

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL T. RUANE

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Colonel Michael T. Ruane on January 9, 2024, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Thank you so much for coming in, I really appreciate it.

MR: Well, thank you, Shaun.

SI: Also, I thank Jim Pressman for putting us in touch--he will like to see that.

MR: Yes. [laughter]

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

MR: I was born July 15, 1942, in the Bronx.

SI: Okay.

MR: Actually, my parents lived in the Bronx. I think I was born in St. Luke's Hospital in Manhattan. We lived there for about six months. Then, we moved to Jersey City. I was the oldest of three children. I have another brother and a sister and we're all about two-and-a-half years apart.

My parents originally came from Ireland, my mom at the age of sixteen in 1923 and my dad at the age of twenty in 1930. So, I never met my grandparents. They all passed away in the 1940s. So, I never had the chance to meet them.

SI: Do you know where in Ireland they came from?

MR: Yes, oh, yes, I'm the family genealogist.

SI: Okay.

MR: So, my father came from Galway. My mother came from Roscommon, yes. We have a lot of oral history and I have a lot of history on the family going back.

SI: Sure.

MR: Going back generations, but the family, the Ruane Family, basically came here, probably in about 1913, when a cousin of my father's came here. So, she married another Irishman. They lived in Jersey City. Then, when my father came over, he ended up visiting with them an awful lot. She pretty much sponsored other relatives coming over. So, that was the background, started with the Jersey City connection.

My dad was a laborer. I don't even know if he had a high school education. I know he was a vociferous reader. He just couldn't get enough to read. I think that was one of the things he missed about not being schooled.

My mom, she graduated high school. Right after high school, she came to the States. She was the oldest. My dad was the youngest, my mother was the oldest in her family.

My mom came here; she ended up in New York City. She was a nanny, for a lot of things. A lot of things she told me about was (one of the things) that when she came here, she was applying for jobs. At that time, it was pretty tough, but some of the signs were out there, "Negros and Irish need not apply."

So, she ran into some of that; never colored her perception of the world, though. My mom was a great person. My dad was a hard worker. My mom was pretty much the leader of the family--go ahead.

SI: Did either parent talk about why they left or was it just for general economic opportunity?

MR: On my dad's side, it was pretty much the economic opportunity, because he was the youngest. He was the youngest of about, I think it was ten children. My mom was the oldest of--at the time, she was the oldest of nine children. So, she came over here. She ended up living with a relative, an aunt. So, she used to send money home and that was one of her things.

When Dad came over, it was primarily to look for work, because there wasn't anything in Ireland. The way they used to [execute], let's say, the rights of inheritance, if you want to call it that, is, normally, the oldest son would get the farm. So, I mean, my dad had, like, four older brothers, so, he wasn't in that line no matter what. He wasn't getting anything, yes. [laughter]

We moved to Jersey City. My Aunt Julia, the one that we called our aunt that was my father's cousin, she's the one that had the house in Jersey City. She lived on the top floor. We rented the bottom floor. My brother was born. My sister was born. My sister, when she was probably about four or five years old, she got polio. As a matter of fact, at that time, she had polio and two of my cousins also got polio, within a year of each other.

SI: Wow.

MR: My sister was the poster child, believe it or not, for the Sister Kenny Foundation in Jersey City, at the Jersey City Medical Center.

[Editor's Note: Sister Elizabeth Kenny (1880-1952), an Australian nurse, pioneered polio treatment with the use of techniques that are found in present-day physical therapy. The Sister Kenny Foundation for Infantile Paralysis established a hundred-bed clinic at Jersey City Medical Center in 1948.]

The neighborhood we lived in was primarily Irish. Jersey City, at the time, was probably about eighty percent Catholic. The neighborhood was about eighty percent--oh, not eighty percent--maybe about sixty percent Irish, about twenty percent Italian, twenty percent Polish. We had some Jewish families and, on the main drag, there was some African American families, black families; never a problem.

Everybody, we're kids growing up. We played in the streets. No one had much. It was lower middle income. Like I said, my father unloaded trucks, loaded trucks. One guy was a bus driver, another one was a cop, another one's a fireman. The Jewish families, they had a small store around the corner, a dry goods store. One of the Italian families had a small vegetable store. So, I mean, it was typical. It was probably a typical city at that time, what it was.

SI: What part of the city was it?

MR: We lived in the Greenville section [the southernmost neighborhood of Jersey City].

SI: Okay.

MR: In Jersey City, at the time, when someone asked you, "Where you from?" "Jersey City." "Oh, where?" you go, "Sacred Heart Parish," because people identified by parish. I mean, like, the Italians would belong to Our Lady of Victories, see, the Poles and the Slovaks would be Lady of Czestochowa. So, you could tell not only what ethnic background they were, but what part of the city they lived in. I mean, that was just the way it was.

We didn't have a car. There were buses. You could get anywhere you wanted by bus, or walking. I mean, so, that was never a problem. I went to Sacred Heart Grammar School. From there, I went to St. Peter's Prep in downtown Jersey City. That was a Jesuit school. Then, from St. Peter's, I ended up going to Seton Hall University. I graduated St. Peter's in '59 and started at Seton Hall. Seton Hall was then in there.

I wanted to be--I guess, when I was growing up, one of my favorite cousins, a guy by the name of Frank Flaherty--and he had been a Marine right after World War II--I wanted to follow in his footsteps. He was like my hero, and he was an actuary with Exxon (Esso at the time). So, I started to look at going into a degree in math, okay. That lasted about a year-and-a-half, until I found out that I could not do calculus or some of the other math subjects, [laughter] but that was another interesting thing, too.

The family, when I told you they first came over here in 1913, two of my father's cousins, my Aunt Julia's brothers, both fought for the United States in World War I. They came over here and they served in the United States Army. The family, ever since, has had a pretty good history of people serving, one way or another.

I told you about my cousin Frank, who was the Marine right after World War II. His brother, Tommy, was older than him. He was in the Pacific in the Navy. I had two uncles on my mother's side who were in the Army in Europe. One of them was on Anzio. One of them was on the Bridge at Remagen, when they crossed over. He was an antiaircraft gunner at the Remagen bridgehead.

[Editor's Note: On January 22, 1944, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Anzio on the western coast of Italy to make a push towards Rome. Instead, Allied movement from Anzio stalled and faced a fierce German counterattack. In March 1945, Allied forces captured the Ludendorff Bridge, which spans the Rhine River in Germany, in the Battle of Remagen.]

Since then, I guess that got into my blood. When I went to Seton Hall, not only did I want to be an actuary, but the other thing was, I wanted to be in the military. When I was a kid, I used to go up and I used to play with soldiers all the time. I used to set up my own little war games and everything else along those lines. So, I ended up in ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] and I graduated 1963.

I was not the best of students. When I switched over from a math major to an accounting major, I ended up getting out of Seton Hall with about 158 credits, and I went through three summer schools. I was carrying eighteen and twenty-one credits in summer school. As a matter of fact, my last year, 1963, I didn't graduate in June, I graduated in August, because I had to go to summer school to complete what I had.

I worked for three months for an accounting firm. That was certified public accountants. They did bridges and we did the Town of Hoboken audits. From there, I went in the Army.

SI: Let me go back and unpack some of that.

MR: Yes, there's a lot there, go ahead.

SI: Going back to your Irish roots, were there things in your household that your family tried to keep up that were distinctly Irish?

MR: Not really, no, not really. It was hard to get them to talk about it, okay. My father, the only time I ever heard my father talk about it was, one time, I guess it was late in life, his brother went over to Ireland and came back. His brother was over in Ireland when we landed on the Moon.

[Editor's Note: On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the Moon as part of NASA's Apollo 11 mission.]

So, when he came back, I just remember my father, my Uncle Marty (that was the one that went to Ireland), a friend of theirs, Connie Lane, sitting in my parents' house (at that time, in Ridgefield Park) and they each had a glass of Jameson whiskey. They sipped it and they just talked about Ireland, the old days, and that was the most I ever heard my father talk about it. I just sat back and I was just quiet.

It was just talking about some of the things when they were kids. I guess they had to be in their, probably, sixties at that time, yes, someplace in around there, yes, because it was 1969, I think, we landed on the Moon and my dad was born in 1910. Yes, so, he would've been [in his] sixties.

One of the things that they did--I know [because] I've been over to Ireland about twelve times--one of the things my cousins over there told me [was] that they remembered Aunt Bridey (my mother's name was Bridget), "Aunt Bridey's boxes." They could tell they're coming from her because they could smell the mothballs, okay, because she packed clothes and put some toys and other stuff in and [would] send them over to her sisters and her brothers; well, sisters, actually, because her brothers never married.

Yes, so, she'd do something like that, but there wasn't really much of a connection, aside from St. Patrick's Day, everyone, people would get together and just celebrate St. Patrick's Day, but that was about it. The only reason you knew they were Irish [was] because they spoke with a brogue. So, that was about it.

SI: Your father, you said he unloaded trucks. Did he do that for a particular company or did he move between different employers?

MR: Well, yes, he worked in different places. When he first came over, I'm not certain exactly what he did, but, at one time in the '30s, he worked for Grand Markets up in the Bronx, because he was living in New York City at the time. He worked for Grand Markets at the time.

I remember one of the stories he used to tell. He used to bring in the old milk pails. I mean, they were like silver pails and they were filled with milk. When the milk settled, the cream settled on the top. So, what they used to do in the back, they used to scoop the cream. They used to take some of the cream without the bosses knowing about it, but that was one of his stories about that.

Then, in the late '30s, he started working for the Jersey Central Railroad in Jersey City, down around Communipaw Avenue, which [was] one of their big, big yards down there. He was with them all the way through the war, up until about 1946, 1947. He then worked for National Cash Register, again, as a laborer, basically.

Then, I guess in the early '50s, he started working for H&H Poultry Company over in New York City. That was the job that, literally, it killed his hips, because they were in and out of refrigerators all the time and carrying heavy loads. I know that he had both of hips replaced twice, yes, once when he was in his sixties and once when he turned eighty, yes.

SI: Wow.

MR: Yes, and he retired as soon as he could. I just remember, I think he retired when he was sixty-five years old. He had a union contract. He worked for the Teamsters and the union contract had just been renegotiated. It gave him a good--a decent, let me put it that [way]--a decent retirement.

SI: When did he join the Teamsters? Was he always in the Teamsters?

MR: No, I know he was with them when he was with H&H Poultry. I don't know if he was with them with National Cash Register.

SI: Okay.

