, that's dangerous for people sitting on top, especially for people like me that hadn't been on those tracks very much. Sometimes, you'd go straight up in the air and you would just hope that you would land back on the thing and not be hurt in the process.

They would take C-4...Starting fires, that was their fun thing to do. They didn't go anywhere that they didn't start a fire. They never saw a fire that they didn't like. They'd take this C-4, which will burn very intensely. It's a plastic in explosives, and they would light this stuff, and throw it to one side and then the other to see how many fires they could start. They were crazy! They were certainly effective in terms of, when they met with the enemy they were...They met force with force, that's for sure. That was really just not our style, they're just kind of operating in a different zone.

It was assigned to a leg infantry, the Bravo Company, First 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry. As soon as I got there, we were getting ready to head up north. If I'm not mistaken, the infantry battalion at that time was at Quang Tri, but we were at a lot of different fire bases and I can't remember a lot of that. I do know that the brigade had recently gotten back from Khe San. Now, this was in July of 1969. If I'm not mistaken, I believe the siege of Khe San was, I want to say '66 or '67

Ernst: It was the prelude to TET, it was used as ... to pool all the American forces.

McGregor: Yeah, it might have been early '68, but my brigade got to Vietnam in July of '68.

Maybe July '67. I know we got there in July. That was one of the problems that we had there.

There was a one year rotation and the brigade had been there a year, so every body would rotate kind of together. They tried to solve that problem by sending a lot of people to other units and kind of cross pollinating, so to speak. They were only partially successful.

Of course, I got there in July and I went up there, because that's when a lot of people were rotating out. I tried to remember the things that happened that I wasn't directly involved in because the brigade had really been beaten up. They had been out at Khe San. They went out and reopened Khe San. They had a lot of resistance out there. Another thing that had happened just before I got there was, that a lot of times, troops were carried on wheeled vehicles. On flat bed trucks, you'd have sandbags underneath you so if you hit a land min, it would absorb some of the shock. But what happened was, and this is just one of those things that shouldn't happen, but it does happen, is that they were not in a tactical kind of thing. If you're on a secure road, in a secure situation, you don't have tactical concerns about keeping people three meters apart. That kind of thing, to keep one shell from killing a while bunch of people. Somebody had got off one of these flatbed trucks that they were, or had got on I forgot which it was, but I know there was a whole bunch of people there. The pin off this grenade somehow got caught and it

pulled it out and 7 or 8 people were killed. Just stupid stuff like that. Everybody was still kind of in a tail spin about that. That was part of what people were fretting about.

One of my first things that I went to, first activities that we had, when I first got to the infantry battalion was at a wake. We went to the officer's club and passed out little cups and I think they poured scotch or bourbon, or something in everybody's. It was for one of the officers who had been killed by a land mine. It was a short wake, but that was pretty much the way it was handled. You just go on from there.

Ernst: Was that a common practice? Let's just say an officer died, that they'd come in, for a wake or a salute of sort.

McGregor: Yeah, then you'd leave it. Yeah, pretty much the way it was done. But at any rate, we'd loaded up on flat beds and that was part of the concern that people had was making sure this grenade accident didn't happen again. We'd loaded up our company and we went up to UNINTELLIGIBLE which is an old Marine base, the Army had labeled it Alpha Four. UNINTELLIGIBLE sits right up on a DMZ.

We got up there and I had been in country only 3, 4, 5 days, at the most, and there I was sitting looking into north Vietnam. You could even see a North Vietnamese flag in the DMZ where we were. It was weird, yeah.

That was a lot of the Marines' stomping ground up there. A lot of areas there had Marine names to them, like the Marketplace and different places like that. Whenever we went through the Marketplace, it was named that I think probably because at one time it was a market place. All of that had long since been completely demolished. There was very little evidence that anybody had even lived there. I remember one time that I found some dominoes. I think that was about the only thing I ever found that indicated that anybody ever lived there.

We never went to the Marketplace that we didn't take casualties. We never went to Rocket Ridge without taking casualties either and that's where we headed for that night. We got up there that day and then we headed out that night. It was a night movement. It was very dangerous. My CO was not happy about it. I say my CO, I mean the infantry company commander.

His name was Captain Woblusky. We call him Captain W. He's probably the finest, one of the finest officers I've ever known. This was his third tour in Vietnam, as a company commander. He had won every award for valor and heroism in ground combat that you can win short of the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was very highly decorated. He was very opinionated about the fact that he was not there to win the war. He was there to do his job and to perform the mission that was given to him, and at the same time, not squander American lives. If he could avoid putting people in a dangerous situation, he would do it. He did do it. It was kind of hard to avoid sometimes. He was really hard core. He was an UNINTELLIGIBLE graduate as a matter of fact, and had gone through just about every service school that you can think of. Air borne ranger, this , that, and the other. I'm not sure. I remember, I knew at that time, how he told me how he got from the Navy to the Army. He had an Article 15 in his background. I don't know what he did, but he got an Article 15. That's why he hadn't made major. He'd been a captain a long time. He didn't play the political side of the fence. He was a field soldier, and he was a good one. Unfortunately, he left just a couple months after I got there, so I wasn't in the field with him that long.

I'm belaboring this point a little bit about going up to UNINTELLIGIBLE because by far, the most protracted and the most violent combat that I had was that night.

Ernst: Early on in your tour...

McGregor: Right, because we ran into an NVA regiment, just inadvertently. That's the type of thing that happens when you move at night. That's the reasons why Americans don't generally do that. But we headed up to Rocket Ridge and we had almost gotten there and we were trying to get into our night position up there. We ran into this regiment and it was just ... all hell broke loose. I was just as green behind the ears I mean, I was well trained, but I had never seen the likes of what was going on. We were taking indirect fire from mortars and I was trying to... One of the things that you do with artillery is counter battery fire to try to suppress their artillery. Of course, they didn't have any artillery like we did. At night or at any time, figuring out where this mortar is coming from is hard to do. Of course they had a little nifty way of digging these mortars in, in such a way that you could barely hit them. In order to get rid of them, it would have to be a direct hit. Because mortar is high angle fire, they don't have to be above ground. They can shoot these things from below ground. They just have to have a little angle. They're almost impossible to eliminate.

Of course that was my job, to try to do that, to try to get that artillery in there, of some support. Mostly, I was just afraid, trying to figure out what the commander wanted me to do. He didn't really want me to do a whole lot. He didn't feel like there was much we could do, at that point with artillery. Of course, my liaison officer was really hot for me to call in some missions.

I didn't know where my people were. We were strung out all down the mountain side. There was a bunch of fire fights going down at the base of the mountain. I didn't really know where the enemy was. Actually, they seemed to be every where. They were every where. What do you do? It was just one of those things. War is confusing. Combat is a fog.

That lasted all night. We tried to get a MediVac in there and he got shot down. That was a Marine MediVac, as a matter of fact. They would not send another MediVac in after that. We

later got Army here from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, if I'm not mistaken. He finally got in there, but their Marine pilot, we got him in the perimeter and he died, eventually. I remember that it wasn't too long...I don't remember what time all this started. It was probably 10:00 or 11:00. By about 3:00am, we had a UNINTELLIGIBLE, we called it Puff the Magic Dragon. I forgot what it actually was, but it was a flare ship. They could really light up the sky. They could turn dark into day light, that's for sure. It stayed up until dawn. We also had some emergency ammunition resupplies, that got in. Of course, they didn't have to land. All they had to do was drop it from the sky, which they did.

We had a lot of support we had gun ships, shooting cannon. I forget what the caliber was now, 35 mm maybe, 35 mm cannon. We kill a lot of them, they kill a lot of us is really what it boils down to.

One of the things that my liaison insisted that I do, was try to get a direction on some of these mortars. You do that going to a crater and you take a back UNINTELLIGIBLE so you can figure out what direction a mortar came from by looking at the shape and by getting a back UNINTELLIGIBLE off of it. The problem is, there's no possible way of knowing how far, unless you can see a flash. There's so many flashes. You can maybe get some kind of distance. I mean, you can get the direction, but getting the distance is...The rule of thumb is you figure they're shooting from max distance. Maybe they are, maybe they aren't.

Ernst: When you say liaison you mean an infantry soldier?

McGregor: No, my liaison was an artillery captain. He was my liaison to the ...he was the liaison between the infantry battalion and all of the UNINTELLIGIBLE observers that were assigned to that battalion. So, if you got problems, he's going to be on the radio. He's going to be trying to help you, and trying to do something.

Captain W and my liaison didn't get along very well. Captain W didn't want him messing with me. He certainly didn't want him determining where the artillery was going to be shot, because he was out at the ground and the other guy was back at headquarters. Vietnam was a company commander's war. Nobody, nobody trumped the company commander. What he said went. If he said shoot, I shot. If he said don't shoot, I didn't shoot, no matter what the liaison officer said. The liaison was my UNINTELLIGIBLE. That wasn't so good.

My liaison officer had plenty of combat experience. He'd been in FO for many months. He'd been at Khe San. It wasn't like he was just sitting back in headquarters, his whole career. For him to go from forward observer to liaison was a normal progression.

Ernst: Was that a frustrating experience that night?

McGregor: It was a frightening, first of all, and it was frustrating. It was very frustrating. Not being able to do more. I would have liked to have been able to have massed fires and... We had more artillery that could reach us, anywhere in the world, except, according to what I was told, Fort Hood, Texas, where there's a whole bunch of artillery units. I bet you I had 50 or 75 artillery UNINTELLIGIBLE that could reach me, from that point. Some of it heavy artillery, some of it my own organic artillery, and some of it... There was an artillery, at least a battery, there at UNINTELLIGIBLE at Alpha Four where we left out of. They may have had a whole battalion up there. I know there was a lot of artillery up there. If I had a way to know what I was doing, ... but at night... and I was completely unfamiliar with the geography. I could tell if it was on the map. It was ver frustrating. It was ultimately very sad to see that much, that many casualties.

Ernst: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but for me I would think it would be an overwhelming experience for it to happen like that.



McGregor: So soon into my tour, it was. After that, I wasn't the new guy anymore. There were a lot of other things that happened in terms of fire fights and skirmishes of different kinds. A lot of the contact we had was inadvertent just like that was. They were never going to meet us on our terms. That wasn't their style.

Ernst: That wasn't smart

McGregor: No, they couldn't win that way. Ninety-nine percent of the contact we had was with NVA. Well disciplined. Very, very well disciplined Army. Pretty well equipped. They had plenty of ordinance. We saw more than one RPG7 when we were functioning with the tracks. They loved to shoot those things at the track vehicles and they were pretty good with them. That was my introduction. I've heard it said that combat was 5% terror and 95% boredom and I think that's probably the case. You spend days on end without seeing anything, hearing anything.

Then, it becomes a short burst of very violent activity.

Ernst: Did you notice a change in yourself after that, that day?

McGregor: Well, it doesn't take long before, if you're going to adapt to that kind of environment, you have to...I don't know how to describe it. I've thought about this as I've anticipated talking to you about it. I'm not very good at describing it. It's a very primitive way to live. To give an example, the next morning after the smoke had cleared, so to speak, the situation I was telling you about...Of course, one of the things that you've got to do, you've got to figure out how many of them you killed. Of course, they'll drag off a whole bunch of them, so there's no way of knowing for sure. But, if you've got a body, you know you got that one. We had some...they were right at our perimeter. We came within a hair of being completely overrun.

