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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Michael Harrington
Conducted by Jason Stewart
December 10, 2008
Transcribed by Rayanne Melot**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an oral history interview with retired Marine Corps Col. Michael
3 Harrington. Today is December 10, 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special
4 Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech, and Colonel Harrington is joining me
5 by phone from Houston, Texas. Is that correct, sir?

6 Michael Harrington: That's correct.

7 JS: All right. Why don't we begin, if you don't mind, by telling me a little bit of
8 biographical information? First of all, when and where were you born?

9 MH: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, November 27th, 1933.

10 JS: Okay. What did your parents do for a living?

11 MH: My mother was a career educator, a schoolteacher in the Baltimore City
12 School System. My father was an accountant by education and he worked at one time for
13 the Maryland State Roads Commission before he volunteered for the US Army in World
14 War II. He got a direct commission as a first lieutenant in the Army Transportation
15 Corps. Then in later years he had his own company, Hastings Awning Company, for
16 about twenty years.

17 JS: Okay. All right. Did your father's career in the military, did that have any
18 influence on you?

19 MH: Not really. I was proud of the fact he went in. He was in his mid-thirties, but
20 he served at the Brooklyn Army Base and then in Detroit. It wasn't a stellar career, but I
21 was proud that he volunteered.

22 JS: Sure. Yes, sir. All right. Well, did you grow up in Baltimore?

1 MH: Yes. I went to a public high school, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. It was
2 an all-boys school. I graduated in 1951.

3 JS: Okay. All right. Could you give me a little bit of a description of your
4 childhood? Just tell me a little bit about what it was like.

5 MH: Well, like I said, my mother was a career educator. She always worked. I
6 went to public schools in Baltimore County to elementary school and junior high school,
7 and then transferred into Baltimore City to Baltimore Polytechnic, which was a very good
8 engineering public high school.

9 JS: Uh-huh. All right. What did you do for fun as a kid? Did you play any sports
10 or anything?

11 MH: Yeah. I was not a great athlete, but I did—coming from Baltimore, you
12 almost always had to play lacrosse. I did wind up playing lacrosse in high school and
13 then also I went to Duke University and I played lacrosse for four years. I got better as I
14 got older.

15 JS: Okay. All right. Were you a pretty good student in high school?

16 MH: Fair.

17 JS: What was your favorite subjects?

18 MH: History. I was in an engineering high school. Had a large dose of math,
19 which I struggled with, and a lot of physics. It was a tough school, but was a very good
20 school.

21 JS: Okay. All right. So you said you graduated in '51?

22 MH: Yes.

23 JS: All right. Well, what do you remember about World War II growing up?

24 MH: I had a—my mother's younger sister, Mary Prudence Marsh's husband, he
25 had been an Army Reserve officer out in the border of Texas. He got called up on
26 December the eighth and wound up spending three years in the South Pacific in the 37th
27 Ohio National Guard. My aunt lived with us most of the time, so we were always
28 involved with that. My uncle was on Guadalcanal, Bougainville. Sent a Japanese rifle and
29 bayonet and so forth back from Bougainville, so I followed that all through World War
30 II.

31 JS: All right. Did your uncle ever tell you anything about his service?

1 MH: Yeah, we talked. He stayed in after World War II. He was a Reserve officer.
2 He went to Korea for two years. He wound up as a lieutenant colonel in Fort Lewis,
3 Washington. They were going to—they gave him an opportunity to—he could retire as a
4 Reserve officer—he was in his fifties—or he could stay on and get twenty years of active
5 service as a first sergeant, so that's what he did. That coincided with me being in the
6 Marine Corps down in Camp Pendleton in the '50s. He told me quite a bit about
7 Bougainville and also in the Philippines.

8 JS: Yes, sir. Well, your interest in history and this background of some of your
9 family members, particularly your uncle, with the military, did that give you an interest in
10 the military and just what was going on in the world with World War II and then later the
11 Cold War as a kid? Did that kind of pique your interest?

12 MH: Yeah, it did. I've read quite a bit about the Civil War. My uncle had a set of
13 books, about eight volumes that were published in the 1890s, which I now have, on the
14 Civil War stuff, so I read a lot about the Civil War. Followed very closely World War II,
15 particularly the Pacific campaigns.