MR: He was probably with the union in National Cash Register also, because they had unions at that time. I know, in the railroad, he would've been in a union, yes. So, he's probably a union man almost all his life, yes.

SI: Did he ever seem active in it, that you could tell?

MR: No. About the most he ever became, he became the shop steward for H&H Poultry Company, towards the end of his career there, yes, but that was about all he ever did. He just represented the guys. Most of the guys in H&H were all "greenhorns from the other side," yes. Dad had been over here probably longer than most of them, so, he was like the "designee," if you want to call it that.

SI: Did your mother work outside the home at all?

MR: She did. After my sister got polio, my mother worked for [a while], because of the doctor bills and everything associated with [the illness]. My mother worked for several years for--it wasn't Woolworth--I think it was Kresge's, the five-and-ten-cent stores at that time.

She apparently did very well there, because they wanted her to become one of the department heads that they had. She said no, because, simply, her thing was just [to] make some money to pay off the bills, so that she could be a homemaker. I mean, that was the way she was, yes, but she worked for them for probably about seven or eight years.

SI: You do not have to answer this, but how did having a sister with polio affect the family and affect your daily lives?

MR: I don't think it affected us that much. My parents paid more attention to Mary Pat as she was growing up, especially when she was younger and she's learning how to cope with it. I know, in the neighborhood, the kids and everything else, there wasn't any reaction to her having polio. Now, she just had a slight limp, okay; well, it was more than a slight limp. My cousin, Ellen, she had to walk with a cane and my other cousin was in a wheelchair.

So, Mary Pat had a brace on her leg, but, I mean, she was still mobile. The girls in the neighborhood, I mean, the young girls, her friends, were her friends. I think the only thing that happened, one time, was one kid said something about Mary Pat. Some kid who was new to the neighborhood said something about Mary Pat, and I took care of that. Yes, so, I was about twelve or thirteen at the time, yes.

SI: Yes.

MR: No, and she never let it stand in the way, either. I mean, she went to A. Harry Moore School in Jersey City, which was for people with disabilities. She went to St. Al's Academy on a scholarship. That was a high school in Jersey City. Then, she went to St. Elizabeth College on a scholarship, yes. She was very smart. She ended up working for the government, Social Security. She spent her whole career there and loved it.

SI: Growing up in Jersey City, I have interviewed a bunch of people from there, they all talk about Hauge or the "Hague Machine," as they call it.

[Editor's Note: Frank Hague (1876-1956) was the Mayor of Jersey City, New Jersey, from 1917 to 1947. He was the boss of the city's Democratic political machine and a powerful member of the Democratic National Committee.]

MR: Yes, yes.

SI: Did that affect your lives at all? Do you have any memories of that?

MR: No. My ex-father-in-law, at one time, he found out that he had signed a petition [laughter] for something that was going on. I mean, he didn't sign a petition.

SI: Oh, yes.

MR: I mean, someone signed his name for it, [that] type thing. There used to be the saying that, "Bayview Cemetery cast its twelve hundred votes for Frank Hague." No, my parents were never involved in politics.

We never saw it around the area, whether it was there or not. I mean, it had to be there, because they all had ward healers who took care of various things. I know, around the holidays, if someone was down on their luck, there'd be food baskets or something else that'd come in from the party, from the Democratic Party, yes, but that was about it.

SI: You were about four when World War II started, is that right?

MR: I wasn't born yet.

SI: You were not born yet, oh.

MR: I was born in '42.

SI: Okay, yes. You would not remember the actual war.

MR: Yes.

SI: Did your uncles talk about the war or did you just find out later where they had been and what they had done?

MR: I found out later on. One of my earliest memories is, my Uncle Mike--he was married to my mother's sister--my Uncle Mike came back from Europe. I had to be about four years old at the time. I remember him being in uniform in the house, in our house in Jersey City, with my Aunt Martha. I remember a tennis ball. Now, don't ask me why--I mean, this is just random thoughts. This is all I remember about that. I don't remember what they talked about. I was too young at the time.

I remember talking to him years later, and no one really spoke about it. Years later, when I was back from Vietnam, my Uncle Mike and his brother, Andy, were up in Connecticut and we were talking at that time. Andy was also on Anzio.

Andy was telling us about how they used to--I mean, we're just talking infantry stuff, I guess because he felt comfortable talking to me about it and I felt comfortable talking to him--how they used to stack bodies up to protect them. The dead bodies, he said the sound of the bullets hitting the dead flesh remained with him. So, he had PTSD. I mean, he did. He was not an exceptionally heavy drinker, but he was a heavy drinker at times. I think that might have played into it.

SI: When you were making your own decisions about serving, did that impact your thought process at all, what they had gone through, beyond just that you wanted to serve because previous family members had served?

MR: I tell people that the US did an awful lot for my folks. They came over here with nothing, I mean, literally a suitcase, twenty-five dollars, that's all they had. That's what you needed to get in the country. All of a sudden, we're able to afford a house. My mom, she was good with money--I'll tell you, she could've been a CFO at any corporation you wanted. She was excellent with money. They're able to buy a house.

They never went past high school. All of a sudden, they have three kids, all graduated from colleges, two of us with scholarships, one of them in a checkered journey, which is interesting all by itself--that's my brother. I felt I really owed something that I wanted to pay back, and my way of paying back was going into the military.

SI: Okay.

MR: I mean, I liked it when I was a kid, and then, when I went into ROTC, it just firmed it up for me, is what it boiled down to, yes.

SI: Before we talk about Seton Hall, tell me a little bit about the Catholic school experience. Before you went to the Jesuit school, was that earlier school run by nuns?

MR: Yes, Sisters of Charity.

SI: Okay, yes.

MR: Sisters of Charity. It was cool. It was a time of the Civil Defense drills, "Everybody get down under your desk." [laughter] Afterwards, we used to say, "Put your head between your legs and kiss your ass goodbye," because, I'll tell you, you're not going to survive it, but I thought it was good. I considered it "double jeopardy." If you screwed around, the nuns took care of you. If you went home and your parents found out about it, they took care of you at the same time.

I thought it was a good education. I thought it was a good education. I was always shy. I was always shy, up until I got halfway through college, and I'm talking about really, really shy. I just remember that it gave me some confidence in myself.

Also, I read a lot. So, that was one of the things with the shyness. If I wasn't playing with my friends, I'd be reading, whether it be comic books or books. As I got older, it was books. As a matter of fact, when I got into college, I think I read every war book that was in the St. Peter's Prep library, but I was in the choir at Sacred Heart Church when I was in grammar school. I was also an altar boy. So, it was a good experience for me.

I thought it was a good experience for me. I had some good friends; lost a lot of them over the years, but there's still one or two of us that still maintain some contact with each other--not like my high school kids, yes.

SI: Did your interest in reading lead you to like English or history more?

MR: Well, I read a lot of history. I read a lot of fiction. Every night before I go to sleep, I read for at least an hour. I've got a couple hundred books in my basement, all of which I've read, some of them two and three times.

I look at them like they're an old friend. If I haven't read them in ten or fifteen years and I enjoyed them the first time round, I'll pick them up, just to read them again and just to see what I missed the first time around, like history books, especially American history, ancient history, somewhat, yes. It keeps my mind active and I enjoy it. I really enjoy it. I've got friends and we discuss it. We pass books back and forth between each other, too, yes.

SI: Tell me more about the Jesuit school.

MR: St. Peter's Prep.

SI: A lot of people really value the Jesuit education they got.

MR: Oh, yes. I remember our first day; I remember this well, I'll tell you. It was about three hundred of us in the school yard, the courtyard. We're waiting for school to start. All of a sudden--it was like a stairway that went up maybe two-and-a-half, three stories high and it was a door--the door opens up and out comes this Jesuit.

He had the biretta; the hat was down like this. He stood there, Father John. In fact, he stood about six-two, slim, and he had his hand in the thing, like this. He just looked around--three hundred kids, not a word, not a word. That was it. That was our introduction to Father John Murray, known as "Tex," who was the prefect of discipline. He was known as Tex because of the thing, of putting his hands in there.

We all got divided up into various classes. Freshman year was--not the weeding out process--but it was a process whereby they figured out, okay, your academic levels. Okay, if you're very smart, you learned Greek, okay, if you're pretty smart, you learned German and, if you're a good

student, average, okay, you learn French. Okay, I was in the French class. I was close to the bottom of the French class. I was not a good student. The classes were good.

The thing is, if you screwed up, you got something known as "JUG." That means you were sent down to Father Murray. This is where you learned how to print the Papal Encyclicals in a blue book. I don't know if you're familiar with the blue books, from college.

SI: Yes.

MR: The thing is, you would think that you could figure out, "Okay, what assignment is he going to give you?" but you never could, because you had to start on page five or line six. So, I mean, he kept shifting the things around. JUG usually was about an hour-and-a-half, two hours, after school. So, then, you got home and you had to tell your parents that you're at JUG. That didn't work well. [laughter]

The guys I met there--sophomore year was the French class--the guys that I met there, right now, many of us are very close. We get together every three or four months, a bunch of us who live in the Shore area; used to be fifteen, twenty of us. Now, we're down to about ten, because some of the guys have passed on, some of the guys have moved to Florida, but we'll meet for lunch.

There's another group that meets up in North Jersey and I get in with them every once in a while. There's a group that meets in Florida. Then, we've got guys spread out all over, but our class had one guy, Joe Russoniello, he was on the--what do you call the federal courts on the West Coast?

SI: Oh, the circuit courts?

MR: Yes, I mean, it's like seven courts throughout the United States, just below the Supreme Court.

SI: Is it the Third Circuit?

[Editor's Note: Joseph P. Russoniello served as the United States Attorney for the Northern District of California from 1982 to 1990 and again from 2008 to 2010, within the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.]

MR: Yes, I forget which one, but he was on there. Another couple of our guys were famous doctors. One guy, one of my classmates, Paul Jordan, was the Mayor of Jersey City. So, I mean, there was a bunch of [successes]. The guys did pretty well. The Jesuits gave you a good education.

[Editor's Note: Dr. Paul Jordan served as the Mayor of Jersey City from 1971 to 1977.]

Well, it was like they said in the beginning--what they're going to do is going to give you discipline and study habits and, also, moral character. I mean, I'll tell you, one of the things, if you screwed up, you paid for it, you'd pay for it. I mean, that was just the way it was. They told you right off.

Discipline in class was something else. One of my instructors was Father Jasko, Jasko, J-A-S-K-O. He came out of Poland. He was a bull. He was a strong guy. We had one guy, Jim McBurney, Jim weighed about 220 pounds, 215, 220 pounds.