These two guys were telling me, two of the infantry guys, they said we shot at them all night and they shot at us. They had set out their claymores and we never really saw them well enough to figure we should shoot the claymores. Just before dark we said, well, if we're gonna shoot 'em, let's go ahead and shoot 'em now. So, each of them had to set out their claymore and they fired them off and they killed two NVA soldiers. They were laughing about that a little bit. Of course, we all felt lucky to still be there. There is a certain reassurance that GI's have, and anybody that has been in that kind of traumatic situation, you tend to want to clump together. There's a real strong desire to associate with each other. Of course, that's a wrong thing to do because you're going to get people killed that way. That's the job of leadership

I remember the battalion commander came out that morning and talked to us about that. I appreciated that. I remember he said, I know you want to reassure each other that you're still alive, but you're going to have to be careful and use tactical judgment and so on and so forth.

Anyway, these two guys pulled the NVA soldiers up into the perimeter, which was okay. That was what was going to have to be done eventually, anyway. But when they ate breakfast, instead of sitting on the ground, they sat on them. They sat on the dead guys. They didn't think anything about it. I thought, this is kind of bizarre. It's real bizarre. You know, they had made the adjustment. It was kind of the normal thing to do. It's a very primitive mind set.

Ernst: It's interesting, I had a Marine, a month or two ago, he doesn't have our words. He's an intelligent man, but he wasn't able to articulate it like you did. I don't know if he's saying the same thing or not, but he said something to the effect of he had to make a leap. You could tell the guys who had done it and the guys who hadn't. He said I really thought if you made that leap, you could make it. He felt he had a better chance of surviving the experience if he took that leap and...My impression is that what you're saying is that...

McGregor: I think that's a good way of putting it. It's kind of a barrier you have to cross. If you're going to adjust, if you're going to make it, you're going to have to get into that mind set.

I heard a guy talking once in a situation where people were talking about Vietnam. This was a guy who had been in the infantry and he was talking about a warrior mentality. He talked about that a lot. I've since thought about that. I think that's part of what that is. Doing your job is first and the morality issues and all those things, there's just not any room for that. Not then. It reduces your life and your existence down to a lowest common denominator. I don't mean that in a ...that's not really what I wanted to say. Into the simplest terms, I guess that's a better way of putting it. Very, very simple. There are not that many things that matter. Staying alive matters. Killing them before they kill you, that matters. Nothing else really matters very much, including things like whether you get a bath or how bad you smell. Everybody wants the mission to be over with, but that matters, I guess getting out of the field for a while, getting back and not being in that situation for such a long period of time. It's funny when I think of the primitive way you live in the field, in a combat environment like that. The idea of women being in an infantry unit is just laughable. Not because they couldn't do it, but because it would be so disruptive and so intrusive to getting things done, on a very basic level. That's another story, I guess. There's a leap that you have to make. I can't say that I was fundamentally different after that. I've made that adjustment. That was what I had to do.

Ernst: Were you a fairly racially mixed group?

McGregor: Pretty much. I don't recall the specifics of that, but certainly blacks were over represented in Vietnam. They were over represented in combat units, there's no question about that.

Ernst: Were there any racial problems?

McGregor: Not in our unit. None. Now, I say that from the point of view of a white officer. Maybe I don't know what all was going on, in some respects. Also, from the point of view of a white officer that had no command responsibility in that unit. In that infantry unit, I was there as an advisor, and as a technician. I had a very specific role there. I wasn't there as a platoon leader, so I didn't have to tell those guys what to do. But, I didn't see that.

We didn't have drug problems in that unit either. For one thing, Captain W would...you wouldn't want to face, you wouldn't want to deal with Captain W if he found out about it. That's not to say that nobody ever smoked a joint out there. I doubt that it happened ver much. It wasn't just Captain W, I had two other company commanders after him and they didn't put up with it either. But it wasn't a problem for us. For one things we were rarely ever in a situation or very far from a situation that was some what dangerous. It was just foolish. Not only for yourself, not only would you not do it, but the mind set was that you wouldn't do it and you wouldn't tolerate anybody else doing it because they're going to put your life in danger. The drug problem was catastrophic in Vietnam. There were so many GI's there, in support, and they had very little to do a lot of the time. They had a lot of free time, ready access to drugs,, and it was just more opportunity. There just wasn't that much opportunity up where we were. I'm sure there was some. It just wasn't the thing to do.

Ernst: The ratio was like 8 to 10 : 1 personnel versus the front line folks. Did you notice many differences or did you have much time in the rear? You're right, there weren't really any secured areas, but there were some...

McGregor: Some were more secure than others. Any fire support base was more secure than when you're out in the field. That was about as close to the rear as I ever got was when I spent plenty of time on fire support bases.

Ernst: Did you ever notice any difference in race relations or drug use or anything that opposed to the front line during that?

McGregor: When I left the infantry unit and rotated back to the artillery fighting battery, it was some what different in that respect. It certainly was more secure there. Most of the time, anyway. Not all the time, though. One of the things that I did, was I took three of our tracks out to a place called UNINTELLIGIBLE a special forces camp. It's about half way between Quang Tri and Khe San. I was acting battery commander out there. I felt more threatened out there in that situation than I ever did out in the field because we didn't have enough security. We were way out away from most. We did have some artillery that could reach us. One of the principles that you use is that if you can ever afford it, you never want to lead interlocking fires. You want to have artillery in support of your artillery, defensively.

We had some interlocking fires, but we didn't have very much and I really felt vulnerable out there. We were lucky that nothing happened while we were out there. My luck had been overrun a month prior to that .

Ernst: I'm sure that played on your mind.

McGregor: Yeah, and it was down in a valley. It was pretty much surrounded by mountainous areas. It was like Dien Bien Phu, for heaven's sakes. We were in a very precarious position, I felt. I don't even know what we were doing out there. I think we were there to support some of the special forces folks in Laos. I know we were firing in that direction and we could reach Laos. I'm not sure if we ever fired into it or not. With some exceptions like that, most of the time, we ere more secure and there was more opportunity for conflict. A little bit more free time. A lot of alcohol available.

Ernst: I'm curious if you divided along racial lines or if blacks, whites, hispanics all mixed together or did people move off in their own racial groups? I'm just curious.

McGregor: There really wasn't that much formal socializing that we did. The officers socialized together and I don't remember there being any black officers in our battery. A lot of times, the club may be nothing more than a glorified UNINTELLIGIBLE with a beer cooler. It would also be for senior NCO's as well. There were some racial tension there, but not a lot.

Ernst: Did you ever run into the Rocks? The South Koreans over there?

McGregor: No, just heard about them.

Ernst: What kind of stuff did you here?

McGregor: That they were, by far, the most vidious, the most cruel of any of the allied forces.

They took no prisoners what so ever. They gave none of the enemies any slack, no observations of them at all.

Ernst: Was that a prevalent impression?

McGregor: Yes, yeah.

Ernst: Did you ever give it any creed? Did you ever hear it from somebody that you valued and believed that this was the case?

McGregor: I can't recall that. It's just one of those things I accepted at face value.

Ernst: Did everybody pretty much...

McGregor: Everybody pretty much

Ernst: UNINTELLIGIBLE

McGregor: Have you heard that a lot?

Ernst: Yeah, that's my latest research interest. I find it fascinating. We pay, America, we pay a lot of money out in UNINTELLIGIBLE South Korea has modernized off the Vietnam War,

where as it really hurt when the Johnson's Great Society that UNINTELLIGIBLE I can't turn loose of it, for what ever reason.

McGregor: That is ironic, isn't it?

Ernst: Yeah, I'm trying to write an essay on that now. It's a UNINTELLIGIBLE question for me right now for any Vietnam veteran. If they've had any interactions with the Rocks. A few of them have. Most will say similar to what you said, a very tough, tough, tough breed. Some have said that they were extremely efficient in the field. No one has said that I saw them commit an atrocity or this or that but that is the general, at least one of the charges.

McGregor: Yeah, interesting. I had some contact with the Aussies. Always a pleasure to work with them. They always had a sense of humor. They were great at what they did. I forgot exactly what my contacts were with them. It was usually inadvertent. I was never around any Aussie units. I don't even know if they had all Aussie units over there. They're fun. The Aussie's are fun-loving people and they weren't let war keep them from having fun.

Interview of Pat McGregor by Prof. Ernst in Lexington, KY. on  
July 9, 1997.

E: Why did you join the Army in 1968?

M: Well, I didn't really have a lot of choice. I had graduated from college and had transferred after my sophomore year and was a little bit behind throughout college. The draft board knew this because I had a student deferment. I think partially because of my family connections and maybe partially due to dumb luck. They held off and did not draft me. Although they could have possibly on the basis of not making adequate progress. When I transferred, I lost the equivalent of a semester. I had to double up and go to summer school in order to graduate within four years. I didn't even have my cap and gown off when someone from the draft board called my mother. They told her that I would be called up during the next go around. This was before the lottery system. I had not been in ROTC and knew that I was going into the service, one way or the other. I took the option of joining the Army because of their College Option Program. This guaranteed that you would go to OCS. This was assuming that you were physically qualified and so forth. If you decided not to go to OCS, you had a two year active duty obligation, which is like any draftee. Although I had a RA (regular army status), I had no intention of not going to OCS. I never had any doubt that I would do that. In answer to your question, I didn't have a lot of choice.



E: I've heard that a lot of times. People wanted to have control over their lives and select and enlist, as apposed to being drafted.

M: Yes. This gave me some flexibility. I figured I was going to Vietnam anyway. I saw that in the stars, however a lot of people didn't. My perception was that you were inducted one day and in the jungle the next. I thought that if I'm going to be in the service and be in Vietnam, I wanted to go as an officer. This gave me pretty much a guarantee of an option to do that.

E: Was your brother in the Air Force at this time and stationed in Japan?

M: Yes. He had not been there long when I joined. He was in the Air Force for four years and probably spent three of them in Japan. I visited him once there. Did I tell you that?

E: You said that you had a brother in the Air Force on the paper.

M: Oh, yes that was one of the questions.

E: Yes, I was just curious.

M: He was a communications officer. He was in charge of maintaining the equipment that was used to transfer communications from Southeast Asia back to the States. It was a relay point.

E: Did he ever do any service in Vietnam?

M: No. He was never incountry. He and his wife were over there and in fact their oldest child was born there. He was actually on an Army base there.

E: What was your training like? Did you feel that you received adequate training at OCS? I know you were trained in a number of areas and if you could talk about the whole process.

M: The prelude to OCS is the same as any enlisted man gets. You get basic training combat training and then you go to advanced individual training in your specialty. From there you can go to additional training or you can go to a unit. One of the great things about the Army is that everybody gets the same package in basic combat training. Everybody gets the same deal. (Laugh by McGregor) It was no different than anyone else's. It was an adjustment for sure. Looking back on it, it was a fun time in a lot of respects because you never knew what was going to happen. The friendships that you make and you learn to deal with people who are very unfamiliar. We had people in my basic training unit that didn't even speak English. They were mostly Puerto Rican kids from the inner cities of Chicago and New York. They were not fluent in English at all. Some of the things that are required to get through basic training does require paper and pencil responses. They had a hard time getting them through, but I don't think that very many of them didn't make it.

E: Was that an odd experience for somebody with a good educational background?

M: It was different. It was different. Most of my educational experiences were pretty white bread.

E: You had gone to good schools too. Transy and Vanderbuilt are excellent schools.