16 JS: Right. Yes, sir. All right. When you graduated from high school did you go
17 directly into college?

18 MH: Yeah, to Duke University.

19 JS: Okay. What was your major there?

20 MH: Economics.

21 JS: Economics. Okay. All right. And while you were at Duke was that when
22 you—did you enlist in the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) there?

23 MH: Yeah. I was in the Naval ROTC. That's one of the first things I did was join
24 in '51. Of course, the Korean War was hot and heavy and I really didn't want to be
25 drafted. In subsequent years and recently I've had the chance to talk to some Marine
26 battalions deploying to Iraq and said I was draft induced. Of course, these young men
27 today don't know what a draft is, but that's the truth of the matter. At the end of my
28 sophomore year I'd switched to the Marine Corps from the Navy.

29 JS: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the ROTC training you received?

30 MH: Yeah. We met, the classroom was three times a week and in the first couple
31 of years was Navy oriented, weapons, history. Then we had a drill once a month. That

1 enters—I applied at the end of my sophomore year and was picked up as a Marine option.
2 We got into more military history, particularly with the Marine Corps, some tactics and
3 then small arms weapons training.

4 JS: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about what type of weapons you were
5 training on?

6 MH: Well, on the Marine Corps end of it, it was the M-1 and the .30-caliber air-
7 cooled. I went—my senior year I was a platoon commander of freshmen platoon, which
8 was very helpful later on when I went to Quantico because I had already had a year
9 training a bunch of freshmen in close-order drill. The senior Marine was Major Ben
10 Reed, who was a fine gentleman and a great Marine. He had a Navy Cross from World
11 War II and a Silver Star from Korea. He later got a Legion of Merit in Vietnam. Artillery
12 officer. I had the privilege of serving under him in the '50s after I got commissioned.

13 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. All right. How did you find that you were adjusting to the
14 military lifestyle? Did you have any problems with that or was it a smooth transition?

15 MH: Well, there—I can give you an anecdote. I went to OCS (officer candidate
16 school) in July of 1955 after I had graduated. That was a little out of phase. Normally I
17 would have gone between my junior and senior years, but Major Reed suggested, which I
18 took as a direct order, that I stay and go to summer school. In those days, a Duke had had
19 three years of college. I was having a little trouble with my Spanish so I went out of
20 phase. I had already graduated before I went to Quantico OCS. The first night I was there
21 I parked my new '55 Chevy convertible in the wrong place and the DI (drill instructor)
22 gave me one of the dirtiest garbage cans I've ever seen and said he wanted to see his face
23 in it the next morning. So I spent my first night at Quantico shining a garbage can with
24 my Duke University ring going up and down. That was a little hard to adjust. I didn't
25 park in the wrong place ever again.

26 JS: Right. Yeah. Now, was this, uh—you said, uh, that you went, uh, a phase
27 later, or a little bit later on. Were you supposed to go—was it normal you would go in the
28 summers?

29 MH: Yeah, normally for NROTC (Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps) we
30 would go between our junior and senior year, and I didn't ever—actually, there were two
31 other graduates that were out of phase and we went the summer after we graduated. We

1 got commissioned. I got commissioned on 3 September '55. I went back from Quantico
2 to Durham and Duke and got commissioned second lieutenant and then back to Quantico
3 for schools.

4 JS: Okay. All right. What about your, um, instructors in, um, ROTC at Duke?
5 Were they veterans?

6 MH: Yeah. The Marines, Major Reed of World War II, I already said he had a
7 Navy Cross and he had a Silver Star. He had a battery, they were the last battery out of
8 the Reservoir, a 105 battery. He was really a dynamic person. He'd been an advisor to a
9 movie called—I can't remember now. I think it was called *Retreat, Hell!* or *Frozen*
10 *Chosin* or something. They had a gunnery sergeant who was a World War II and Korean
11 veteran. The Navy officers—there was a big difference in my opinion between the Navy
12 officers and the Marines. I'm not sure what their records were.