One time, Father Jasko, he comes in, he said [Colonel Ruane uses a Polish accent], "One, two, three question sheets," because he spoke with the accent. McBurney said [in a Polish accent], "One, two, three question sheets," and Jasko heard him say that. He walked down, he picked up McBurney and the desk and threw him to the back of the room.

SI: Oh, wow.

MR: No one ever made fun of Father Jasko after that. They were good. They were good. We had guys that used to feel their testosterone in the same manner. There was one guy that pointed out to the Father, well, said about Father Murray, "If he wasn't wearing that biretta, I'd kick his ass." Okay, well, that got around to Father Murray.

So, we had a convocation. This is where'd we pass out the report cards and the awards for honors and this, that, and the other thing, and it was all over. When it was over, everyone's sitting around in the gym, waiting for [class].

Father Murray takes off his hat, takes off his collar. He says, "Lang, come here. You said you were going to..." [Colonel Ruane imitates crying], "I'm sorry, Father. I'm just opening up my mouth, Father. I'm sorry, I'm sorry." "Two weeks, JUG." He ended up giving him two weeks JUG for it. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

MR: But, it was cool, it was cool. One of the things, he left after our junior year. He went up to Canisius College, but he came down when we graduated. The graduation was at Snyder High School in Jersey City. We did not know he was there until afterwards.

My parents were about a block away from Snyder High School. We're still on stage. We're getting ready to take off our gowns, caps and gowns, and so forth, and he came back. He came backstage. My parents said they heard the cheers a block away, for him. He ended up giving us all his blessing, which to us was very important. He was really loved.

We had one guy in the class, Lefty Kennedy. There was one time--I guess, we were sophomores or juniors, I forget which--Lefty came to school this wintertime and his feet were all wet. When we're going into the school, okay, there'd be Father, Tex would be there, the assistant prefect of discipline, maybe, maybe the principal, just watching the kids come in.

All of a sudden, Tex goes, "Kennedy, get over here--where's your boots?" "Oh, I'm sorry, Father, I forgot them." "Well, you'd better not forget them tomorrow. Get out of here." Okay, next day, Kennedy comes in, no boots again. "Hey, Lefty, come here."

He brings him in the office, "What's up?" He says, "Hey, Father, I don't have them." "What do you mean you don't have them?" "I don't have them, Father." "Can you buy them?" He says, "My dad's laid off." [Editor's Note: Colonel Ruane makes a sound to simulate cash being passed.] "Go get yourself a pair of boots." That was the type of guy he was.

SI: Wow.

MR: But, that was pretty much the culture there, I mean, if you want to call it. It was all-male. It was all-male. It was good teachers, good teachers. We felt they really cared about us, I think is one of the things.

You talk to the guys now--I mean, I went to Seton Hall, I had a free ride to the Hall--ah, I've got nothing to do with the Hall. I mean, it ties into me in no way, shape, or form. Most of the guys, they talk about the Prep and they talk about it with love, I mean, is basically what it boils down to. It was just a great school and a great experience, yes.

SI: Do any of the Jesuits or lay teachers stand out in your memory as being very influential? It sounds like Tex was, but were there others?

MR: Yes. There was one, Lou Parisi. Here we go again with the military side--Lou Parisi (he's still alive, as a matter of fact), he was World War II. He was on Okinawa, got shot. I think he got shot on April 7th. He said he woke up about something like five months later, plate in his head, everything else like this. He was one of our teachers. He was really a good teacher.

[Editor's Note: On April 1, 1945, American forces invaded the Japanese island of Okinawa in the Pacific. The island was not secured until June and was the deadliest battle in the Pacific War for both sides.]

I can't pick out one that would stand out more than the others--okay, Lou might have been, there was another guy, T.V. Mace--because as bad a student I was, they made me want to learn things. I just didn't know how to study, I didn't know how to take notes. That was one of the things--as a matter of fact, let me just go off on a tangent for a second.

SI: Sure.

MR: When I was fifty, fifty-one, I went to an Air Force course down in Eglin Air Force Base down in Florida. It was tactical air control parties, the guys that coordinate all the big airstrikes and get the bad guys dead. It was a three-week course.

The first thing I did--and I guess I was the oldest guy in the course, [because] it was everything from, I was a colonel at the time, all the way down to captains, majors, senior NCOs--they said, "None of you have been in school for a long period of time. So, the first thing I'm going to do is teach you how to study, how to take notes."

For the first day-and-a-half, that's what they did, "Okay, here's how you take notes. Here's how you study. Here's how you reinforce. Here's how you do this." I'll tell you, I came out of that

course and I was one of the top three in the course. It was like, "Wow, if I had known this years ago..." is what it was, because I was like the type of guy that I had to see it and play with it in order to be able to understand and comprehend and be able to accept it, you know what I mean?

If I read stuff, the concepts, a lot of times, it'd get by me, unless someone could explain it to me in a certain way. So, I tried to be a good student, but I wasn't, [laughter] okay, is what it boiled down to, and that followed me all the way through college, too.

The teachers, I think it was the fact that they cared about us, is the thing that stands out more than anything else. You could reach out to every one of them. I mean, tough love, oh, there was tough love there, I'll tell you. There wasn't any problem with that. You open up to a teacher, I mean, he had no problem smacking the crap out of you. I don't mean punch you out; I mean, he'll just give you the back of his hand and that's it. You didn't do it again, simple.

Nowadays, if you told people that, they'd [say it was] child abuse, everything else like that, but we used to be proud of the fact that, "Hey, we had tough teachers, man. You couldn't get away with anything."

SI: No.

MR: Yes, that was one of our things.

SI: In high school, did you also work or did you have other activities that you were involved in?

MR: Yes, I worked. I had a big paper route, when I was--I guess I was twelve years old, eighth grade--and then, I worked all the way through high school and college. I worked a variety of things. I worked the paper route for a couple years. Then, I worked at a hardware store. Then, I worked at a butcher store; worked at a hardware store, shelves and waiting on customers, and, at the butcher store, delivering orders and cleaning up and everything else like that.

I ended up, I think it was my junior year in high school, I worked at a confectioner's, candy. It was almost like a luncheonette, but the guy made his own chocolates and his own ice creams. So, I worked there--as a matter of fact, that's where I met my first wife--worked there for three years, I think, until I was a sophomore in college. Then, I started working for A&P. I worked for A&P until, let's see, graduated from college, and I started working with the accounting firm, yes.

One of the things was, *had to*, is basically what it boiled down to. I mean, me being able to work, I was able to take some of the burden off of my folks. So, that was the way it was. Then, my brother, also, he was working at the same time, when he was getting older, too, yes.

SI: Did you have to turn your money over to your family or was it just that you would pay for your own stuff?

MR: I'd pay for my own stuff. Okay, like, if I wanted to go to the movies, I didn't have to go to them, if I needed books for school or I needed something. It wasn't really that much, I mean,

when you look at it, but it just saved them a little bit. I could buy my own lunch. I thought that was pretty cool, yes.

My dad, especially when he was working with the poultry company, he got up at two o'clock in the morning. They normally started work around four, four-thirty. So, he'd get up at two o'clock in the morning. Mom would make him breakfast, believe it or not. She'd be up to make him breakfast. He would leave for work probably about quarter to three.

By the time he got over, it'd four o'clock. He'd work his eight hours, but, then, if he could get overtime, he'd work overtime. So, he'd usually get maybe one or two hours of overtime. So, by the time he got home in the afternoon, it was four o'clock.

For all intents and purposes, I mean, he was toast at that time. We'd have dinner probably about six. Dad'd go to bed right after that. So, basically, the times I saw my dad was around suppertime or on the weekends. It was good, the times he had.

He wasn't a big man. He was maybe five-ten. My mom was five-ten. My mom was tall. My dad wasn't a big man. I'll tell you, he's very slow to anger, but, when he angered, he angered, that type thing. Not so much with us, with the kids, matter of fact, very little, but I remember, one time, a guy accused me of hurting his son. I didn't do anything to the kid at all.

He stormed up on our front porch when we were in Jersey City and he's screaming through the front window at my mom. My dad went out to the front porch and he said, "I'll give you one second to get off this porch or I'm going to throw you right through the concrete." The guy took a look at him and he just scurried right down the stairs.

Joe (Larkin?) was one of the guys my dad worked with over in the poultry [company], over in New York City, told me that someone came one time, my dad threw him off the loading dock. So, I mean, I didn't see that in my dad, but, I mean, I heard he could be that way.

SI: Yes.

MR: I don't know where the hell we started with this... [laughter]

SI: Yes, we were just talking about working different jobs.

MR: Yes, yes.

SI: Did you have time for any activities at school or sports?

MR: Believe it or not, I was too small for football. I tried out for football. When I was a freshman, I was about five-ten, about 160 pounds, which was a pretty good size, but I was too small. St. Peter's Prep, at that time, in my four years there, they played like thirty-six football games. They won thirty-three and lost three. In senior year, they won all the games.

The guys that I was trying out against were good friends of mine now, but they were Richie (Gronda?), John (Spadore?), Joe (Cattreras?), yes. These guys were shaving in the fourth grade. I mean, they were huge. These guys were big. [laughter] I'm going, "Holy good God, how am I [going to make it]?" Then, I said, "No, I'm never going to make football."

I ended up actually being on the stage crew for a couple of plays there, but that was about all I really did. I played intramural, lunchtime sports, but that was about it, no, because most of the time, afternoon, I'd get home, go to work, come home from work, have supper, do my homework, and then, go to sleep and wake up the next day, yes.

SI: By the time you were senior, it was 1959, right?

MR: Yes.

SI: How would you say you were as a consumer of news? Did you keep up on current events?

MR: Not that much. You just kept the general stuff, who's running in the elections or some of the big things that were happening, *Sputnik*, things along those lines. I started getting more involved in it when I was in college, with the Cuban Missile Crisis, okay, because we were in ROTC at that time. We're thinking, "Hey, they may call us up." What the hell did we know? but that was when I started getting involved in what was going on in the outside world, yes.

[Editor's Note: On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union successfully launched *Sputnik* into orbit, making it the world's first artificial satellite. In October 1962, the United States demanded that the Soviet Union remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba. The United States placed a naval blockade around the island nation, creating a tense standoff between the superpowers that many feared would lead to nuclear war. The crisis was averted when the Soviet Union agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba in exchange for the United States removing its nuclear missiles from Turkey.]

SI: Okay.