M: Most of the people were middle class kids like me. I had never been in the inner cities before or dealt with these folks. We didn't have any serious problems that I was aware of. I'm sure there were some that were taken off, but it was not like gang warfare within my basic training. Everybody was in the same boat and there wasn't any reason for conflict. It was a matter of how we could cooperate with each other and make our lives easier. It was not the other way around. It was very hard and physically demanding. Sometimes we would be up at three in the morning just out of sheer harassment. They would take your footlocker out and dump it in the middle of the road. We thought that we were being harassed to the point of insanity at the time. The funny things that I think happened was the harassment the drill sergeant would put you through. I was a little bit older and was close to twenty two-years-old. Some of these kids were seventeen years old and had a different outlook on life.

E: I think that's a big difference.

M: That is huge difference. Some of the kids didn't know how to take this stuff. Some of these drill sergeants were younger than I was. That certainly wasn't the upper most on my mind, but looking back on it I realized that these were young guys who were doing their job and having some fun with it. After awhile, you kind of catch on to the joke. There just messing with you. There was one drill sergeant that I was truly afraid of. One of my friends from high school who is a year older than me and we were sworn in the Army together. I knew him pretty well, but he

wasn't one of the people that I ran around with because we weren't in the same class. We were together all through our training, but he went to a different unit in Vietnam, but we came back together at Ft. Seal. I consider him to be one of my best friends and in fact I named my middle son after him. We have laughed about the funny things that happened at basic. I will have to say that I was truly afraid of this one drill sergeant. He was calling out the names on the first day and he called "McGeorge." Of course, everyone looked around and there was no "McGeorge" that raised their hand. He said "McGeorge" again and no one answered. He said, "By god McGeorge you had better answer me!" He said, "McGeorge, M-C-G-R-E-G-O-R." I told him that was me. He was holding a big stick and he told me that he would knock those goddamn eyeglasses off my face. He told me when I called my name that I had better answer me and he called me "sweetlips" and told me that my ass was his. (Laugh by both) I'll have to say that this was my introduction and I thought this is going to be a tough eight weeks.

E: Did you dare say that it is pronounced "McGregor"

M: NO, not a word. His name was Sergeant Jones and I ran into him a couple years later.

E: Do you think he was harassing you because you were an educated guy or do you think he just mispronounced it?

M: I think he just mispronounced it. It didn't matter to him whether he pronounced it or not. One other thing that I remember about basic is that we were inducted in Nashville and it's funny

to hear people tell stories about their transportation to basic. Some people had to travel very long distances and some of them flew. We took the bus all the way from Nashville all the way to a little town outside Ft. Leonardwood, Missouri. We got on this bus at 6 A.M. and we ended up at Ft. Leonardwood at 3 A.M. the next morning. We got to the reception center and we had a video we had to watch on the UMCJ(Uniform Military Code of Justice??) There was a guy going around to make sure that you weren't asleep. It was absurd because it was three in the morning and you're not supposed to be sleeping. Ft. Leonardwood is the training center for combat engineers. It was just more of the harassment. As soon as we were off the bus, they were on to us. Some of these guys who had something on their sleeves had a lot of power. I remember that after the video, they herded us into one of the barracks. Typically when you secure a bunk, you roll the mattress up. They told us to sleep until breakfast. I don't know whether it was O.K. to roll the mattress back down and we were so afraid of doing something wrong that we slept on the springs. (Laugh by McGregor) It was funny. The great thing about it is that it's the same as everybody else gets. It was good training in giving you the skills that you need and also in adjusting your attitude of going from a civilian to a soldier. They do a good job. It's very much a brainwashing type of thing and it is well designed for that reason. You have limited contact with the outside and they play a lot of head games with you in the sense of starting rumors. The rumor in every basic

training outfit is that "Our cycle is going to be cut short and that they are going to ship us straight to Vietnam." Every unit in the whole world has that rumor. After that I went to AIT, which is Advanced Individual Training. There were several people I knew in my group. One was a fraternity brother of mine that actually talked me into joining in the College Option Program. He is from Atlanta and he told me that this is what I should do. He was in my basic training. He and several other folks that were in the same deal as I was, they went ahead because for some reason, my security clearance was held up. They wouldn't ship me out until that was clear. I was there maybe two weeks in a holding pattern. I was being a gopher. I took the bus from Ft. Leonardwood to Lawton, Oklahoma. AIT compared to basic training was like a vacation. There was a fraction of the harassment and partiality in the AIT. I was a fire direction specialist. There was a lot of technical aspects to it and a lot that we needed to be taught. It was not a matter of teaching you some general principles, there were things that you had to be able to do that you couldn't make a mistake on. The training was very intense in the academic sense that nobody got through without really knowing what they were doing and able to do it without errors. There are a lot of checks to make sure you don't make an error, but that is part of the system. We didn't have that much physical training requirements and the harassment was not much. The details that had to be taken of, but mostly we had weekends off. We were there in the fall of the year because I joined in late June. By

the time I got to AIT, it was getting to be fall. We really had some good training. A lot of what we did there was also part of our OCS training. It was very helpful to have already had that. Some people came to Artillery OCS without having that MOS. They had to work a lot harder to learn that stuff. I got into another holding pattern after AIT because my assigned OCS class was not going to start until December. Mostly I was messing around. I think we were assigned to Holding Battery as a fact of fact. (Laugh by Ernst) It was for people who were just there and no place to go. We had a good time. I had a car out there.

E: I bet you were popular. (Laugh by both)

M: We found this little town out in Oklahoma called Chickasaw. There was a girl's school there and also a Holiday Inn with a bar. We used to go to Chickasaw and we met some girls up there. It was about half way between Lawton and Oklahoma City. We got to Oklahoma City a few times too. We went to the campus at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. We had a real good time. In fact, we had such a good time that when OCS started, I know I was run down and wasn't getting enough sleep.

E: You were having too much fun. (Laugh by Ernst)

M: That's right. The first or second day of OCS, I became acutely ill. Of course, they assumed that I was wanting out of it. I don't know why they would assume that because it was volunteer. I'm sure that they had people that didn't want to finish. That marked me during my time in OCS as somebody that needed to be weeded out.

E: Really? Just because you got sick. Didn't the doctors say that you did have the flu or something.

M: I don't know if they asked the doctors. (Laugh by both) The fact of the matter is that I don't think any of the medical people realized how sick I was. There was a Hong Kong flu going around at the time and that's what I had. My temperature shot really high. They put me in the annex of the hospital because I didn't need all that care. There wasn't too much that they could do. It is a good thing because in the annex, you rarely saw a nurse. They assumed also that I was laying out. When they would come and take my temperature, they would become furious and insist that I'd taken a match to it. I got no aspirin or blankets. When my TAC officer came over to see me and I told him that I didn't think that they were doing as much as they could. Apparently, he talked to somebody because I did get aspirin and a blanket. That was a really miserable time and I wasn't given the care that I should've been. They were, however, busy at the time with a lot of returnees in the annex. They were in some rehab type of status. A lot of the activities there were geared toward them. In fact, if I would have had some kind of progressive illness, I could have died in that situation. I don't want to be overly traumatic about it, but they just didn't believe that I was that sick. I was there for close to a week. I remember the night that my fever broke and it was like somebody had taken an anvil off of me. I could take a deep breath and I realized that I was going to be O.K. I went back to the unit and the battery.



The fact is, though, that I did miss some of the worst harassment of the whole OCS period. They were after me and they just figured that I wouldn't cut it. Because I had missed all the instruction that week, I failed the first test. I remember it was on drill and ceremony. They thought I wasn't going to make. Once they have someone weakened, they go after you. It didn't bother me that much.

E: Were you more determined as a result?

M: No more or no less because I had no intention of quitting. It wasn't an option. There was nothing they could do, legally, to shake my resolve. I didn't get many leadership positions in OCS. My grades were fine, but by the time the TAC officer, who told me later that he never thought I would make it and didn't realize that I was determined to make until the end. OCS is twenty three weeks. In a way, the leadership positions, while they were good training, were a lot of work and anxiety. By not getting any of the top leadership positions, it made it easier. It was a lot less stressful and I never complained once about getting a leadership position. I got orders to go straight to Vietnam out of OCS. I then went to the jungle school in Panama for two weeks. Then went straight over after that.

E: Did you feel well prepared?

M: I felt very prepared. I was very well trained for what I was asked to do. People always say that the Army trains you for one and you never get a chance to do it. (Laugh by McGregor) I got lots of chances to do it. Everything that we studied or worked

on in OCS were things that I must know in order to do my job. Artillery is a pretty technical type of thing. There is a lot to it. Not only in terms of fire direction, but in terms of the firing battery operations. Taking a projectile and sheeting it, anywhere from five to thirty miles away at a target that you can't see, is a pretty technical skill. We were well trained and Army Artillery is an awesome thing. It can really bring a huge amount of ordinances on a target in a short matter of time.

E: What was your first impression of Vietnam? Did you, like a lot of them, come in on a commercial flight?

M: Yes, I did. I flew over in a nice TWA. My friend and I went to San Francisco, one week before we were to fly out. We had a fun time in San Francisco. I'll tell you this, we also had a fun time in Panama. We had two weekends that were free. They were the middle weekend and the weekend before we left. We did our thing in the jungle, but we also did our thing in Panama City. We had a lot of fun.

E: Was the jungle training good training?

M: It was primarily an assimilation. It was to give you an idea of what it's like to adjust to the heat and operating in that environment. We did some fun things like repelling. We repelled down a small waterfall and some other river operations things. It was important stuff to know. Like the nature of a jungle stream, which tends to be very, very deep. You think you are going to walk through, but you drown. The main thing was learning to deal with the jungle and the heat. It was pretty

uncomfortable at first, but it was good training. We had some Aussies, who were very funny. It was mostly young officers and middle MCOs. Most of us had never been to Vietnam, but a few had been. We saw a good bit of Panama. We crossed one side to the other. Going back to your question. I know it sounds like I'm going from one party to the next.

E: I know so far. (Laugh by both)

M: From Chickasaw, to San Francisco,--

E: You probably would have had a great time except that you were sick. (Laugh by Ernst)

M: Yes. I'll have to say that I did have a good time.

E: During any of this, did you ever get concerned that you were going to Vietnam?

M: I always thought it was my destiny to go. I really didn't worry to much about it. At the end of OCS, they call us in and give you your orders. A lot of us in my OCS did get Germany and got other units in the States, but we all ended up in Vietnam during one time or the other. We all knew that was going to be the case. Hearing them call that out gave me a sinking feeling in my stomach. It didn't last long. Army is a big organization, but it is very much a family type of thing. You don't do anything alone.

E: I suspect, and I may be wrong, that once you let it go it was like a relief or a freeing experience to say, "Well, I'm going and I might as well not worry about it."

M: Yes, it is. I also was young and single. If I would have been married, there would have been other concerns. I didn't have anybody to worry about besides myself.

E: I've heard that before.

M: Another thing was that it was 1968 when I joined. There was a lot of things going on in 1968 and it was very exciting and sometimes overwhelming with the race riots and the assassinations. It was stimulating and exciting and a great time to be in your early twenties.

E: I've often told my students, when we get to that point, that 1968 was one of the most exciting years America's ever had, but at the same time it's one of the most tragic years. The Tet Offensive, the assassination, the 1968 Democratic Convention, but I can see the excitement of it all. There was always something going on.

M: It was never dull. There were plenty of dull years in the seventies. (Laugh by McGregor)

E: A lot of bad music too.

M: And bad clothes. (Laugh by both)

E: What about your first impressions of Vietnam?