13 JS: Okay. All right. Now when you say, uh, “a big difference,” was it just in the
14 way they, uh, instilled discipline and things like that, or how were they different?

15 MH: Everything. The way where they commanded respect. The way they
16 instilled—and then their method of instruction. The Marine instructors were excellent, as
17 far as technique of instruction were really better than ninety percent of the civilian
18 professors.

19 JS: Okay. All right. So you, uh, you said you went to, uh, OCS in July of '55 and
20 then when you finished you were, uh, commissioned as a second lieutenant at that point?

21 MH: Yeah, on September 3rd, '55.

22 JS: Okay. All right. And, uh, let's see. Where did you go from there?

23 MH: I went back to Quantico through the Basic School most Marine officers go
24 through about six months. I chose artillery, so I went through a five-week artillery
25 officers orientation course at Quantico.

26 JS: Okay. All right. Can you tell me a little bit about the, uh, about the training at,
27 uh, the Basic School and just a little bit about a typical day there?

28 MH: Back in the '50s the Basic School was held at—Quantico has quite a large
29 base. It has some camps, supplementary camps. Camp Upshur was where the Basic
30 School was in those days in the World War II Quonset huts. Even though we were second
31 lieutenants, I lived in a Quonset hut on the bottom bunk with Steve Brezinski on the top

1 bunk. We lived more or less like enlisted men. The typical day was making our bunks,
2 swabbing the deck, falling out, close-order drill, and then we had a lot of classroom work
3 and a lot of field work, tactics, weapons, conditioning hikes. Summer in Quantico can be
4 quite hot and humid and the winter could be cold and humid and wet. After six months of
5 that I was ready to move on. Today and in the early '60s Marine Corps built a brick
6 dormitory, college-style buildings. The Basics School was they have two men to a room
7 and four men share a head, a bathroom. We had a Quonset hut alongside that as our head
8 that served about sixty or seventy second lieutenants at one time. That's the Old Corps
9 verses the New Corps.

10 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Well, overall did you find the training you received here at
11 the Basic School, was it pretty sufficient as preparing you for the rest of your career?

12 MH: Yeah, it was. I think that's one of the strengths of the Marine Corps, in my
13 opinion. When you go out to the field, the NCOs (non-commissioned officers) and the
14 troops, they give you the benefit of the doubt that you're going to—that you know what
15 you're doing. You can mess up pretty easily and they have their doubts, but I had a lot of
16 friends that went into the Navy as ensigns and they put them on a ship and they had a
17 chief who was technically under them, training them in what they had to do. I felt the
18 camaraderie and the respect that even as a second lieutenant that I got from the NCOs
19 was tremendous.

20 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Well, were there any other particularly memorable
21 moments or anything that stand out from—whether it be Basic—whether it be ROTC or
22 the Basic School or anything?

23 MH: No, not outstanding. I mean it was a—like I say, living in a Quonset hut
24 with thirty-five other guys. I have one, a rather humorous incident. We, of course, being
25 officers, we paid for our own food. We came in one—we had been out on a—this was in
26 January if I remember. Pretty wet, cold. We didn't get back in until about 1800. We had
27 had hot chow in the field, which was nice, but it was ravioli. Then when you're walking
28 up and down those hills with a stomach full of ravioli, that's not too good. We got back to
29 the mess hall. We were the last company in and we had been complaining about the food.
30 The had chain style. Instead of going through a mess line, they were served family style.
31 We went into the large mess hall which was another large Quonset hut. They brought out

1 ravioli. Looked over at the other companies that were ahead of us and they had steak. I
2 don't know who started it but it was the biggest food fight you've ever seen. There was
3 about six hundred second lieutenants. I laughed. There was a young first lieutenant who
4 was Officer of the Day. He was down at the end of the building, and then all the enlisted
5 mess men, they laughed like hell because, you know, we had this food riot. The next day
6 we had a new mess officer.

7 JS: Sure. Right. All right. So after you finished up at the Basic School were you
8 then—were you finished with training at that point and then on to your first assignment?

9 MH: I went down to Mainside to an artillery officers orientation school. That was
10 at Mainside as opposed to the Basics School. From there I was sent to the 1st Division at
11 Camp Pendleton and wound up in Charlie Battery, 11th Marines. The
12 executive officer of the battalion was Major Reed who had been at Duke University.