MR: Yes, most of the rest of the stuff was just what's happening in Jersey City, what's happening with the Giants and the Dodgers. I wasn't a Yankee fan, but I was a Giant/Dodger fan, Giant fan.

SI: Would you be able to go to games?

MR: Went to a couple of games. Let's see, when I was a kid, the Dodgers used to play in Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City. They played, I think, ten games a year there. My dad would take us down there a couple of times. So, we were able to go down there a few times.

Then, when I was older, I went up to the Polo Grounds, saw a game up there, before when the Mets were there. That had to be about 1962, I guess it was. Then, I went to Yankee Stadium to see a couple of football games, but, then, as I got older, I was up at MetLife Stadium for the Cosmos and various other things like that. When I was a kid, no, not too much, not too much, saw all the high school football games.

SI: Yes.

MR: Because that was it; that was a Sunday tradition type thing.

SI: Who was St. Peter's big rival?

MR: Memorial High School, West New York. They were the only team that beat us those three years.

SI: Okay.

MR: Yes, I think it was 7-6, 12-7 and 13-12, something like that. They were close games, close games.

SI: Wow, they really stuck in your memory. [laughter]

MR: Oh, yes, let me tell you, yes, yes.

SI: Let's look at college--what led you to Seton Hall?

MR: Our parish, Sacred Heart Parish, had a scholarship for a family in need. Okay, like I said, my sister had polio. Parish scholarship was given to me, was given to our family. I was the guy. You just had to maintain a passing grade, basically is what it boils down to, because I wasn't a good student in high school. I think, out of 220-some-odd guys who graduated from Prep, I was probably about 210, 211, someplace in and around there.

So, that's how we ended up at the Hall. Almost all the family went to St. Peter's College at the time, all the Ruane's and the Flahertys, all went to St. Peter's College. The only one who didn't go to St. Peter's College was my cousin, Tommy. That was the guy who was in the Navy in World War II, because he went to Seton Hall under the GI Bill. So, I just ended up there because I got there, I got it for free. If I didn't get it for free, I probably would've gone to St. Peter's, yes.

[Editor's Note: The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, or GI Bill, provided World War II veterans with educational benefits and home loans.]

SI: Did you live on campus or did you commute?

MR: No, commuted. I was working at the time, so, I mean, that was [where you had to] get back. They didn't really have dorms, if you wanted. They have dorms now; they didn't have dorms then.

It was a "day hop," as they call it. So, we used to catch the bus down to the junction in Jersey City, junction in Jersey City, we'd catch the No. 9 bus into Penn Station in Newark, from Penn Station Newark, you catch the 31 up into Springfield. It took you about an hour-and-a-quarter, hour-and-a-half, to get there, yes.

In junior and senior year, a bunch of us got together and we went by car. So, you went that way, but it was all day hop. There might have been some guys that lived near campus, but it wasn't on campus itself, yes.

SI: Do any of the professors stand out in your memory as being influential and memorable?

MR: Well, for different reasons. [laughter]

SI: Okay.

MR: We had one guy, Mr. (Gerasie?), he taught accounting. He taught a big accounting lab and there had to be a couple hundred kids in the lab. We called him "The Missing Link," because his face, he had a protruding jaw and he had green teeth. He used to walk somewhat stooped over. That was the main thing about him. I don't have any good feelings, bad feelings about him. I mean, I passed his courses, but it was just the physical characteristics of him.

There was another, Father Carey. The priests out at Seton Hall were all secular priests, which means they kept their vows of chastity and obedience, but not poverty. Carey had a Cadillac and he used to go to the Jersey Shore in the summertime. He used to drive guys down to the Shore with him and drop them off wherever the hell they were going. He was good. He was just very interesting, a good priest, good priest. His brother was, if I remember correctly, the Democratic strongman in Essex County at the time.

[Editor's Note: Dennis F. Carey served as Essex County Democratic Committee Chairman from 1953 to 1968.]

Then, we had another guy that stands out for me, was an ROTC captain by the name of (Galfredo Sanzalone?). I guess we had him in my sophomore or junior year, but he taught me an awful lot. He taught me an awful lot about working with people, about leadership. That was part of my coming out process, if you want to call it that.

SI: Was ROTC optional?

MR: Mandatory. It was mandatory for two years. At that time, all freshmen had to be in it for two years. Then, if you wanted, your junior, senior year, you got it for your junior and senior year, yes, yes. It was good. It's where I met a lot friends. As a matter of fact, three of my closest friends while going through college (and even now), we're in each other's weddings. The four of us traveled back and forth to Seton Hall in our sophomore and junior years.

We knew each other from school. We hung around at school. We all lived in Jersey City, but one guy lived in Bayonne. Vince (McGrath?), Mike Ruane, we're the Irish guys and it was Al (San Martino?) and Pete (Mitaliano?), and we used to break each other's chops. We'd be the Irish against the Italians.

Al (San Martino?) was very thin-skinned. When he was getting thin-skinned, because he was Sicilian, okay, and Pete (Mitaliano?) was Calabrese, I'd say, "He's from the mainland and Al's from the island." When Al started getting thin-skinned, then, it was three guys jumping on Al because he's Sicilian.

We did that for years, but we all ended up in each other's weddings whenever possible, because we all were ROTC. We all got commissioned together, we all graduated together and we all went our separate ways. If you're in the United States and one of us is getting married, everyone was there, everyone who could be was there, yes.

Al passed away of stomach cancer back in 2004 and Vince, right now, he's on hospice down in Florida. Pete is up in Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania. So, we see each other. We talk to each other all the time, see each other when we can. So, we're still close in that respect.

SI: Wow.

MR: But, that was one of the things that the ROTC did, and it also tied me into a bunch of guys. The ones I remember from Seton Hall are primarily the guys from ROTC. As a matter of fact, a couple of them I met in Vietnam, too, yes. Our paths crossed over there.

SI: Tell me a little bit more about the training itself. Was it mostly classroom work? Did they take you on any maneuvers or parades?

MR: Well, when you first went in, you learned drill and ceremonies--how to march, how to right face, left face, so forth. You learned military courtesy. You started learning some of the basic stuff. You never went on maneuvers. The only time you went on maneuvers [was] between your junior and senior year, if you stayed in the program, because that was the ROTC summer camp.

We marched in parades, especially the Columbus Day Parade in Newark. There was another parade, too. I think it was in the spring, but I figure it might have been the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Newark. So, we marched then, but it was basic classroom instruction.

How to read a map--well, you can only do so much with a map when you're not in the woods or some other place like that, but, I mean, you went through some of that stuff. You really didn't do anything with weapons, but it was just the basic stuff. Again, you're only doing maybe one hour of drill a week and maybe one hour of classroom a week. So, there wasn't that much that you're going to get anyway.

One of the things that was there was, there was an ROTC fraternity. There were two of them, the Pershing Rifles and another one, the Triphibian Guard. I went with the Triphibian Guard. What we used to do, we used to march in various parades, like in Jersey City or other places like that. There'd be about sixteen people marching. There'd be four people with the color guard, plus a few others. So, I mean, the group wasn't that big. It was maybe thirty, thirty-five people all told in our group, in the Triphibian Guard, yes.

SI: I have heard of the Pershing Rifles, but what was this other group?

MR: The Triphibian Guard?

SI: Yes. What was it organized around?

MR: It was started at Seton Hall and was supposedly sea, air and land. Some guys formed it up. We were the second year that it was there. It lasted up until about--let's see, Jimmy went to the Hall--it had to be close to 2000 that it was still an organized fraternity.

SI: Wow.

MR: Yes, which was amazing, because we didn't think it was going to be. Actually, we used to talk about it after we graduated and other stuff like that, because it didn't have the national support, like the Pershing Rifles did, yes. We used to play them in football and we used to beat them. That was all that mattered to us. [laughter] That was all that mattered.

SI: Did they have more general interfraternity competitions?

MR: Well, the Pershing Rifles did among themselves, but we did with the ones at Seton Hall, simply because they were at the Hall and we were at the Hall. "Who the hell are you guys?" "Well, who the hell do you think you are?" "Okay, we'll meet you Sunday," and that's it. We'd hire a couple of guys to be the referees and the umpires and we went at it over there. Yes, it was interesting.

SI: You mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis.

MR: Yes.

SI: What do you remember about that period?

MR: I think I was a junior at the time. That was '62, if I remember correctly. I think it was the Fall of '62. I would've been a junior. The only thing I really remember about it is, it came out, and then, all of a sudden, we started reading about the ships and the quarantine and what's going to happen here and moving troops down into Florida.

Our ROTC cadre--and it was a lieutenant colonel and a couple of majors, I think, three or four captains and a bunch of NCOs--were on top of it. We could tell by the way that they were handling it or acting about it that they were concerned about it. That slid over on to us.

We used to talk a lot about it in the cafeteria, about, "Do you think we're going to get called up? Do you think they're going to--if something happens, if war breaks out--would they commission us early?" because we're all juniors at that time. "Will they commission us early? Then, we've got to be moving out," or whatever we're going to do. That was really about it. From there, I started getting more and more involved in current events, yes.

SI: Was Vietnam discussed at all during your time in ROTC?

MR: No, no.

SI: Okay.

MR: No, we graduated '63. There was nothing really going on there. There was advisors, but there wasn't anything big.

SI: Yes.

MR: I mean, you knew it was there. It was there, but there was a lot of stuff going on in Germany, too.

SI: Yes.

MR: Germany was the concern, because of the Russians and their threats and the other stuff like that. They're going to come through the Fulda Gap. That was the big thing, yes.

[Editor's Note: The Fulda Gap is an area of lowlands in central Germany where it was believed Communist forces would attack if war broke out in Europe during the Cold War.]

SI: What did you want to do in the service? Did you want to go the infantry route or were there other things that you were looking at doing?

MR: I wanted combat arms. I applied for--I think it was armor, then, infantry, and then, I think, I didn't do artillery, I think I might've done engineers. I'm not certain what the third one was, but I know it was armor and it was infantry. That's what I applied for. The reason is, I fell in love with the combat arms when we went to ROTC summer camp.

At the ROTC summer camp, it was almost like a switch was thrown. I was able to absorb stuff, I was able to be able to express myself to others and I was able to get others to follow me, if you want to say that. It was like things that I had learned and things that I'd been reading, things that people had taught me, all of a sudden, things started to come together.

I was not exceptional at the summer camp, because they gave you ratings, but, on the leadership mode, I came out very high, very high in our company on the leadership mode. From there, we went back to our senior year. That's when we put in, okay, what branches we wanted to go to. So, I put in the branches. So, we put in for the branches.