M: We went over on a TWA and watched a movie called "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter." It was a very sad movie. Maybe they wanted to take our minds off other things, but I don't know why they showed such a sad movie. It was regular commercial aircraft. There was a standing joke about what they would say when you landed in Tungstenote Air Base outside of Saigon. They would get on the

intercom and say, "Welcome to Vietnam, the temperature is 100 degrees in the shade and ground fire is moderate." (Laugh by both)

E: Wasn't that a weird experience?

M: That was bizarre! She looked at me and said, "We'll see you later." I looked at her and said, "I certainly hope so." It was really bizarre. We got our clothing issued at another reception station and there was absolutely nothing to do until you got your orders. It seemed like you always got your orders in the middle of the night. There would be a guy with a flashlight looking for you and telling you that your orders came in. As soon as you got orders, you had to pack up and get to your unit. It didn't matter what time it was. This was a station not only for people coming in, but for people going out. Some of the guys that were leaving saw fit to harass the young lieutenants who were coming in. They would say that he probably wouldn't leave here alive. There was this one officer who particularly obnoxious. He said that the artillery lieutenants wouldn't last fifteen minutes. He went on and on. I wasn't there very long before I got my orders. We all went in different directions. I've got the 5th Infantry Division, which is up on the DMZ. It probably wasn't as worse as many other places, but it was certainly the farthest away. Early the next morning, we caught a C-130 and flew up the coast. We dropped people off at each of the spots. I never will forget this one guy. This guy got sick and we didn't have any air

sickness bags and he had no place to vomit. He vomited in his hat and then he had no place to put it, so he swallowed it.

E: Oh, god!

M: Talk about making you sick. We were telling him to stop. It was hot and it was stuffy and all of our stomachs were churning.

E: I didn't think you were going to tell me that!

M: That's a lot grosser than you thought it was going to be.

E: I didn't know what you were going to say. (Laugh by both) I didn't think you were going to say that!

M: At any rate, we stopped at all these different air bases. I was at the last spot. My unit was on the DMZ and on the brigade headquarters. The whole division wasn't there, but it was a separate brigade. The other two brigades were still at Ft. Riley, Kansas. When I got there, it was commanded by a full colonel. We were operationally controlled by the 3rd Marine Division. Later on we did get BG and we left the Marine Division and became part of Army 24th Corp. The Marines and Army are two separate organizations. They think and operate differently and have different missions. It just doesn't work very well for us to be part of a Marine Division and our field support from them was not good. Like getting food and dry socks and stuff.

E: Do you think that you were the last on their list?

M: Yes. I think we were not their top priority.

One of my first impressions when I got to Vietnam, other than how hot it was, was how quickly I was processed through. First I had to process through the brigade headquarters and then through my

artillery unit. Usually for a young officer this means meeting the commander and getting an orientation to the unit. I went through all that and then I went to my assignment with the infantry, as a forward observer. There was one forward observer for each infantry miniver unit. So then I processed through there. This was all around the clock. I went from my battery to the infantry battalion and meet that commander and then I was assigned to the infantry unit. A separate mechanized infantry brigade is made up of a leg infantry, which means they walk. An armor battalion and a mechanized infantry battalion are very heavy. They would put together different combinations and call them Task Forces. They would combine tanks, mechanized infantry, and so forth. The 1st Cavalry worked alone. It is a legacy of the horse cavalry and they have the mentality of shoot first and ask questions later. It is wild bunch. I probably came closer to getting killed by the Cav. than by the enemy. They would move too fast to coordinate people on the ground and people on tracks. Lightning speed is their calling card. It was a matter of how fast they could drive those trucks, which is dangerous. They loved to start fires. They didn't go anywhere without starting fires. They would take these C4s, which are intense plastic explosives, and throw them to one side and the other trying to see how many fires they could start. They were crazy. They were certainly effective. I was assigned to leg infantry called Bravo Company. As soon as I got there, we were getting ready to head

North. The brigade had recently gotten back from Khe Sahn. This was July 1969 and I think the seize was in 1967.

E: It was the prelude to Tet. It was used as a diversion to pull all the American forces.

M: My brigade got to Vietnam in July of 1968 or 1967. That was a problem of everybody rotating out together. They tried to solve it by sending a lot of people to different units, but they were only partially successful. I went up there because it was during a time when a lot of people were rotating out. The brigade had been beaten up. They went to Khe Sahn and reopened it and they had a lot of resistance there. Sometimes troops were carried in these large trucks, which had sand bags underneath them to protect against land mines. It was something that shouldn't have happened, but I guess because they were in a secure area they weren't keeping the trucks far enough apart where one shell won't kill a bunch of people. Somebody had got on or off one of these trucks and the pin fell off his grenade. Seven or eight people were killed and everybody was still in a tailspin about that. One of my first things that I went to when I first got to the infantry battalion was a wake. I went to the officer's club and I think they poured scotch or bourbon in little cups and it was for one of the officers who had been killed by a land mine. It was a short wake, but that is the way things were handled.

E: Was that a common practice? Let's say an officer died and they would come in---



M: Yes. Then you leave it. Anyway, we loaded up on flat beds and everyone was making sure that this grenade accident didn't happen again. We loaded up our company and went to CONTINN, which is an old Marine base that sits right beside the DMZ. We got up there and I'd been incountry for five days and there I was looking at North Vietnam. You could even see the North Vietnamese flag. That was a lot of the Marines' stopping ground. A lot of those areas had Marine's names to them. Like the Marketplace, which was now completely demolished. We never went to the Marketplace without taking casualties. We never went to Rocket Ridge without taking casualties and that's where we headed for that night. We got up there that day because it was a night movement. It was very dangerous and my CO was not happy about it. I mean the infantry company commander, which we called Captain W. He was probably one of the finest officers that I've ever known. It was his third tour in Vietnam as a company commander. He had won every award for valor and ground combat that you can win short of the congressional medal of honor. He was very opinionated about the fact that he was not there to win the war, but was there to perform his job and the mission given to him and at the same time, not squander American lives. If he could avoid putting people in a dangerous situation he would do it. He was really hard core. He was an Annapolis graduate and had gone through just about every service school. He had an Article 15 in his background and I don't know what he had done. That's why he hadn't made major. He didn't play the political

side of the fence because he was a field soldier. Unfortunately, he left just after I got there, so I wasn't in the field with him that long. By far the most protracted and the most violent combat that I've had was that night.

E: It was early on in your tour.

M: Yes. We ran into a NVA regiment. That's the kind of thing that happens when you move at night and that's why Americans don't usually do that. We had almost gotten to Rocket Ridge and we were trying to get into our night position up there. We ran into this regiment and all hell broke loose. I was well trained, but very green behind the ears. I had never seen the likes of what was going on. We were taking fire from mortars. One of the things that you try to do with artillery is counter battery fire, which tries to suppress their artillery. At night or anytime, trying to figure out where these mortars are coming from is hard to do. They had a nifty way of digging these mortars in such a way that you could barely hit them. In order to get them, it would take a direct hit. Mortars can shoot from below ground and only need a little angle. It was my job to try and eliminate this, which was almost impossible. Mostly I was just afraid and trying to figure out what the commander wanted me to do. He didn't want me to do a whole lot. He didn't feel like there was much that I could go at that point with artillery. My other officer was hot for me to call in some artillery, but I didn't know where my people were. We were strung out all the way down the mountainside. There were firefights at the base of the

mountain and I didn't know where the enemy was. They seemed to be everywhere. It's just one of those things that makes war so confusing. This lasted all night. We tried to get a medivac in there and he got shot down. It was a Marine medivac and after that they would not send another one in there. We later got Army Air from the 101st Airborne and finally got in there. There was a Marine pilot died in the perimeter. By about 3 A.M. we had a airplane called Puff the Magic Dragon and it was a flare ship. They can turn dark into daylight. It stayed up until dawn. We also had some emergency ammunition that got in, which were dropped from the sky. We also had gun ships that supported us, which shot 35 millimeter cannons. We killed a lot of them and they killed a lot of us. One of the things that my liaison insisted that I do was go and get some directions on some of these mortars. You do this by going to a crater and you can figure the direction of the mortar by looking at the shape. The problem is that there is no possible way of knowing how far. Unless you can see a flash, which was impossible that night. The rule of thumb is that they are shooting from max distance, but maybe they are and maybe they aren't.

E: When you say liaison, do you mean infantry soldier?

M: No. My liaison was an artillery captain. He was my liaison between the infantry battalion and all the forward observers assigned to that battalion. If you've got problems, he is going to be on the radio. The fact is that Captain W. and my liaison didn't get along very well. Captain W. didn't want him messing

with me or determining where the artillery was going to be shot. Vietnam was a company commander's war. Nobody trumped the company commander. He said shoot, I shoot and so forth. My liaison had plenty of combat experience and had been a FO for many months. He had been at Khe Sahn and for him to go from forward observer to liaison was a normal progression.

E: Was that a frustrating experience?

M: It was frightening and it was frustrating not being able to do more. I bet I had fifty or seventy-five artillery tubes that could reach me from that point. Some of it heavy artillery and some of it organic artillery. At night and completely unfamiliar with the geography, I could only tell what was on the map and it was very frustrating. Ultimately, it was very sad to see that many casualties.

E: I suspect and I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but to me I would think it would be an overwhelming experience for it to happen like that.

M: It was very soon in my tour. I certainly wasn't a new guy anymore after that. There were a lot of other things that happened as far as firefights at different times. A lot of the contact was inadvertent, just like that. They were never going to meet us on our terms. That wasn't their style.

E: That wasn't smart.

M: They couldn't win that way. 99% of the contact that we had was with the NVA. They were very, very, well disciplined and pretty well equipped. They had plenty of ordinances. We saw

more than one RPG-7 when we were with the tracks. They loved to shoot those things at the track vehicles and they were pretty good with them. That was my introduction. I've heard it said that combat is 5% terror and 95% boredom and I think that's the case. You can spend days on end without seeing or hearing anything and then it becomes a very violent activity for a short burst.

E: Did you notice a change in yourself after that?

M: (pause) It doesn't take long, if you are going to adapt to that type of environment, you have to--I don't know how to describe it. I've thought about this as I've anticipated talking to you about it and I'm not very good at describing it. It is a very primitive way to live. I'll give you an example. The next morning after the smoke had cleared after that night, one of the first things you do is to check and see how many of them that you killed. They will drag off a whole bunch, so there is really no way of knowing. They were right at our perimeter and we had come a hair of being overrun. Two of the infantry guys were telling me that we shot at them all night and they shot at us and they had set out their clay more. They said that they never saw them well enough to shoot the clay more, so just before dark they decided to go ahead and shoot the clay more. After firing them off, they killed two NVA soldiers. They were laughing about that and we all felt lucky to still be there. There is a certain reassurance that anybody has once they have been in that kind of traumatic situation. You tend to get together and a strong

desire to associate with each other. That is, however, the wrong thing to do because you can get people killed that way. I remember the battalion commander came out that morning and talked to us about that and I appreciated that. He told that he knows that we want to reassure each other that you are still alive, but you are going to have to be careful and use tactful judgement. Anyway, these two guys pull the NVA soldiers up into the perimeter, which was going to have to be done eventually anyway. But when they ate breakfast, instead of sitting down, they sat on the dead guys. They didn't think anything about it. I thought that this is bizarre. They had made the adjustment and it was kind of the normal thing to do. It's a very primitive mind set.