13 JS: Right. Can you tell me a little bit about your duties here and just the daily
14 routine here with Charlie Battery?

15 MH: I started off as a forward observer. We did a lot of field problems with the
16 infantry. That's who we supported. Then this Major Reed was—he was a real martinet
17 and was an excellent trainer. He took all of the battalion forward observers, officer and
18 enlisted, and we had a lot of live-fire exercises where we were calling in the fires. It was
19 excellent training. He was very good. We were either doing that, actually live-fire
20 missions, or field problems with the infantry where we had simulated the artillery. After
21 about six months we, the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, we had 105 howitzers. In those days
22 the helicopters the Marine Corps had couldn't pick up a 105 howitzer. We went and got
23 four-deuce mortars that had been in the infantry regiment and took those—we were the
24 first artillery battalion to do that. The helicopters could pick up the four-deuce mortars. I
25 became a platoon commander of a four-deuce mortar platoon. When we went to Twenty-
26 nine Palms in the desert in the early spring of '57—I got out of Basic School in '56,
27 artillery school, and joined 11th Marines in May of '56 and early '57 we went out to fire
28 the four-deuce mortars, which none of us had ever fired. I was a little—a lot of Marine
29 artillery officers were sent to Fort Sill, the Army school. I was Reserve officer and I
30 hadn't gone to Fort Sill. There was a lot of technical aspects of the artillery. I hadn't had
31 any formal training, but we managed to—after six weeks in the desert where you can

1 make a lot of mistakes, we came back and were a pretty good firing platoon. That was a
2 gratifying experience. It wasn't very good living conditions but, you know, to see that
3 people learn a new weapon and become very proficient with it.

4 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. All right. So from there you went on to be a platoon
5 commander?

6 MH: I was a platoon commander of a 4.2 inch mortar platoon, still in Charlie
7 Battery, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines.

8 JS: Okay. All right. Uh, let's see. After that you went to—I should have said, uh,
9 an engineering battalion?

10 MH: I got off active duty and went back to Baltimore. I went to work for my
11 father and there was an engineer battalion, a Reserve engineer battalion in Baltimore. I
12 joined that as a Reserve on inactive duty, and then moved over to Arlington, Virginia,
13 again working for my father and joined the 3rd Reserve Infantry Battalion. I went to work
14 for the Aluminum Company of America and they moved me to Kansas City, Missouri.
15 Then I went to—I was inactive for a year so getting adjusted to a new job. I went to a
16 two-week artillery officers school back in Quantico in '62 and then joined the 30th Rifle
17 Company which was a Marine Corps Reserve unit in Kansas City. I came in as the
18 executive officer and wound up as the commanding officer.

19 JS: All right. Um, how often, uh, being, uh, a reserve, uh, commander, how often
20 would you, uh, would the unit come together?

21 MH: Once a month for a weekend. In the early '60s, well '62, -'3, -'4. Then as
22 things in Vietnam started heating up in '65, I was able to get some extra paid drills. I tried
23 to have at least the officers and the NCOs in for a second weekend. We anticipated being
24 mobilized in '65. We should have been. We weren't.

25 JS: Right. So as things began to heat up then, I would assume that you were
26 paying pretty close attention to what was going on.

27 MH: At the time it was top secret, but we had orders that any given seven days
28 after notice we had to be at Camp Pendleton. That kept you attuned to what was going on
29 as far as physical training as well as the other aspects of the training. We trained pretty
30 hard. It was in anticipation of being called up, and then we weren't.