Then, we went for a physical. Now, I'm pretty much blind in my right eye. Right now, I just see blurs. I can make you out a little bit. Nothing is distinct and I can't read, can't read words or anything else like that. So, I had every eye test memorized, I mean.

SI: You had it then, yes.

MR: Yes, "L-P-G," whatever it was, going down. So, when I was going for my physical, they said, "Okay, put your hand over your left eye and read the chart." Shit, I wasn't going to read [that]. So, I put my hand on my right eye. "No, I said, 'Your left eye,'" but, by that time, I knew what the chart was--right down through, okay.

So, they gave me 20/20, 20/20, but, apparently, when the guy was writing it on the paper, he had an ink pen and, apparently, blotted it. The old ink pens, you could suck up the ink, if you held the pen a certain way. So, he sucked up the ink. So, now, instead of a "1-1-1," it looked like a "1-4."

So, all of a sudden, I get the thing that I'm going to the Quartermaster Corps. I said, "Whoa, what happened?" "Well, according to your physical, you got a 4 on your eye test." I said, "Wait a minute, no, that's wrong." I went over to Governor's Island, because that was First Army Headquarters at the time, went over to Governor's Island and I plead my case with the head of the ROTC region.

He listened to me. They made me take the eye exam again. I took it again, "The other eye," right down through. "Okay, that should be a 1." Okay, so, they change it and they gave me the armor. So, that was it.

I graduated in August, got commissioned in August. Like I said, I worked for three months writing for the accounting firm, the auditors, and then, I went down to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

SI: Did you have a choice between going in or going to work for a little bit? Did you want to work for a little bit to get the experience?

MR: I wanted to go right in, but they brought you in as they needed you, is what it boiled down to. If you were a Distinguished Military Graduate, which means the top ten percent of your class, you went in pretty much right after college. You got your choice of going airborne. The rest of us, we just went in when they needed us, yes.

SI: You obviously had a lot of exposure to the military, but what was it like once you were actually on active duty? Is it a big change in your life?

MR: Well, the first part of active duty was down in Fort Knox, Kentucky, okay. We're all officers at that time, so, we're going through the armor officer basic course. So, it was like going to school wearing a uniform, okay, and keeping up with the military traditions, courtesy, etc., and discipline. You're instructed by officers and NCOs and by laymen, and, matter of fact, even by--we had one guy instruct us, he was with the *Panzers* [tanks]. He was with the Germans.

SI: Really?

MR: On the Eastern Front, was the way he put it, on the Eastern Front. He wasn't going to tell us he was on the Western Front, because the Western Front would be fighting against us. He used to tell us, when he was teaching us tank tactics, how they used to take out the Russian tanks. So, that was part of the tactics training.

The main thing I learned about when I actually went on active duty, when I went to a unit, was what I learned in ROTC. That was from guys like Captain (then Major) Sansalone and some of the NCOs.

The NCOs told me, they said, "Ruane, when you get on active duty, ninety percent of your NCOs are going to work with you. Five percent are going to try and screw you. The other five percent are going to try and do everything they can for you. What you've got to do is root out that five percent that are trying to screw you and just watch them." They said, "Your job is to take their knowledge and their experience, and then, make the decision."

One of the things I learned, I guess it was one of my first times when I was in a tank unit, I had a platoon sergeant, a guy by the name of Pope, who's from North Carolina, good man. I was brand-new to the unit. The way Pope did it, we're supposed to be, I forget, going on a road march, doing something or another.

He goes, "Sir," and he has the NCOs around, the tank commanders around him, him, me. He says, "Sir, we're supposed to be doing this road march. Now, we normally would do the road march in this way and this way. However, you can do it this way if you want--but this is the way we normally do it. How do you want us to do it?"

"Sergeant Pope, I think we ought to do it," bah-bup, you know what I mean? [laughter] He was giving me the way to do it, yes, and he's making me look good in front of the troops. So, I mean, he's letting me make the decision, okay. I may have been a platoon leader, but he actually ran the platoon, is what it boiled down to. I mean, that was just the way it was.

I guess my first assignment once we left Knox--and, again, Knox, I was an average student. I was probably the middle of the class, aside from the leadership. I was pretty high on the leadership side of it.

At that time, I was going out with my first wife. She was at St. Elizabeth College. We were talking about getting married, me being a career in the Army. I had already made up my mind at that time, wanted to have a career in the Army. She was fine with it.

So, I was going to go to [Korea]. At that time, if you're in the Army for twenty years, you used to have to do probably three hardship tours, which means you've got to be gone for a year at a time. The Army was Korea, could be Alaska, could be something else.

So, I put in for Korea, my first assignment for Korea. "Get back from Korea, we're going to get engaged." Actually, now, I'm thinking--it had to be that I got engaged before I went to Korea. Now, I'm not certain, I'll tell you the truth, but, one way or the other, I was going to go to Korea. When I came back from Korea, then, we're going to get married.

So, I went to Korea. I was supposedly a cavalry platoon leader, reconnaissance platoon leader, with the Ninth Cav. I was supposed to be up on the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. When I got

over there, all those positions were filled. So, they put me in an engineer unit, branch immaterial. So, anybody could do it as long as you're an officer.

[Editor's Note: The Ninth Cavalry Regiment was stationed in South Korea from 1957 to 1965 under the command of the First Cavalry Division.]

So, in that position, I worked with a bunch of US NCOs, a bunch of Korean soldiers, a bunch of Korean civilians and a bunch of American civilians. It was like a real conglomerate. We ran a supply yard just below the DMZ.

Again, I had two good NCOs that I was working with. One was Riley. He was an E-7. I forget the name of the other guy, but, again, they taught me how to work with the people, how to work with soldiers and how to be an officer.

From there, I ended up--I guess six months later - a position opened up in an armor battalion, again, up in the DMZ, the Fifteenth Armor. I went over there as a battalion S-4. I was there for six months, six, seven months, until I came back to the States. That was another good position, because I worked with some warrant officers over there as well as NCOs.

Again, the learning process, being a staff officer now, because, basically, the engineer job was a staff job, because you're supporting units, and being a battalion S-4, which is a logistics officer, you're responsible for all the maintenance, supply and everything else going on within the battalion. That taught me an awful lot about an armor unit.

You looked like you were going to ask me something.

SI: You were over there for a year.

MR: Thirteen months.

SI: What were the conditions like there, the living conditions?

MR: Well, aside from the one main road going from Seoul up to the DMZ, which was asphalt, everything else is dirt. The buildings were what we called Quonset huts. It's basically just a slab on the ground, it's almost like a half-moon of steel. Then, it was broken up into rooms. You had water plants all over the place.

Conditions weren't bad, I mean, really, conditions weren't bad. Compared to Vietnam, conditions were fantastic, I'll tell you. We had officers' clubs. We had NCO clubs. We had groups coming in, usually every month, Filipino groups primarily, sometimes Japanese groups, coming in to entertain the troops. Martha Raye was over there one time. I saw Bob Hope there.

I'm trying to think--you did your job. It was tension, because the North Koreans are still coming down over the border, and especially around wintertime, when it froze, the Imjin River froze. They'd come across. It was easier for them to come across, didn't have to swim across. The guy

could walk across. So, there'd be stuff going on. Some guys would be killed, some guys wounded, and we kept some of them.

[Editor's Note: The Imjin River is a 169-mile river that flows from North Korea to South Korea across the DMZ.]

It was fun. You were able to buy a lot of stuff cheaply at the PX [post exchange]. You could get yourself, at the time, a thousand-dollar tape recording unit, top of the line, that would cost a thousand over here, for about 250 dollars over there.

We used to play a game. The Quonset huts would have two rooms on each end with the door facing the hallway. Then, off the hallway, there was all the other rooms. So, what we would do, especially during the rainy season, all the frogs would come in the building. They'd all get in the hallway. If you walked down the hallway at nighttime with the lights out, you'd hear, "Squish, squish." You'd be killing frogs.

So, what a couple of guys did, they put targets on the doorways on each end of the hallway, and then, they put lines, maybe twenty feet down. It'd be times one, thirty feet down, times two, times three. Then, you get brooms. You'd be drinking, naturally. You get a broom and, "Phew," you sweep a frog, see where the frog hit on the target.

SI: Okay, yes.

MR: If it was a times three, you got thirty points, right. So, this is it. That was one way of entertaining yourself. About the only other entertainment you had was getting down to Seoul every couple of months. Maybe a day or so, that was about it, yes.

Again, it wasn't a combat zone as such, but, I mean, there was stuff going on over there and up on the DMZ. It wasn't bad, not as good as it was further south, but where we were, it was okay. You lived with it.

SI: Would you ever go out to where they were finding these North Koreans trying to come over?

MR: Well, yes, while I was up on the DMZ. I went up to Panmunjom one time, because they bring everybody up to Panmunjom just to show you what it's like. You stay on your side of it. A couple years after we were there, I think, someone was axed. A North Korean came across and killed a guy with an axe then. That made big news.

[Editor's Note: The Joint Security Area (JSA) is an area of the Korean Demilitarized Zone where soldiers of North and South Korea stand guard at all times. It is commonly called Panmunjom which is the village where the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, however this village is not within the Joint Security Area. On August 18, 1976, two US Army officers were killed by North Korean soldiers armed with axes and other tools within the Joint Security Area. The Army officers were in charge of a detail to prune a tree that blocked the view of a North Korean guardhouse.]

SI: Yes, okay.

MR: The Ninth Cav, which was north of the river, the Ninth Cav were the ones that would run into the bad guys most of the time. They'd either get shot at, maybe guys get wounded, maybe they find a mine, something else along those lines.

Where we were, south of the river, there was one time, for a two-week period of time--two weeks or for a couple of weeks, I'm not certain right now. You're making me recall stuff I haven't talked about, I haven't thought about, in years.

SI: That is good.

MR: But, it was south of the river, they took our tank battalion and spread us out, because the river was frozen, to make certain people weren't coming across at nighttime. No, I never saw anybody or anything else like that. All we did was hear about what was going on up in the Ninth Cav.

SI: It was 1965 when you left Korea.

MR: Yes, about April of '65.

SI: Okay.

MR: I came back and was assigned to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. I was assigned to the Third Battalion, 77th Armor, and started off as a platoon leader and executive officer in B Company, with a guy by the name of Tom Kling. He was a West Pointer.