E: It's interesting. I had a Marine about a month ago and he didn't have your words. He is an intelligent man, but he wasn't able to articulate like you did. I don't know if he is saying the same thing or not, but he said something to the effect that you had to make a leap. He said that you could tell the guys who had done it and the guys who hadn't. I really felt that if you didn't make that leap that you weren't going to make it. He felt that he had a better chance of surviving that experience if he took that leap. My impression of what you are saying is----

M: I think that's a good way of putting it. I think it's a barrier that you have to cross. If you're going to adjust and make it, you have to get into that mind set. I heard a guy talking once in a situation where people were talking about Vietnam. This was a guy who had been in the infantry and he was

talking about a warrior mentality. I've since thought about that I think that is part of what that is. Doing your job is first and there just isn't any room for the morality issues. Everything reduces your life and your existence down to the lowest common denominator. I guess into the simplest terms. I guess that's a better way of putting it. It is very, very simple and there are not that many things that matter. Staying alive matters, killing them before they kill you matters, and nothing else really matters. This includes getting a bath or how bad you smell. It's funny when I think about the primitive way that you live in a combat environment. The idea of women being in an infantry unit is laughable, not because they couldn't do it, but because it would be so disruptive and intrusive to getting things done. There is a leap that you have to make. I can't say that I was fundamentally different after that. I made that adjustment and that was what I had to do.

E: Where you a fairly racially mixed group?

M: Yes, pretty much. I don't recall the specifics of that. Blacks were over represented in Vietnam and in combat units.

E: Where there any racial problems?

M: Not in our unit. None. I say that from the point of view of a white officer. Maybe I don't know everything that was going on in some respects. I also didn't have any command in that infantry unit. I was there to advise and as a technician. I wasn't there as a platoon leader. I didn't see any of that. We didn't have drug problems in that unit either. For one thing,

you wouldn't want to face Captain W. if he found out about it. That's not to say that nobody ever smoked a joint out there, but I doubt that it happened very much. I had two other company commanders after him that didn't put up with it either. It really wasn't a problem for us. We were rarely far away from a situation that wasn't dangerous. It was foolish. The mind set was that you wouldn't do it and you wouldn't tolerate anyone else doing it because they're going to put your life in danger. The drug problem was catastrophic in Vietnam. There were so many GIs there that were in support. They had very little to do most of the time. They had a lot of free time and a ready access to drugs. There was more of an opportunity and there just wasn't an opportunity up where we were.

E: The ratio is 8 to 10 to 1 as support personnel verses the front line folks. Did you notice any difference or did you have that much time in the rear? There weren't any secure areas, but some were more so than others.

M: Any fire support base was more secure than being out in the field. That was about as close to the rear as I got.

E: Did you notice any difference in race relations or drug usage as opposed to the front line?

M: When I left the infantry unit and rotated back to the artillery fire battery it was somewhat different in that respect. It was more secure there. One of the things that I did was to take three of our tracks out to a place called Mai Loc Special Forces Camp, which is halfway between Quang Tri and Khe Sanh. I



was acting company commander out there. I felt more threatened in that situation than I ever did in the field because we didn't have enough security. We were way out, but we did have some artillery that would reach us. We had some interlocking fires and I really felt vulnerable. Mai Loc had been overrun about a month prior.

E: I'm sure that played on your mind.

M: It was in a valley and surrounded by mountains. It was like Dem Phem Phu for heaven sakes. We were in a very scary position. I think we were there to support some of the special forces people in Laos because I know we were firing in that direction. At any rate, with that exception, most of the time we were more secure and there was more opportunity for conflict and free time. There was a lot of alcohol.

E: I'm curious if you divided on racial lines? Or if black, whites, Hispanics still mixed together and talked or did people move off in their different racial groups?

M: There wasn't really that much formal socializing that we did. The officers socialized together and I don't remember there being any black officers in our battery. A lot of times, there were clubs, so to speak. It may be nothing more than a hootch with a beer cellar would also be for senior NCOs as well. I remember that there was some racial tension there, but not a lot.

E: Did you ever run into the South Korean ROCKS over there?

M: No, I just heard about them.

E: What kind of stuff did you hear?

M: That they were by far the most vicious and cruel of any of the Allied forces. That they took absolutely no prisoners and that they didn't give any of the enemy any slack. I didn't, however, have any observations of them at all.

E: Was that a prevalent impression?

M: Yes.

E: Did you give it any credence? Did you ever hear it from someone that you trusted and believed that this was the case?

M: I can't recall that. It was one of those things that I accepted at face value.

E: Was it the prevalent attitude?

M: Yes. Have you heard that a lot?

E: Yes. That is my current research interest. I find it fascinating. We paid a lot of money out and in many ways, South Korea modernized off the Vietnam War. Whereas it really hurt when the Johnson's Great Society and that dichotomy, I can't turn loose of it.

M: That is ironic isn't it.

E: I'm trying to write an essay on that now. It's a question from me to all the Vietnam veterans. If they had any interaction with the ROCKS and most will say similar to what you said. They say that they were a very tough, tough breed and some say that they were extremely efficient in the field. No one has ever said that they saw them commit an atrocity or this or that. That is one of the charges levied against them.

M: I had some contact with the Aussies. It was always a pleasure to work with them. They always had a sense of humor. I don't know if they even had whole units over there, but they did have a lot of people there. The Aussies were fun loving people and they won't let war stop them from having fun. (Laugh by both)

The diaries that I have here, a lot of it is me writing down the grid coordinates that I used to do my job. My liaison had also asked to keep a record of the problems I had of getting clearance to fire and long delays in getting fire support. It was due to the political nature of working with the ARVNs, who weren't too far from us. It just took a long time to get clearance. You might have a great target and if you can't get rounds in a minute or so, that target going to move. I remember one time that I had a whole squad of NVA sitting on a hill side. I was so excited that I couldn't stand it. By the time I got rounds on the target--Exactly I hate to say this, but I was getting fire support from the Marines and they were always very slow. The Army artillery was very faster. It may have been because of clearance things. The Marine artillery trained at the same place, Ft. Seal, Oklahoma, so it isn't a difference in training. Maybe the equipment. He just wanted me to document problems like this one. It's been so long that I don't even understand some of my own abbreviations. (Reading from diary) I sent in a grid at 1330 and at 1700 it hadn't got past 24 station. I don't know what 24 station is. It means that is hadn't been forwarded for clearance. (Reads) After some confusion, all the grids were

resubmitted with all receiving new target numbers and fired at E at 1800. One of the things that we would do when we got into a night defensive position is to plot defensive fires. I would have the option of shooting them in. More often than not, that is what we would do. When you shoot in your artillery defensive fires, you might as well hold up a flag and say, "Here we are. Come and get us." Sometimes that was part of the thinking. A lot of the stuff that we did was us trying to get their attention and lure them into a fight. Then hope that we could bring enough ordinances on the situation to avoid a lot of casualties. I took a lot of pride in being able to get my defensive fires in really good and tight. I would bring them in close without risk to people. You have to have a lot of faith in your firing battery to get the rounds where they are supposed to be. You do it by making minor corrections. You don't have one ten thousand meters out and then bring it in a mile. You start going in fifty meters corrections until they get as close as they can. You just put them in places where they are likely to come after you. In some cases, you ring your perimeter with them. The standard operating procedure, I have them marked here as A, B, C, D, E, instead of calling out a grid coordinate, I would call out the letter. I might say that, "We have contact and give me a battery at B." I could also say to give me a B, but right 100. I never called in any of my night defensive fires.

E: What do you mean by that?

M: In other words, we never, except for the time that we ran into that NVA regiment, were attacked on the ground in our night position. Most of the contact that we had was other kinds of stuff. There are a couple of things here. (Looking at diary) Here is a note: "Artillery support improved definitely in the last two days. Have received responsive fires on every occasion. Have now only waited for contact to see what happens."

Here is me writing down some radio communications. Unfortunately I'm not sure who was who in this case. I'll read this. I have ED85 and I don't know who that is. It reads: "Fire mission over" and then G85. I then have three minutes elapsed. Then G85 says, "Are you going to send a mission?" E85 says, "No. You didn't use proper RTO procedures" RTO is radio telephone operating. E85 continues, "You didn't use proper RTO procedures and I was waiting for you to call back." I'm not sure what this means but it sounds like people snickering at each other. Here is another entry that is interesting. I'm not sure why I was shooting this mission that it was 1830 and "the first round of WP (white phosphorus) was 200 meters up and about 1000 meters away." White Phosphorus is very visible and has a number of uses. I used to use it for marking rounds or to get direction. I could tell them to put a white phosphorus round at 200 up and I could see where that was.

E: It gave you a reference point.

M: Yes. I used to set fires. That was my answer to the Cavs fire thing. A lot of times when you're firing a mission and you don't know where you are and you don't want to take a chance of not

being in the right place, just ask for the first round to be up. This relieves any doubt that you aren't so far off that you will make a terrible mistake. There were times when I've fired a mission and I thought it was going to be out here somewhere and they fired it 200 up and I didn't even see it. I was that far off. I would go back and get my self in order. One thing about being up on the DMZ was that it was more like conventional warfare. We didn't have that much jungle. A few times we went into the mountains. I'll tell you about an experience that I had there too. We had a huge Task Force that went up into the mountains somewhat left of the point that we usually operate. It was very mountainous. We had intelligence. They say that military intelligence was an oxymoron. (Laugh by Ernst) Sometimes that was true. Our intelligence rarely helped us out. They really didn't know what was going on. We went up into the mountains and were supposedly going to make contact with a very large NVA unit. They were supposed to be dug in, so we had a very big force. The infantry was the big part of that because it wasn't tank country. We got into this one particular area and I tell you it was one of the most eery experience I've ever had. As soon as you walked into this area, you could smell death. Everyone agreed that this was the spot where a lot of people have died. We started looking around and we found a bunch of old Marine equipment. We found a boot, part of a rifle and you knew it was the site of a lot of bad stuff. I can't describe it, but it is a pungent and sicking kind of smell.

E: There weren't any corpses? This had been a long time ago and it still was there.

M: Yes.

E: What did you mean when you said that setting fires would sometimes be advantageous? Was it to flush the enemy?

M: Yes. It was like a scorched earth type of thing. There wasn't that much vegetation and what was there, I tried my best to burn down. We worked in the same area and I got to know it pretty well. I would shoot a lot of defensive fires. I came to the philosophy that if I can soften an area up, why shouldn't I do it? I would tell the commander that we shouldn't go anywhere without me putting some artillery in there first. The guys up in brigade and battalion headquarters, they really don't want that. They want you make contact with the enemy and come up with some bodies. My thinking was that it is safer to scare them off or kill them ahead of time. The ground commanders would agree.

E: Did you ever get into an area and realize that these guys are underground and that there is no way that I would ever get to them? The Vietcong did that quiet a bit.

M: The NVA usually were moving more. We rarely found a place where they had been dug in. We found some tunnels and they were usually unproductive in what we would find in them. We had a couple of Montagnard scouts that were really small and they would be our tunnel rats. After that one night engagement, we lost our scouts and we never found their bodies. We don't know if they were kidnaped or they ran away.

E: They could have been simply running away from a bad situation.

M: It was strange.

E: Did you get new ones?

M: Yes. Several of them got killed later on too.

E: They called them Kit Carson scout? At least in some situations they did.

M: I was thinking they were ARVNs. It was interesting all the different types of support that an infantry company would have. We had the Montagnards, an interpreter, combat engineers, artillery, and so forth.

E: Did you have much interaction with the ARVNs?

M: No. I didn't personally. We usually had a dog. We lost a couple of dogs. Our artillery team consisted of a reconnaissance sergeant and RTO (radio telephone operator). I think I went through two or three RTOs. None of them were killed, but everyone I ever had got wounded. I think I lost one of my reconnaissance sergeants.