He was a very good officer and he helped me an awful lot, but I was only with him for about three or four months before I moved up. Let's see, I was a first lieutenant at that time, and then, I got a tank company, okay, I became the company commander for Charlie Company, 77th Armored. That was about the beginning of the July timeframe.

When I was the XO/ platoon leader, Pope was the guy that taught me, was the one I was telling you about, the guy from North Carolina. That was an interesting unit. Well, the whole damn Army was interesting at the time.

I came from Jersey City; I'd heard about prejudice. We had some. You always had bigots. No matter where you go, you're always going to find bigots. We never had a problem between black and white where I was in my neighborhood. There weren't that many black guys. The ones that were, we played together, whatever else we did.

When I got down to Fort Knox, Kentucky, there was about a half dozen of us hung around together, five white guys and a black guy. My first thing of overt prejudice was when we went into Louisville one time to go to dinner at a restaurant. They wouldn't let us in the restaurant because there was a black guy with us. We finally found a place where we could go.

When I was in Korea, it was never a problem in Korea. It was never a problem with the combat units, anyway. When I came back to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, Tom Kling, as I say, Captain Kling was the company commander. The First Sergeant's a guy by the name of Robert McCray. He was from New Jersey, black guy. Pope was a "tar heel," I mean, from deep North Carolina. I mean, he was "a tar heel of a tar heel."

They handled race relations in that company--it was, like, unusual. The First Sergeant, they painted the ceiling of the mess hall brown and he painted the walls white, because he just wanted to let people know that, "Hey, brown people on top." Okay, now, this is a joke.

SI: Yes.

MR: This is all a joke. They had one tank, tank commander's a white guy, the three guys--there's four guys in a tank--the other three guys were all black, the tank was known as "The Ink Spots." That was the name of the tank.

Pope and McCray used to have a little skit they used to go through. Guys used to be initiated when they first come into the unit--Pope would come in and he'd be yelling something to the First Sergeant. McCray would go, "Pope, get your white ass out of here before I kick it out. You understand what I'm telling you?" "Well, you could take your..." All of a sudden, they'd pull out switchblades. The kids would be back against the wall.

Then, all of a sudden, they'd start cracking up and they'd be laughing their asses off. It was just treated as, "Hey, we don't have it. You've got to understand, it's not going to happen here." Another story, following along on this, because it follows along with McCray...

SI: Sure.

MR: When I first went to--before I went to Vietnam--my company first sergeant was a guy by the name of Joe May from Hezbaliah, Georgia, I think it was. He was my first sergeant. The brigade first sergeant was now McCray. So, they knew each other, were good friends, very good friends. They went on R&R together, they used to pal around together, everything else like that.

One time, they were down in the town--it wasn't a village--the town of Tây Ninh. They were with a couple of young ladies, okay. They were in this hooch with a wall around it. Someone threw a grenade over the wall. Okay, grenade goes off; both of them roll out of bed.

Joe grabs his rifle, starts going to the door. He's in the door looking. All of a sudden, he hears McCray laughing like it's going out of style. Joe goes, "Mac, what the hell are you laughing about?" He said, "You." "What do you mean me?" He said, "Your white ass is shining all over the place," he said. [laughter] May told me afterwards, he said, "I was so embarrassed," he goes.

[Editor's Note: Tây Ninh is the capital city of Tây Ninh Province in southeastern Vietnam. It is located about fifty miles north of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City).]

So, back to Ft Devens. We switched places. The tank companies up there were part of the Second Brigade, the Fifth Mechanized Infantry Division. So, there was a tank battalion with 77th Armor and there were two infantry battalions, the First of the First and the Second of the First Infantry. Both of those units were called up, I guess in the August timeframe. They went over to Vietnam.

In July, I became the tank company commander of Charlie Company. Then, in September, we were told that we're going to be the nucleus for a unit they were forming up. That was the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. We were going to be the cadre for them.

The unit formed up on September 15th, and then, we got the first troops in two weeks after that. So, we closed out the one unit, the armor unit, and then, we opened up the infantry unit at the same time. So, there was an awful lot going on at that time.

Interestingly, when I was with B Company, we went up to Fort Drum in May. I guess it was May. We went up to Fort Drum in May for maneuvers. So, also up there at the time was the 50th Armored Division; one of their units was up there. The unit that was up there is the unit I eventually ended up with when I got out of the service and I joined the National Guard--just thought that was interesting.

[Editor's Note: The 50th Armored Division was a division comprised of units within the New Jersey Army National Guard. It was active from 1946 to 1993.]

SI: Yes.

MR: As a matter of fact, one of my platoon sergeants, his platoon/company was against the company I was with, B Company, during those maneuvers. So, I thought it was just interesting in that respect.

SI: Yes. You were in Massachusetts--what happened next?

MR: Well, we trained our cadre up. We stayed up at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. I guess the end of September, buses came in with about five thousand kids, half volunteers and half draftees. They were assigned out to the various battalions and the various companies.

The 196th Light Infantry, at that time, had an artillery battalion, three infantry battalions, there were other units, but, at this point in time, all we're doing is just basic training for these kids. We brought them from basic training to advanced infantry training. Then, we went to basic unit training and advanced unit training. This is all over a period of about six months, six or seven months.

SI: Was that a new idea they were trying out?

MR: This was the first of its kind, in a couple of ways.

SI: Okay.

MR: Number one, it was "train-and-retain". The other thing was, the 196th was the first light infantry unit since the Revolutionary War.

The "train-and-retain" was done in World War II on a limited basis, but, again, in World War II, they're switching people in and out. With us, we're going to actually take these guys, train them, and then we were going to lead them when they got overseas.

So, the guys that I was training, that my platoon sergeants, my platoon leaders, my squad leaders, were working with, were the guys that we're going to be with when we hit combat. Good points, bad points--good points, you got to know your people. You knew who could do what and how they could do it, and so forth, and who you could rely on, who needed help, etc.

Bad points, you got to know your people. You got to know them too well. When they started getting killed or wounded, then, all of a sudden, it's a little bit tougher to write the letters when you know who the wife is or the girlfriend. You've met them. You've met their parents. So, that was one of the bad parts on it.

SI: Just one more question on that.

MR: Go ahead.

SI: Do you think it made your unit more effective in combat?

MR: Oh, hell yes, oh, hell yes.

SI: Yes.

MR: Yes, these kids were superb, I want to tell you, the ones we went over with, what we called "the boat people," all the people who went over by boat over to Vietnam.

A lot of them knew each other from the neighborhood, because they came from the same areas. Okay, in my unit, Charlie Company, 4-31 Infantry, Greg Kitchen was my radio operator. He was drafted the same time as a bunch of guys by the name of Bob Kelly, Pete Kulpa, and Eddie Lazaran; the four of them, one, two, three, four in the draft call up. They all ended up going into the 196th, all ended up in the 31st Infantry. Yes, I mean, they knew each other; they knew each other from high school.

You had a lot of that. They came from, let's see, Indiana, Ohio, Upper Peninsula in Michigan, North Jersey, Bergen, Hudson, Essex Counties, and the New England states. That's where most of the kids came from. The fact that we were going to take them over made us say, "We're going to make certain you really learn what you're supposed to do," not one of these, "Okay, sounds good, get out of here," that type of thing. "You better have it together."

The esprit that they had in the unit was excellent. I remember one time that I was coming back from church on a Sunday morning. So, I always used to go in and check with my staff duty

NCO, the guy who's in charge of the company in evenings and on weekends in case something happened.

So, I went in there, "Hey, Sergeant, how you doing?" "Oh, fine, sir." "What's going on?" "Uh, nothing much, sir." "Okay, what's up?" because I could tell something was. "Well, I've got a couple of the guys out back," because we had the orderly room and behind the orderly room was the supply room, then, it was the loading dock. Then, a parking lot and a field.

So, I said, "What's up?" He said, "Oh, a couple of the guys, they're doing gun drills out back." Now, what they were doing--this is without any senior leadership, without the squad leaders or anything else, these are just the draftees--they're taking an eighty-one-millimeter mortar and the aiming stakes and everything else, and they were doing crew drill out behind the supply room, on a Sunday morning.

"What are you guys doing?" "Oh, sir," all snap to attention. There was one kid there by the name of Fullerton, a real wise ass, but, man, I'll tell you, he was good, "Fullerton, what's up?" "Well, sir, we're just doing crew drill. We've got nothing else to do. PX doesn't open until two o'clock. We're going to go to PX after that." "Okay, carry on." "Yes, sir," and that was it, [laughter] but they were doing it on their own, didn't have to order them to do it. They could've just stayed in bed, whatever it was.

The interesting part, we get over to Vietnam and, when we got there, we were married up with the 25th Division, a battalion from the 25th Division, for about a week or so. They were going to teach us how to use mortars. They were pretty cocky that they were going to really show us how to use mortars.

My mortar platoon had an E-7 Sergeant First Class named Cronk and one E-6 that was in my forward observers. Then I had Fullerton, now an E-4 and most of the other guys were E-3s, PFCs. When we had the shoot off with the mortar platoon from the 25th, they blew them away. They outshot them. They really did. They did a fantastic job.

Where were we? We were up at Devens. We were initially told us that we're going to be going to the Dominican Republic, because there was an outbreak of stuff in the Dominican Republic at that time. Then, Vietnam heated up and they said, "No, you're going to Vietnam."

[Editor's Note: On April 28, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson ordered 22,000 military personnel into the Dominican Republic to intervene in the ongoing civil war there. The military intervention was known as Operation POWERPACK and ultimately involved over 42,000 American military personnel. A final withdrawal of American forces occurred in September 1966 after elections occurred and a new government was formed.]

In, I think it was January or February, we ended up going to Camp Edwards, which is down on the Cape Cod, for tactics, jungle tactics. It was like twenties and thirties, the weather. It was rain, snow, mud, slop, garbage all over the place. I mean, you really lived in crap. We just thought it was very interesting that, here we are, learning about jungle tactics in the middle of winter.

SI: Wow.

MR: In Massachusetts, yes!! I guess, from there, in the springtime, we headed up to Fort Drum, NY. We're up at Fort Drum for about three weeks, I guess it was. That's when the unit really started putting everything together, because, now, up there, you could get the platoons working with the companies, working with the battalions. So, now, all of a sudden, everything started to mesh together into one big unit. What it boiled down to was one big machine. That was pretty much it.

In June when we returned to Ft Devens, we sent everybody on leave and everybody came back. No one went AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave). We packed up everybody and everything. I remember, July 15, 1966, my twenty-fourth birthday, I was getting onboard a boat down in Boston Harbor to sail to Vietnam, yes.