E: Did you form any close bonds over there?

M: Yes, I did. Especially with one of the platoon leaders named Tom Cones. He was from Golden City, Missouri. He and I have been in contact. I made other friends over there as well. I didn't make a lot of friends with the infantry unit because of the old cliché that you didn't want to get too close to them because they are going to get killed. The fact is that people come and go partly because people do get killed and wounded. You



don't have time to get to know people. By the time, I was in the field for a couple months, I was the old man of the unit.

E: Did you wear down as time went on? Were you ready to get out of here or did you any think in those terms?

M: Yes. I felt like I wanted to do my time and get out. The third company commander that I had begged me to stay in the field because I knew the area like the back of my hand. I was probably the senior member and officer of the whole company. In terms of time in the field. He begged me to stay and told me that he would get me a CIV if I would stay. That was a Combat Infantry Man's Badge. I was not an authorized CIV. (Laugh by Erst) I told him that if I thought he could get me a CIV that I probably would stay. I told him no that I would go out when I was rotated.

E: That must have been an interesting feeling. To go from being brand new and another expression is that you aged out there. Did you see a big difference in yourself from when you were a senior individual with field experience?

M: Yes, in terms of self confidence and in feeling more important. It was good feeling. An artillery FO is not a very important person anyway. Even when I was brand new I never was a 2nd lieutenant because the whole time I was 2nd lieutenant, I was in Vietnam. I never took any grief about being a butter bar because I had so much combat experience.

E: It sounds like you were responsible to yourself or your own little entity. You weren't really in charge of other people and reported to a commander.

M: Yes. Of course, when I got back to the bad? area, I had command responsibility. Not a whole lot though because I was a system executive. Basically, I was the fire direction officer. I kind of ran my own show. I was looking at this and I'm not sure why I was shooting this mission, but it is marked "1830 hours." It starts: "I began shooting in D grid at 1830. The first round of white phosphorus was shot 200 up was about 1000 meters away. The first direction was correction was left 200 and drop 200. Platoon (that's two rounds) HE (high explosives) on the deck (on the surface not in the air) got four tubes. Next correction drop 100. Got three rounds in the right place. One round dropped 600 meters short. This was 50 meters from the closest man who would have been WIA, except that the round landed in the river. The next correction was adding 100. One tube HE. Round was acceptable. Correction drop 100 of one round HE. The round landed 250 meters above the last one." That was the type of thing that I was trying to document. I remember one time that I was shooting at a target. I was up on some high ground and I remember asking for a battery. I was shooting eight inch, which is the largest and most accurate projectile in the arsenal. It says, "It is hard to describe how much explosiveness is in one of these rounds." I got everything where I wanted it, except one

round. It was so far short that it landed behind us. Scared me to death. I thought we were taking some kind of huge incoming. I'll tell you one another thing that happened that is kind of funny. This was on that big mission up in the mountains, where we were going to come in contact with this huge force. We spotted an NVA FO. My commander got excited and the battalion commander got excited. They came to me and told me to blow him away. I was excited and I was thinking what I reasonably should do in that situation. They had me all jacked up and I really wanted to show my stuff. I got on the phone and I called for, probably the stupidest thing that I could have done. I was really embarrassed about it later. I called for a time on target all available. What that meant was that I wanted every available tube that would reach me to send rounds in all at the same time. So, that wherever they are, it is coordinated and all the rounds land together. This would be appropriate if you had some kind of huge target way out in the open. I've done them before, but it isn't the type of thing that you want to do to kill one soldier. The S3 got on the phone and he was guy that usually didn't get on the radio. He was at the battalion fire direction center and he would have to coordinate all of this. It would be extremely complicated to do this. It wouldn't be out of the question if it was justified. My call letter was 87 Bravo and he was guy from Nashville and he said in his Tennessee draw, "87 Bravo, what in the world are you trying to do?" He chewed me out a little bit and told me that I didn't need a time-on-target-all-available.

He told that all I needed was a battery and try to get some rounds on it. My face turned red and I told the battalion commander that we were going to have a change. I don't think I ever got him. The thing about the time-on-target is that I was thinking that if I got enough artillery rounds in that general vicinity that I could get him with one shot. I knew that first rounds that went out would cause him to leave. Shortly before this, that guy had shot down one of our helicopters. I don't want to keep you here all day. I think I would rather make copies of this.

E: That is perfect. I would probably feel better anyway.

M: Most of this is just a bunch of numbers. I've got a few comments.

E: If you could give us a cross reference of some it and preferably some of it with text so if a student or professor was going through it, they would understand what you meant. Let me ask you this, what was life like for you after the service? After your tour in Vietnam, where you still in the military for awhile?

M: Yes. I came back to Ft. Seal to teach firing battery. When I came back, I had a bad attitude. My performance in Vietnam was great, but back home it wasn't so good. In fact, I started to extend for six months because I thought that I would be really good at being an aerial observer. They had these little bird dogs that were with the heavy artillery batteries. These batteries had different missions than my battery had as part of

the organic artillery to the brigade. These folks were in reinforcing missions and they were part of an artillery group. They did have Fos, but they were in the air. I thought that not only do I know the geography, but I know the likely routes of infiltration and where the NVA would likely be coming through. I had done that before and I thought it was great fun. I went down to Da Nang and I talked to the battery commander about whether he would want me there as a FO. He said that he would love to have me in the battery, but he didn't guarantee me that I would be a FO. He told that I would be an executive, if he ever needed one. My rank at that time as 1st Lieutenant pointed in that direction. It made sense because you don't create your own job in the Army. You are assigned to a unit and you do what they tell you to do. When he said that, I decided that it didn't sound like that much fun after all. I came on back. I made a better adjustment back into the field than I did back into the garrison. I had a bad attitude for really no good reason. For one thing, I was drinking too much. That certainly hurt my performance and attitude.

E: Did you feel like you had, for the lack of a better phrase "In the big show," and now this was---

M: Yes. This was just piddley stuff. Although, I was very serious in teaching these guys firing battery and felt that I was a pretty good instructor. It was the auxiliary things. For example, one of the jobs that we had was to be officer of the day for this particular thing. It wasn't a big deal. You would go

in and check in late in the afternoon. You would have to go check if certain things were secure and then you go back home. You could go anywhere that you wanted to, as long as they could reach you. They would post lists and it was just part of your job. Well, I'll put this in quotes "forgot" or "ignored" unconscious, I had seen the thing and didn't pay any attention to it. I was in town all weekend and could have done that. My boss came out to where I was teaching that Monday morning and he asked where I was during the past weekend. As soon as he said that, I knew exactly what the problem was. I told him that I knew why he asked me that and I just screwed up. Having said that, the MCO could have called me and asked me where I was, but nobody ever did. That was a correctable error by them. I can't blame someone else for my error, but I didn't feel good about the fact that they let me screw up. They threatened me with two Article 15s, one for each day that I was gone for being AWOL. I told them that I wouldn't accept that and that they would have to take me to court martial. They came up with some punishment like I had to come in early every morning and make coffee. I think I had to be there at 5 A.M.

E: That would grade on me too.

M: I wasn't happy about that. To tell you the truth, a lot of us had bad attitudes. There was a captain there, who I think was a little smarter than I was because he kept out of the line of fire so to speak. He didn't do anything to get himself in trouble. I think that's probably it what you said is that you go from being

in the big show and get back to all this piddley stuff. One was the Army equivalent to the United Way, which this stuff is illegal now, but back in those days they almost demanded that you contribute.

E: Some businesses do that now for the United Way.

M: Much more so than they should. It's not right and that was routinely done. Every commander was going to have 100% participation and that's the way it was going to be. One of the things that they couldn't do was to tell you how much you were going to give. I remember this captain gave a dollar. His boss stood up and said, "I'm not going to say who it is, but if you're only going to give a dollar than you shouldn't give anything." He then stood up and asked for his dollar back. (Laugh by Ernst) We all thought that was real funny. (Laugh by McGregor) At any rate, I came back and made it through the few months that I had left and got an early out. To make a long story short, I eventually got back into the reserves when I was in college because it was a good way to earn some money. I didn't have a good attitude about the Army when I got into the reserves either. I stayed in the reserves for twenty-seven years. Over the years, I've incorporated my initial active duty experience into my identity so to speak. At least when I was in the military environment, I really did identify as being a soldier. That was very much up front for me, even more so than some of my colleagues who were on active duty. They consider themselves as professional people who happened to be in the military. I always

thought that this was the wrong attitude. If you're going to be in the military than you should be a soldier, which happens to be a professional person. You have to be a soldier first and I would tell anyone that in the military. It has to come first or your not going to be able to do what you should. Everybody in the Army during those days had a love and hate relationship. I grew to love the Army over the years and still do. I didn't feel very good about getting out of the reserves and I didn't have to. They offered me a separation package based on production force and as a professional officer I could have stayed. They were just making it attractive to leave and so I did.

E: Did you have any particular attitude towards the anti-war movement when you got back to the States?

M: I was very fired up about it and I thought it undermined our ability to win the war. I felt offended by all that. I've changed my mind about that since then. I feel like everybody did their part. Even people who went to Canada suffered in their own way. A lot of them paid a bigger price than I did.

E: That's interesting.

M: There is no use in hanging on to those types of resentments. I certainly had them then, though. I did have the treatment that some people did. I was never spit on. People generally ignored me. We flew back from Vietnam in our jungle fatigues, but we did have to change when we got back to the States. We flew home in khakis. No one ever said one word to me. Not one word. I didn't except bands to play,--



E: Just walk into an airport and somebody say "Hi."

M: Or welcome home. I slept all the way to Nashville because I was exhausted. I remember waking up in Portland for a short stop and when we landed in St. Louis. Maybe people were being nice to me by not waking me up.

E: Well their is that common interaction like "excuse me."

M: Yes. I was avoided like the plague.

E: You became a psychologist?

M: Yes. I went back to graduate school after I got out of the Army. I got my master's degree. Jennie, my wife, and I had met when she was on active duty at Ft. Seal. She was just coming on active duty as an Army nurse and I was on my way out. She went to Europe after her tour at Ft. Seal. After I got through with my master's degree, I joined her over there. We came back and got married and then we went back to Europe to finish her tour. We came back to the States in 1973. The war has certainly had a profound impact on the direction of my life. I think I told you that I worked with some of the veterans in some of the outreach things.

E: That was going to be my next and last question.

M: I didn't do that very much because the bureaucracy was much to great. The bureaucracy at the VA is rather cumbersome. They were dealing with contractors like me and they didn't like that at all. They don't like to deal with people that they can't control. It was hard to deal with them. Through my reserve experience, I was working at psychiatric clinics. Many of the

people that I was working with were combat veterans. Many from Vietnam. I was called up for Desert Storm and spent six months at Ft. Bragg. Some of the reserves who were called up were Vietnam veterans. It was interesting. One of the things that I had to do at Ft. Bragg was to look for indications of mental health problems as the soldiers were processing out from Saudi Arabia. I would screen them and see if they were ready to be discharged.

E: Did they do that with the Vietnam vets at all?

M: Lord no. Absolutely not.

E: Do you think it is a lesson from the Vietnam war?

M: I think so.

E: That has always seemed bizarre that there was no transition or orientation, I'm not sure what phrase to use, but there was nothing like you just described for the Desert Storm people. That makes no sense to me. Literally, a lot of them took the commercial flights back from being in Vietnam and experiencing God knows what and then being put on the streets of wherever.

M: I think the Army has learned from that because there was a lot of transition for the Desert Storm people. I was trying to help with some of that. We were assigned to the hospital there and we were trying to get these health professional transitioned back. That was one of the focuses that we had because the units took care of themselves. The 82nd Airborne don't like outsiders coming in. They like to take care of their own people. We did some transitioning with the health care professionals coming

through and I think that was good. It was very intense. A lot of these folks were Vietnam veterans and so they were trying to deal with coming home issues.

E: This is after Desert Storm?

M: Yes.

E: I can't believe that they called Vietnam vets up.

M: These folks were all in active reserve units.

E: I can see it legally, but it's not like they have not done enough.

M: When you're in the reserves that's what your supposed to be doing.

E: Did you feel like you were in a unique position to assist them?

M: I felt like I was in a very good position to help them because I knew exactly what they were talking about.

E: Did Desert Storm allow bring up a lot of these same issues or did it allow you to deal with issues that had been buried, if I may ask?

M: Yes. The biggest issues were the coming home things.

Mobilization issues and separation issues are pretty clear cut.

These are things that you prepare for. If you're in the reserve unit and you aren't prepared for mobilization, you don't belong in a reserve unit. Prepared in terms of having your affairs in order and being ready to go. It is difficult in separating from you family. It's hard to prepare for the coming home things and

the Army tried to help out. I think they did a pretty good job with it.

E: Did a lot of the Vietnam veterans serve in Desert Storm say that it was nothing like it was before? If you could you tell me what types of things they said.

M: (pause) There is an universal feeling among veterans that they were underappreciated. As many Vietnam veterans, who were not part of the military, observed the big heros coming home from Desert Storm and they felt that they should've been welcomed. They did have a bitter sweat feeling about it. They had a feeling of resentment and a sense of thinking about the way they were treated. It was wrong. There were lots of strong feelings among that group. There was a processing station in a little town in Maine who was receiving a lot of the veterans. (Long Pause-McGregor begins to cry)

I believe that certain experience that people have during a lifetime change them fundamentally. I believe that a lot of the experiences that you have may intensify certain things or feelings. I don't think I'm fundamentally different as I've grown over the years. There hasn't been any catastrophic changes in my personality. Hopefully, I've learned from experience. One of the things that has affected my outlook as a soldier and it comes out when soldiering is discussed because of my feelings about soldiers. (Pause) It is a personal thing in a sense. The coming home things, I don't think there are too many veterans who will say that they weren't affected to a degree by that reception. I

can't stand people in uniform to be used or abused. I know one of the things while I was at Ft. Bragg, some of these young men would become acutely ill or acutely agitated. The training at Ft. Bragg is very intense and very combat oriented. The folks who do well in these units, well we've always said that you don't have someone in the 82nd Airborne that is passive. Some of these people are active, impulsive, and border line anti-social. Some of them made really good soldiers and those are the types that you want in those kinds of units. They do submit to discipline, but sometimes they are better in the field that they are in garrison. Some of these young people would become pretty agitated. I guess the acutely ill women were having psychotic episodes. Some of the young men were more like personality disorders. They were pretty hard to manage. When they get out of control, they have to be hospitalized. In the Army, it's not a matter of that you can't hospitalize them because they don't want to be. In my position, there in the clinic, if I decided that they were going to be hospitalized, then they were going to be hospitalized. If I had to call every MP on the post to get them strapped down, then they were going to be.

E: What time period are we talking about here?

M: This was during Desert Storm. I was on active duty for about six months. One of things that I was good at was talking to these guys and telling them that I wanted them to go into the hospital and that they had some choices to make. The choice was whether they were going to walk up to the unit with me or they

were going to go kicking and screaming with leather restraints. We would give them that option not to threaten them, but as a realistic appraisal of what they were looking at. I prided myself on being able to do that. I myself never had a Code Blue, which is when every single person has to come and help restrain someone. I never called a Code Blue, but I know I had some pretty difficult situations. I had respect for them as soldiers and treated them as soldiers. Nothing less than that. The thing that I was most upset about, in terms of what I was trying to do. I guess I really wasn't upset, but I observed this about myself and I think it is one of those legacies from my Vietnam experience. The nursing unit in the psychiatric part of the hospital was all civilian. They had an entirely different outlook on how to manage these people who were out of control. It was ridiculous, the way they treated them. They didn't want me there because I wasn't part of their staff. One of the first things they had to do when they came up there is to get out of their fatigues and put on some sort of hospital garment. They usually didn't want to do that. One of the nurse's first words were, "If you don't do this, we are going to strap you down." When I got somebody up there, I tried to defuse the situation. I would take them up to their room and talk to them a little bit. Tell them that I know that they don't like the situation and treat them like soldiers.

E: And with dignity.

M: Part of that is part of the coming home issues. I was touched by (pause) the effort the folks in Maine made.

E: I'm going to ask you a few more questions. What is your opinion about the way the VA handled the Vietnam veterans?

M: The VA is a big organization and there is a lot of different parts to it. I remember reading about the VA hospitals in college. I think "Life Magazine" did a couple stories on them and they were a national tragedy. I'm sure that they were underfunded and a large group of patients. I'm sure it wasn't anyone's fault, but it is another example of how veterans at that time were treated. It was just atrocious conditions. My feeling was that I wasn't asking the VA for very much, so I wasn't having much contact with them. The contact that I did have was like beating my head against the wall. I was on the GI Bill and the VA did certify all that and that was done effectively. At the end of my doctoral program, you have to have so many hours of so called residency, after that you can continue to sign up and you don't have to pay tuition because you're not taking any courses.

E: I know that well when I was writing my dissertation. (Laugh by Ernst)

M: That's actually what I was doing. I tried to find out from the VA if I could continue receiving the GI Bill, if I wasn't paying tuition. I couldn't get an answer. I called the hotline and asked two or three different people and I wrote a letter and never got a response. I went away and paid tuition because I couldn't afford the GI Bill to lapse. They thought I was crazy.

Maybe if I knew the right person to call or maybe the university could have checked on that, maybe I could have gotten some response.

E: You were probably shuffled to the bottom as a low priority. I've heard horror stories too.

M: I've never had any treatment at the VA.

E: I didn't know in your path as a psychologist.

M: No, it was very little or none.

E: Let me ask you one question and then I promise I'll finish.

Do you think the Gulf War has been glossed over by the Bush administration and the American people? Everyone's saying rah, rah, rah, now we've gotten over the ghost of Vietnam and that sort of thing. Do you think it has been glossed over? Do you think there are parts to it, I assume there are always situations in war that not good. Do you think it has been painted in too positive of a light?

M: I would have to say a qualified no. It was probably the best marketed war that we have had and that's not all bad. I think it did a lot for a national self-esteem. I think it brought us back in some ways. War should not be glorified so much though. The next war, we aren't going to be so luckily. In the Gulf, we were up against a paper army. There was nothing to it. Saddam was so out manned from the beginning.

E: He is an interesting character. Either he is extremely stupid or he just doesn't care.



M: Or maybe a combination of the two. Of course, the Iraq people have suffered. The fact that Saddam is still in power is really absurd. I don't think that it was glossed over too much. I think the thing about the chemicals is a classic example of some people having too little regard for the men on the ground the wears the uniform. Ultimately, I usually have a feeling that there is a civilian there who didn't care enough because I think that most military commanders care deeply for what happened to their people. Civilians don't understand that or how important it is to be cautious. That whole situation is something that just happens. Like the pin falling off the grenade and the intelligence reports about the chemical weapons getting in the wrong place and don't get to the right people and decisions are made. There is a bumper sticker about that sort of thing.

E: I got interviewed by the Kentucky Post a while ago and a young fellow was doing the interview and he asked me about the Gulf War, Vietnam, and Korea in a general question. The one thing that has bothered me is that a number of officials seem to drag their feet over the Gulf War Syndrome. I felt that we should've learned from the Agent Orange situation. Now the committee is really going after it, but it has been a number of years. Some soldiers have had some really bad side effects. I seems like it costs more money to cover it up than to take care of your people.

M: I'm like you. The Army has the potential to really screw up in that regard. Look back in the history and they don't have a very good track record on that sort of stuff. Exposing people to

certain types of things and then denying that there is anything wrong. That is not military people, but political machinery.

E: Right along that line and I promise that this is the last question, do you have an opinion of Robert MacNamara's book In Retrospect?

M: I haven't read it, so I guess I shouldn't have an opinion about it.

E: Are you familiar with it?

M: I'm familiar with it little bit. I know that he says that he was wrong and the conduct of the war was a lot of his responsibility. I don't know enough about it to say much more. I don't have a lot of strong feelings about it.

E: That's fine. Do you have anything else?

M: No, but obviously I could talk about this on and on. I guess the one thing and I don't know if it has any relevance or not. Part of who I am as a soldier and I'll always have that, but I'm not a member of any veteran's organization, nor do I intend to be. One reason is that so many of these organizations are too self serving. It's always veteran's benefits, veteran's right, and so forth. Just because someone served their country doesn't mean that they have unlimited access to the treasury. I think many veterans need to be compensated for what they've lost in terms of life and limb. It gets way out of hand. I think we are going to have to get away from the idea that just because someone serves on active duty for 180 days consequently that they get life long health and medical benefits. We can't afford that and

we need to rethink it. I don't even know if a person who has been serving on active duty for twenty years should get that. Veteran's benefits are important and they need to feel like their country continues to support them, but you have to draw the line somewhere. In a similar vein, so many of these veteran's groups are so patriotic. Like the flag desecration issues. I think the constitutional amendment is one of the worst ideas that anyone has come up with. People have died for our freedoms and we are going to make an amendment that limits some of those freedoms. It's something that really never happens anymore. If you poll these veterans and actually if you poll the general population, they say that people generally support that. I enjoy letting politicians know that I don't support it because they think that everybody does. They think the more they hop up and down about it, the better they look.

E: I feel like if you have to legislate the protection of the flag than it means nothing. That's what it stands for. It's choice.

M: It's a nonviolent expression of protest. If we can't do--

E: We might as well throw it out.

M: At any rate, I guess that's where we should stop.

McGregor: One of the things that we were trying to do was to get these health professional transitioned back. That was one of the focuses that we had because the units took care of themselves. They had their own programs. For example, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, they didn't like outsiders coming in. That's a unit that likes to take care of it's own people. They had their own people, their own programs. They can take care of themselves. But we did some transitioning of the health care professionals coming through. That was, I think, good. I know it was good. Some of it, it was very intense. A lot of these folks were Vietnam veterans. They were trying to deal with a lot of that stuff, too. Coming home issues.

Ernst: Like with Desert Storm?

McGregor: Uh huh. Yeah.

Ernst: I Can't believe they called Vietnam Veterans up.

McGregor: These folks were all in active reserve units.

Ernst: I can see it\_\_\_\_\_

McGregor: Yeah.

Ernst: Like you haven't done enough.

McGregor: Of course in the reserves that's what you're supposed to be doing.

Ernst: Did you feel like you were in a unique position to assist them?

McGregor: I felt like I was in a very good position to help them. I knew exactly what they were talking about, and...

Ernst: Did Desert Storm drudge up a lot of the same, or did it allow them to deal with issues that had been buried? If I may ask that, if not that's fine.