SI: That must have been a long boat ride.

MR: Yes, thirty days, thank God--but we liked it, because it counted towards our tour.

SI: Okay, all right.

MR: [laughter] So, that was the good news. That was the good news about that. We ended up going through the Panama Canal; it was quite an experience. We stopped at Long Beach, California, for a day; very interesting place, interesting time. I mean there was a lot of drinking going on when the guys got off the boat for that one day.

It was amazing. It was amazing that we didn't get into more trouble than we did, and I'm talking about everybody. Then, from there, we went across the Pacific and we hit a typhoon north of the Philippines.

SI: What was that like? I have heard that is the scariest thing you can get into.

MR: Oh, it was some nasty weather. We just caught the edge of it, but we went in two ships. I think they were twenty-thousand-ton troopships, basically is what it boils down to. So, all the enlisted guys were below deck, all the senior NCOs and the officers were above deck in the cabins.

Here's what the troops did: so, water's coming over the bow and kids'd run forward, water'd wash them back; then they would run forward again--until, all of a sudden, it started really getting dangerous and they put all the kids down below. Everyone else was locked in the cabins, everyone. They said down below decks it was atrocious, because you had the bathrooms overflowing. I mean, all the bathrooms were just like a trough and stuff just sloshed back and forth.

SI: Yes.

MR: Slosh and slosh all over the place, guys throwing up, everything. Finally the storm passed and I think it was two days after that we finally got to Vietnam and got off the boats.

Interesting story about our Chaplains. We had one priest with the chaplains. Chaplains were some awesome people, but we had one guy, Father Gianitassio, who had some altar wine left that he couldn't take off the ship with him. So, he got a bunch of us together and we drank altar wine the night before we got off. That was good. It helped. "Waste not, want not," was the way we looked at it.

SI: What was going through your head as you were heading towards Vietnam? Was it something that you were apprehensive about or looking forward to it in some way?

MR: I don't know if I was looking forward to it. You're apprehensive. We trained, supposedly trained, on the way over. We did some rifle marksmanship and other stuff, like shooting off the stern of the boat, did some map reading class and some other stuff like that, but, by that time, it was pretty much just to keep the troops busy, more than anything else.

The main thing, you're apprehensive about what you're getting into, because we didn't know. We knew, generally, where we were going, but we didn't know enough about the terrain or anything else like that.

We're going to be acclimatized for about a week or so when we got there, but you're always wondering about, "Did we teach them enough? Did we teach them the right stuff? Okay, how am I going to do when stuff happens? Okay, I'm trained. I think I know what I'm supposed to be doing. I think I will be doing it," but you can't tell until the first round is fired, until, all of a sudden, you're right in the middle of it. That's when you learned. That's when you learned how you're going to do.

SI: Yes.

MR: It was boring. It was boring going over, but, like I said, it counted towards our tour.

SI: Yes. Was there a lot of gambling and other activities?

MR: No, there was some. There always is. You're not supposed to but everyone's doing it.

SI: Yes.

MR: Yes, but the guys were doing it and there weren't any repercussions, any sort of garbage going on about it. Nothing about guys going after each other because of cheating or anything else. There was no problem along those lines. We had mustache growing contests and other things like that, but that was about its.

SI: So, what was the process going from the boat out to your final deployment in the field?

MR: We went over the sides of the boat into a landing barge. From the landing barges, we landed at Vũng Tàu, which was a rest-and-recreation area. So, we landed there and here's a band playing for us. We're coming in full gear and everything else like this, and here's a band playing for us and our brigade color guard was formed and marching.

[Editor's Note: Vũng Tàu is a coastal city within Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu Province in southeastern Vietnam. During the war, it was of strategic importance for its port, but also a popular in-country R&R area for soldiers.]

The brigade commander and his staff are marching off with the brigade guidon, the American flag, and here we come behind him, the band playing and everything else like that. They load us on the trucks, put us on planes, and then, we flew to Tây Ninh. Tây Ninh was an airport, I guess, that the engineers had built.

A battalion (maybe a brigade) from the 25th Division was securing the area. So, when we went in there, all you had was your duffel bag and what you're carrying on your back, your load-bearing equipment, and your weapons. So, you had to set-up our battalion areas. I forget if we set up the tents or they set up the tents. There may have been tents set up for us; I'm not certain.

Then, we had to level everything out. They had ant hills all over the place. The ant hills were six or seven feet high, five, six feet around in diameter. The interesting part about it, you had to make certain that you take a block of C-4 explosive, or a couple of pieces of C-4, and stick it into one of the holes in the ant hill, around the snake holes or one of the big holes in there, stick the C-4t into it, yell, "Fire in the hole." Everybody moves away. The thing blows up and you see scorpions, ants, snakes, bugs, everything flying through the air, all over the place.

SI: Wow.

MR: But, you got rid of the ant hill, and then you leveled it off as best you could with picks, shovels, and axes. The ant hills were almost like concrete, because they wer just hardened mud but had been there for years. So, we leveled off the area.

Engineers came by and graded roads. We dug drainage ditches and we built bunkers. We built huge bunkers all up and down the perimeter. That kept us busy for about the first week or so. Then, we started going out on small patrols after that, yes.

SI: Was that considered the acclimation period?

MR: Yes.

SI: Was there anything that they did to acclimate you or was it just setting up the base?

MR: Just setting up, getting used to the weather.

SI: Yes.

MR: Within about a week, two weeks, no one was wearing underwear or socks, because the underwear just gets soaking wet because of the humidity. The temperatures may be 105, 110 degrees and the humidity was in the 90s. So, all you're doing is getting rashes in your armpits and your crotch and your feet wouldn't dry out. So, all it was was just shirts, pants and boots, and that was it. That was about the only acclimation you did insofar as the weather.

We ate a lot of hot dogs (canned hot dogs) and powdered eggs and powdered milk for the first couple of weeks. That's all they could get into us at the time, until we got the mess halls and field kitchens actually set up.

The main thing was just getting used to it. There was a lot of sunburn. We had a lot of guys burn, got sunburn very quickly, very quickly. A couple of them got skin cancer in later life. There was a lot of skin cancer--matter of fact, most of us, one way or another got it.

SI: In that area, was it an area where the Vietcong could lob missiles or mortars in?

[Editor's Note: The Vietcong (VC), or National Liberation Front, was a Communist organization within South Vietnam that battled with American forces and collaborated with the North Vietnamese Army and government in an effort to unite South Vietnam under the Communist government of North Vietnam. The Vietcong carried out both guerilla operations and regular Army operations.]

MR: Yes, they were active. They were active but not extremely active at that time. We were (Tây Ninh) was maybe about, I don't know, forty miles northwest of Saigon and maybe five miles from the Cambodian border.

SI: Okay.

MR: North of Tây Ninh was War Zone C. The VC controlled that. The Ninth VC Division, I think, were the guys who were basically the folks who were in there. Down where we were, outside Tây Ninh, were Local Force VC units.

[Editor's Note: War Zone C was an American military operations area within the tactical zone of III Corps in South Vietnam along the Cambodian border. Its eastern boundary ran parallel to Highway 13.]

We used to get--"we," not my battalion--brigade headquarters got mortared once or twice, nothing extensive. You'd get sniped at every once in a while, when you're out on the bunker line, but, for the most part, the area was pretty wide open.

Looking at it now [Colonel Ruane refers to a map], where the base camp was here, there were villages, this was Highway 13. There were villages and houses all along here, which was maybe five hundred yards south of the base camp. There was nothing off to the west for probably four, five, six hundred meters, nothing north, and then, to the east, there was the City of Tây Ninh, probably about a mile or two down the road.

So, it was relatively open. You couldn't get too close to us, except at nighttime, but south of Highway 13, where the villages and the houses were, there was the Tan Tien Forest [Cát Tiên?]. That's where my company, A Company, went on our first missions. That was part of the acclimatization.

SI: Did any of those--I guess they are called nuisance attacks, but, obviously, I would not want to go through it--happen during that first week, that first period in Vietnam?

MR: Yes.

SI: What was that like?

MR: My company had responsibility for the southwestern corner of the base camp perimeter and we had about six bunkers, I guess it was. So, you normally had three guys in each bunker every night. We had Starlight Scopes at that time. Starlight Scope was about 18' long. It was a heavy sucker, but you could see at nighttime. You could see bodies of people moving.

[Editor's Note: The AN/PVS-2 Starlight Scope was a first-generation night vision device that was utilized by American forces during the Vietnam War.]

Like I said, we had our company trained. We knew our guys, we knew what guys are going to handle stuff, we knew guys knew how to report. There was no "Hey, there's bad guys there," no. They reported "Slugger Six," whatever the call sign was, "three individuals moving southwest, carrying this," and so forth.

So, all of a sudden, a call comes in from one of the bunkers. My staff duty NCO got a call from one of the bunkers and they sent someone over to get me from my tent. I go running over and talked to the guy in the bunker: "What do you got?"

He said, "We've got three guys, looks like they've got two Chicom claymores and one AK-47 I could see. I can't see the others. They're moving from west to east. They're about two hundred yards outside the perimeter." "Roger, okay, keep me informed," because it could've been bad guys, good guys, looked like Chinese claymores, okay?

[Editor's Note: Chinese Communist (Chicom) Dh10 directional mines, also called Chinese claymores, were utilized by Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces.]

I get another report from another bunker, same basic info. I called battalion and told them "We've got these guys, we're going to take them out. We've identified them," so forth, and so on. Battalion-3 said, "Roger, give me two minutes.," "Wait until they get such-and-such." "Roger, out."

All of a sudden, the Battalion Commander comes on, "Negative, negative, you will not fire at them. We can't be sure that they're VC. We can't." I said, "Sir, they're VC." I said, "My guys identified them. They've got them on the Starlight Scope, one of my platoon leaders confirmed it." "Negative, negative." "Yes, sir, yes, sir." "Three bags full," I thought to myself.

The VC went down about another four, five hundred yards, set up the claymores, set them off and killed one guy, wounded two other guys. I'll tell you, that--I didn't like the Battalion Commander prior to that. At that point, it was just like, "Hey, I'm done with this guy." I mean, I'll do my job and everything else like that but he lost any respect I still had for him.

Well, one of the things that I didn't tell you, I was a first lieutenant at this time. I was still an armor officer, first lieutenant, leading an infantry company in Vietnam. I was the youngest company commander in the battalion and in the brigade. I was twenty-four. Most of the other guys were in their late twenties, early thirties.

My previous battalion commander--this battalion commander's name was Streif, Bob Streif, He came in just before we went to Vietnam--the guy we had before that was Lt Colonel John B. Wadsworth. He was probably one of the best battalion commanders I ever had in my life.

[Editor's Note: Colonel John Baker Wadsworth, a 1948 graduate of the US Military Academy, lived from 1925 to 1978.]

He got promoted to colonel just before we went to Vietnam. He did not want it and tried to turn it down, so that he could take the battalion over to Vietnam, because it was his battalion. It didn't happen.

Before he left the Battalion. I went in and talked to him [Wadsworth]. I said, "Sir," I said, "I've just got to ask you something." I said, "I'm a first lieutenant and I'm armor. You think I'm still going to have the company?" He said, "Yes, Mike, that company's yours. You trained them up," and so forth, and so on.

I know, when I got over to Vietnam and when I tried to countermand Streif's order, that was it. I was not going to be with A Company too much longer. stayed with the company over there. About late October, I got bumped by an infantry captain who needed command time. I knew the guy and he was a good guy. I had no problem at all with it. I just had a problem with the fact that I was going to lose the company--but, if I'm going to lose it to someone, I'm going to lose it to a guy I like.

So, back to the climatization because that's where we all started on this. In the beginning, it started off with small stuff. I think when we went down to Ton Tiên Forest, that was a company-sized just search-and-destroy mission. We're only out for two days. So, we're out, stayed overnight, came back in again. It was just a sweep through, just to get used to some of the terrain that we're going to be operating in.

Then, from there, we used to send out patrols, platoon-sized patrols and night ambushes and night listening posts. That was through September. Let's see, yes, that had to be through the beginning of September. Then, after that, we started going out more, up towards C Zone. We'd be going on company and battalion missions up there.

Around that time, also--I wasn't involved in it, because, by this time, I was in the Battalion-3 Operations shop--the brigade became involved in one of the first of the real big operations over in Vietnam, called Operation ATTLEBORO, which would really turn out to be a FUBAR (fouled up beyond all recognition).

The brigade commander, a guy by the name of General DeSaussure, was an artillery officer. He started committing units, company units, piecemeal into this battle, where, all of a sudden, you had one battalion commander from the 25th Division in charge of eleven companies. The span of control in the United States Army is from three to five. You try and stay away from five. Three's the best, one man in charge of three units.

Things are out of hand. Guys are getting killed. It was just all messed up out there. At one point, an E-4, was pretty much the only contact that brigade headquarters had with the battalion, an E-4 on the radio.

After this thing, when the units came back--it was primarily the 196th and a battalion from the 25th Division--when the units came back, DeSaussure was relieved by General Westmoreland at that time. That had to be in December, December of '66.

[Editor's Note: Operation ATTLEBORO was a search-and-destroy mission that occurred from September 14th to November 25, 1966. Major General Edward Harleston DeSaussure (1918-2002) commanded the operation, but was relieved after a series of mishaps and casualties. General William Westmoreland (1914-2005), Commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) from 1964 to 1968, served as commander of all American forces in Vietnam.]

When I was with the Battalion-3 shop, I was also the S-3 (Air) officer. So, I was the assistant Battalion operations officer. I was in charge of all air operations. It was a staff job but I had some good times in there.

I ended up flying with the Air Force forward air controllers. I had five or six missions with the Air Force guys, going out and watching them call in air strikes on various things, and saw how crazy they were. They were nuts. They were really nuts, those guys that used to fly with those little prop planes.

SI: Piper Cubs.

MR: Yes, basically, yes. So, they had the overhead wing, windows opened up. The pilot would have two white phosphorous rockets on each wing, he'd have a case of white phosphorous grenades in the cockpit and he'd have an M-16 with like maybe ten magazines of tracer ammunition.

So, first, he'd fire the rockets. When he ran out of rockets, he'd be throwing the white phosphorous grenades to mark where he wanted the airstrikes. Then, after that, he'd just put his rifle out the window and start shooting. The fast movers would follow where the tracer went.

When I was with them, there was one time where there was a mountain up there called Núi Bà Đen (Black Virgin Mountain). That's where the Air Force used to stack everybody. So, I think that was maybe three thousand feet high, let's say.

So, what'd he have--at five thousand feet or ten thousand feet, you'd have a flight of two [McDonnell Douglas] F-4 Phantoms [II] with 750-pound bombs; on top of that, maybe a couple of A-4s [Douglas Skyhawks] with napalm, planes stacked at every thousand feet. He'd have it all written on his windshield, just be erasing them as he's calling them in.

So, there were the strikes that cleared out the area. The choppers (Hueys [Bell UH-1 Iroquois]) came in, troops off loaded. So, now, it's just waiting around to see if anything's going to happen. So, nothing was going on, and he says, "Sir, we're going to start searching for stuff." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "We're just going to fly around." So, we started flying around.

All of a sudden, we saw some green tracer coming up, green tracer. It was the bad guys; red tracer is us. The guy was stupid that fired, because it was like all rice paddies here and there was like a small bit of vegetation, four, five, six trees in that area. He says, "I think I got him spotted." What he does, he starts going in lazy circles, getting tighter and tighter and going lower and lower. All of a sudden, the guy fired at us again.

He pulls up out of it and he starts calling all these planes stacked up over Nui Ba Den. I think he got four or six planes. By the time he finished, there was nothing. Nothing was standing down there. Because it was an automatic weapon, he said, "I think we can possibly claim two VC KIA [killed-in-action] possible," because, I'll tell you, there was nothing left.

SI: Yes.

MR: All it was is craters. It was craters and nothing was standing. They loved it. That guy's name was Dave Hansen. He was an Air Force captain. He was good.

When I was a battalion operations officer, that was also when I got promoted to captain. That's when I branch transferred to the infantry, which a couple of my friends said wasn't too smart, but, after working with the infantry from the beginning of the 196th and seeing what they did--and I loved tanks and I loved the power of tanks and everything else about them--but I'll tell you, the infantrymen, there's just something special about the infantry guys. That's one reason I branch transferred.

SI: Just to clarify, when you got bumped and they brought in the other captain, that was when you went to S-3.

MR: Yes.

SI: Okay. What was a typical day like in S-3?

MR: Well, there weren't really typical days. You didn't have an eight-hour day. Normally, you had your daytime shift--you wake up in the morning, you have breakfast, six, seven o'clock in the morning. You're literally working until eight or nine o'clock at night, because there was nothing else to do.

So, if I was not working up air operations, I'm either writing reports, after-action reports--I was a pretty decent writer--doing after-action reports, checking with other units as to what they had going on, literally going out to the field. When the battalion was out in the field and the S-3 was out, I'd go out to him and we'd coordinate whatever we're doing. Sometimes, I'd stay out for the day; sometimes, I wouldn't.

Then, at nighttime, we'd have shifts at nighttime. So, even though you worked during the day, I mean, you had a shift at nighttime. That was it--it was just constant. The fun parts, like I said, were flying with the forward air controllers. Also, when you went out to the field, you went out on a Huey.

Hueys are an amazing thing for a kid over there. You've got nineteen, twenty-year-old kids, instead of having a Ford, or '59 Chevy or something else like that, they've got something that goes like this, this, up, down and around. They flew them like they were flying hot rods.

They used to love "Nap of the Earth" (NOE) flying, all right. So, you'd be going down and you'd swing around this way and that way between trees and other stuff like that, high trees or whatever, going up and down and around. That used to be a lot of fun. Most of the time, you're flying up around 1,500 - 2,000 feet, but a lot of times, when they'd go down low, it was cool. It was pretty cool.

SI: Wow.

MR: Yes, but it was routine, except when the units were in contact and out on an operation and they were in contact--but the contact didn't happen all that often. A lot of it was just for the units in the field. Again, it was like that when I took over Charlie Company, it was like that when I was in A Company.

A unit in the field is just moving. You don't know what's out there. You're just searching for it. You're hoping you find it, and you're hoping you don't find it, type thing. You're hoping you find it before they find you, type thing. So, that old saying, "It's hours of boredom followed by minutes of sheer terror," was pretty much the way it was.

SI: When you were still with the infantry company, would you ever be in situations where you would have to fire your weapon or was it more your men out in front?

MR: I didn't fire my weapon with A Company.

SI: Okay.

MR: I was more leading than anything else. Charlie Company is a different story. In A Company, we didn't get in that much combat. Charlie Company was a different story. We got in combat, sometimes heavy, sometimes light, but we're in a lot more combat than we were in A Company.

One of the things you had--you're talking about firing your weapon--I was a company commander, I'm supposed to carry a forty-five. I did not carry a forty-five; I carried an M-16 in Alpha Company. I carried about twenty magazines, never twenty rounds per magazine, eighteen rounds per magazine. Twenty rounds per magazine normally jammed, eighteen rounds per magazine didn't. Then, I carried maybe another ten or fifteen boxes of ammunition in my pockets.

I required my grenadiers with the M79 grenade launchers to carry fifty rounds. Normally, the machine-gunners, people said twelve hundred, I used to make it two thousand, because I figured out the main thing over there is ammunition, water and food.

If you run out of ammo, you're screwed. You can live without water for three days, you can live without food for a week, but you can't live without ammo. So, I used to make certain that we carried as much ammo as we could. Yes, it worked out. It worked out in the end, worked out in two occasions, later on, when I was with Charlie Company.

SI: We will probably talk about those next time.

MR: Yes.

SI: In general, were you able to keep up with folks at home? Was that an important part of the experience?

MR: Yes, it was funny--the guys say, "You're always on my mind when I'm there." No, [laughter] you've got other things that you're concerned about.

SI: Yes.

MR: A letter would take maybe a week, five or six days, to get to the States, and then, five or six days to come back. So, I tried to write about every two days, every three days, something like that. My wife would write back answering that letter. So, it was always like a time warp, because things had happened and I've told her other things that she hadn't received yet, but she was answering things that I already knew about.

SI: Yes.

MR: I think the good part about it was pictures, getting the pictures every once in a while. We had a little tape recorder at that time--it was a little, garbage tape recorder, I forget what they were--but with the small tapes. I made a couple of tapes and I sent those back, and that was pretty much the way we kept in contact. There was no other way. I met her on my R&R in the Spring of '67 in Hawaii.

SI: Okay, yes.

MR: So, we were able to get together in Hawaii at that time.

SI: That might be a good place to end for today.

MR: What do you think, Shaun?

SI: I really appreciate all your time.

MR: Thank you.

SI: I look forward to continuing the story later on.

MR: Okay.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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