McGregor: Yeah, there were a lot of these. The biggest issues were the coming home things. Of course, that was what we were dealing with at the time. I mean, you know, mobilization issues and separation issues are things that are pretty clear cut. These are the things that you know you are prepared, for one thing. You're in the reserve unit. Or you're prepared for mobilization and you don't belong in a reserve unit. Prepared in terms of having your affairs in order, being able and ready to go, you know. Of course it's difficult separating from your family. There's uncertainty about that. But the coming home thing, it's something you don't prepare for. You can't prepare for. I mean the Army tried to help out, in terms of the transition and things. I think they did a pretty reasonable job.

Ernst: Did a lot of the Vietnam veterans who served in Desert Storm, were they saying, like, Wow, it wasn't like this before. I'm curious if you can tell me what kind of things they might have said.

McGregor: Well, yeah. There's a universal feeling among veterans that we're underappreciated. As veterans of who were not part of the military observed the vanquishing heroes coming home from Desert Storm. They felt that they should have been welcomed. But they had a bitter-sweet feeling about it. You have a sense of resentment, a sense of feeling like the way they were treated was wrong. You know, they feel like people shouldn't be treated that way. You know, watching from afar. There were a lot of strong feelings about that. Lots of them. Some of those among that group, but that's not the only group who felt that way. There was a \_\_\_\_\_ to station whole bunches of people when they came back from Desert Storm. There was one little

town in Maine, I believe, somewhere up in New England, that was receiving a lot of the veterans in this town...

Ernst: Do you want me to shut this off?

McGregor: Yeah.

Ernst: I'm going to be a good guy. I can.

McGregor: I guess one of the things, a certain experience a person has in a lifetime that changes them fundamentally. But I believe a lot of the experiences that you have can intensify certain things, characteristics, certain feelings, and become fundamentally different over the years. There haven't been any catastrophic changes in personality or whatever. I've learned from experience over the years. But one of the things that has affected my outlook as a soldier, it comes out more, soldiering. Because it has to do with my feelings about soldiers. It is a personal thing in a sense because it's part of that. I don't think that there are very many veterans out there who could say that they weren't affected to some degree by the reception that they got. I can't stand for the people in uniform to be used or abused. I don't like to see anybody used or abused. One of the things when I was at Fort Bragg was, some of these young men were becoming acutely ill or acutely agitated. Fort Bragg, the training is very intensive. There is a very combat oriented, very strict. The folks that do well in these units are people we have, who are clinically...

We've always said that you don't want somebody in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne that is passive. Some of these people are active and impulsive, border on anti-social. Some of them make real good soldiers. They're the kind of soldiers that you want in this unit. People who are willing to act. They have to submit to discipline and they do. But sometimes

they are better in the field, and they are in Garrison, too. I have some appreciation for that. Some of these young people, men and women actually, would become pretty agitated. I guess the women that were the acutely ill women were having psychotic episodes. But some of the young men, I guess you might call them personality disordered. They were pretty hard to manage. One of the things I was able to do, when they got out of control, they have to be hospitalized. In the army, it's not a matter of well, you can't hospitalize them. They don't want to be. In my position, there in the clinic, if they were going to be hospitalized, they were going to be hospitalized. I had to call every MP on the post to get them strapped down.

Ernst: What time period are we talking about here?

McGregor: This was in Desert Storm. 91. I was in active duty about six months. The fact is, one of the things I was good at was talking to these guys, and telling them they're going to a hospital. And that they had some choices to make. Basically, just whether or not they would walk up to the unit with me on their own two feet, or go kicking and screaming with leather restraints. I would give them that option, not to threaten them, but as a realistic appraisal of what they were looking at. I prided myself on being able to do that. I myself never had a situation where I had a code blue. That's when every available person has to come down, when you've got to keep somebody from leaving you, and they've got to be restrained. I'm not sure that's what it's called, a code blue. I might be wrong about that. I had some pretty difficult situations. I walked into because I had, I guess, respect for every man as a soldier and treated them like soldiers. Nothing less than that. That worked for me anyway. I think that I was the most upset about, during that whole time I was there, in terms of what I was trying to do, I

guess, I say upset... I wasn't really that upset. \_\_\_\_\_ this about myself. I guess that our Vietnam experience is a legacy of that. Plus the number of years in reserves, which I guess falls from that. The nursing staff and the inpatient part of the hospital was virtually all civilian. Entirely different outlook on how they manage these folks that are out of control than I did. Some of them, it was ridiculous the way they treated them when they first came in there. Of course, they didn't want me there. I wasn't part of them. I had no responsibility over them I was in the outpatient part. When I came up there one of the things I had to do when they first came up was they had to get out of their fatigues. I forget what they put on, some kind of hospital garment. The nurses, the first words out of their mouths were If you don't do this we're going to strap you down. When I got somebody up there I just tried to defuse the situation. Take them back to their room, talk to them a little, tell them I know they don't like the situation. Just kind of treated the person as a soldier. With dignity. The coming home issues... That's one of the transition things. I was touched by the effort those folks up in Maine, or wherever it was, made.

Ernst: I guess I'm going to ask you a couple more questions. I can't help it. You keep pulling me in. What's your opinion about how the VA handled the Vietnam Veterans?

McGregor: The VA is a big organization and there's so many different parts to it. I remember reading about the VA hospitals when I was in college. I think Life Magazine did a couple of spreads on VA hospitals. It was a national tragedy. I'm sure they were under funded. There was a big influx of patients that they were trying to take care of. It was nobody's fault. But, never the less it's another example about how veterans at that time were treated. It was just atrocious the conditions that they were in. My feeling was



that I wasn't asking the VA for very much, so I didn't have much contact with them.

The contact that I did have with them was outside the norm. I might as well have been beating my head against the wall. \_\_\_\_\_ GI bill \_\_\_\_\_ VA certified all the way. \_\_\_\_\_ effectively and correctly. I had no problem with that. At the very end there was a question about that. When I was at the end of my doctoral program you had to have a certain number of field Hall residency and after that you continue to sign up and don't have to pay tuition. Because you're not taking any courses.

Ernst: I know that well because I was writing a dissertation.

McGregor: I'd probably found out from the VA if I continue to receive a GI bill if I wasn't paying tuition. AI couldn't get an answer. They had a hotline. I ask two or three different people. I wrote a letter and never got a response. It was like there was nobody there, you know. So I went ahead and paid tuition because I couldn't afford not to have a GI Bill. I could not afford for that to lapse, so I wet ahead and paid. They thought I was crazy.

Ernst: \_\_\_\_\_ pay out when \_\_\_\_\_.

McGregor: I was sure that I was still eligible for benefits,. The said Do you really want to pay the tuition, even though you don't owe it? That's what I wanted to do. Maybe it would have been different if I had known the right person to call or maybe had the University check on that. Maybe I would have got a response. That's a very narrow example.

Ernst: \_\_\_\_\_ shuffled to the bottom. Like you said they were under funded at times. \_\_\_\_\_ horror stories.

McGregor: I've never had any treatment at the VA hospitals.

Ernst: I didn't know if you had any later on in your capacity as a psychologist.

McGregor: No. Very little or none.

Ernst: Let me ask you one more question. ... Do you think the Gulf wars were glossed over by the Bush Administration, and America in general? Now that we've gotten rid of the ghost of Vietnam and everything. Do you think that it's been glossed over and there's parts... Obviously, there's always more to the situation. There's situation's that are not covered, ... , painted in a positive light, or a too positive light.

McGregor: Well, I'd have to say a qualified no. It was probably the best marketed war we ever had. They did a good job of that. Not at all bad. I think they did a lot for our national self esteem. It really kind of brought us back in some ways. War should not be glorified so much. The next war we might not be so lucky. We were up against a paper army, in my opinion. There was nothing to... The whole thing was just kind of blustering, a \_\_\_\_\_ on the part of Saddam. He was so outmanned from the beginning. It was ridiculous.

Ernst: ... character. Either extremely stupid or just doesn't care.

McGregor: I think a combination of the two. But, of course, the Iraqi people have suffered tremendously. The fact that Saddam is still in power is really absurd when you think about it. I think it's been glossed over too much. I think the thing about the chemicals is a class example of some people in certain places having too little regard for the man on the ground that wears the uniform. That should have never happened.

Ultimately, I usually end up feeling like there's a civilian somewhere that didn't care enough. I think most military commanders feel deeply about what happens to their people. Civilians a lot of times don't understand that. You know, how important it is to

be cautious in certain situations. But that whole situation was just one of those things that happen. You know, the pin flies off the grenade, the intelligence reports about the chemical weapons getting in the wrong place at the wrong time and don't get to the right people. There's a bumper sticker about that sort of thing.

Ernst: I got interviewed by the Kentucky Post a while back and \_\_\_\_\_. I guess he asked me about the Gulf War, and Vietnam and Korea. The one thing I guess that's bothered me is the number of officials that tried to glaze over the Gulf War Syndrome. Didn't you learn from Agent Orange? Committees are really going after it now, but it's been a number of years. Soldiers have had some really bad side effects. I just don't understand why they cover it up when they could take care of their people.

McGregor: I'm like you. The army's got the potential to really screw up in that regard. When you look back in history, they don't have a very good track record on that sort of stuff. Exposing people to certain kinds of things and then denying that there's anything wrong. That's military commanders leading their people to twist in the wind. It's political machinery, wheels in motion.

Ernst: Along that line, I promise, the last question. Do you have an opinion on Robert MacNimera and his book in retrospect?

McGregor: I haven't read it. So I guess I shouldn't have an opinion on it. I'm familiar with it a little bit. I know he says I was wrong. The \_\_\_\_ of the war was certainly a lot of his responsibility. I don't know nothing about it to really say much more. I don't have a lot of strong feelings about it. It's one of those things that's done now.

Ernst: Got anything else.

McGregor: Obviously I could talk about it on and on. Neither you or I have time to hear all this. The one thing, I don't know if this has any relevance or not... I'll go ahead and say this. I have part of who I am as a soldier. I'll always have that. But I'm not a member of any veterans organizations or intend to be a member. For a couple reasons. One, because so many of these organizations are too self serving. It's always veterans benefits and veterans rights. Just because a person served their country doesn't mean they should have unlimited access to the treasury. Many veterans need to be compensated for what they've lost. In terms of life and limb, so to speak. This whole thing just gets way out of hand. I think that eventually we're going to have to do away with this idea that just because a person served on active duty for 180 days consecutively they get lifelong health and medical benefits. That's just absurd. We can't afford it. We have to kind of rethink that sort of thing. I think it's 180 days, maybe not. I guess if it were service connected you would get that. Even if a person serves on active duty for twenty years, should they be given them? I don't know. Benefits are important. Veterans need to feel like their country supports them. You got to draw the line somewhere. On a similar \_\_\_\_\_ one of the things that... Some of the Veterans Groups are just pseudo patriotic kinds of things. Like flag desecration issues. I think that constitutional amendment was one of the worst ideas anybody's come up with in a long time. People have fought and died for our freedom, yet we make an amendment that specifically limits some of that freedom. Something that never even happens anymore now. Why did anybody think that's a good idea? But I guarantee if you poll some of the veterans or general population it will basically report that. I enjoy letting politicians

know that I don't support it. Of course they think everybody else does. They think the more they hop up and down about it the better they look.

Ernst: \_\_\_\_\_. I feel like the \_\_\_\_ legislation protection of flag burning. What it stands for \_\_\_\_\_.

McGregor: Non violent expression of protest. If we can't do that...

Ernst: We might as well throw it out.

McGregor: Right. What are we talking about here? At any rate, I guess that's where we ought to stop.

Pat McGregor

Tape 2 Side 2

Oral History Project

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Dr. Ernst