31 JS: Right. Okay. So after this did you go back to active duty?

1 MH: Yeah. The Marine Corps from spring of '65 to the summer of '66 almost
2 doubled in size. It went for more or less a hundred and eighty thousand to three hundred
3 sixty thousand. The summer of '65 when we, the Kansas City Reserve unit, we went to
4 Camp Pendleton and most of the 1st Division had already deployed to either Okinawa or
5 Vietnam. As we got back and President Johnson didn't call us up—which was a huge
6 mistake in my opinion—they came out with an ALMAR (all Marine Corps notification)
7 asking for company-grade officers, captains and lieutenants and staff NCOs to volunteer.
8 I put in a letter and with some exceptions and they came back denied. In about a month
9 later I got a letter addressed to me—I was a captain by that time—asking me to resubmit
10 without exceptions. I called again, now-Colonel Ben Reed. He was on the Joint Chiefs of
11 Staff in Washington and I said, "I'm ready, willing, and able to go, but I don't want
12 recruiting duty. I don't want to go to the 9th Marine Corps District," which was in Kansas
13 City, as well. I'd rather be CO (commanding officer) of a reserve unit than one of those
14 jobs. He called back in three days and he said, "I can't guarantee you'll go straight to
15 Vietnam, but I'll guarantee you FMF," Fleet Marine Force duty. I put my letter in and I
16 went back on active duty and went to 2nd Division in Camp Lejeune. Wound up as the
17 CO of E Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines.

18 JS: Okay. All right. And, uh, how long were you with them before you were
19 deployed to Vietnam?

20 MH: We went to Cuba. I got there in March and we went there in May through
21 September and came back. I originally had a—they called it a SWAG, a standard, written
22 agreement, for one year. When we were in Cuba I applied for another year. The battalion
23 commander, he said, "I won't approve it for one year. I'll approve it for two," which was
24 a backhanded compliment. I had applied for two more years. I went up to Headquarters
25 Marine Corps to my monitor and said, "Look, I've done my penance for being a Reserve.
26 I've been down here, had a rifle company, been in Cuba, and trained hard. Now let me
27 get over for what I thought you needed me for." Orders came back in late December for
28 me to go to a civil affairs school, Fort Gordon, Georgia, then on to WESTPAC (Western
29 Pacific Command) 3rd Marine Division. I was sure I was a qualified artillery and infantry
30 officer and they're sending me to civil affairs school. I went to Fort Gordon for six weeks
31 and it was really a waste of time, in my opinion. Then from there I went to Camp

1 Pendleton to await for orders and I got promoted to major en route. I was hoping to get
2 over to Vietnam as a captain. In my opinion, captain is the best rank in the Marine Corps.

3 JS: All right. Could you clarify on that about why you think the captain is the
4 best, uh, rank?

5 MH: Yeah, the captains are company commanders, battery commanders. You're
6 senior enough where you've got some authority, but you're close enough to the troops
7 where you get to know them. You get to train them. I mean, it's really the finest, the
8 greatest job satisfaction I ever had was being a company commander. As you move up
9 the line, you're further away from the troops and you're not actually—you just don't
10 have the same contact. It's not—I had a great job in Vietnam. I was operations officer.
11 That was a good job, but it wasn't quite the same as being a company commander.

12 JS: Right. All right. Well, so, uh, when did you finally, uh, receive your orders to
13 go to Vietnam?

14 MH: Well, the orders, the original orders was to leave 2nd Division, go to civil
15 affairs school, and then on to Camp Pendleton for further duty with Fleet Marine Forces,
16 Pacific. I already had orders. It's just a matter of going to Pendleton. I went through, they
17 had a standard indoctrination course which I didn't think I really needed after having
18 previous couple of years with an infantry company. I got—I left early in July of '67 and
19 we flew. There was a lieutenant colonel, another major, and about forty Marine NCOs.
20 We went on a Northwestern flight from San Diego to Tokyo and then into Okinawa for a
21 couple of days, and then down to Da Nang.

22 JS: All right. Now, how did you, uh, feel when you finally got your orders? Were
23 you excited or nervous? Or how did you feel about it?

24 MH: I was excited. It was overdue, as far as I was concerned. As I said, being a
25 company commander in the 2nd Marines was a good experience. I don't know how much
26 you want to hear that. When the battalion went to Cuba we went down there as security
27 for the base. They had had a Navy Seabee battalion down there that had helped the
28 Marine barracks with security for the base and Seabees moved out to Vietnam. I had—a
29 Marine infantry company in those days rated 211 men, including five officers. I had two
30 young second lieutenants right out of Basic School. I only had a 125 men instead of 211,
31 and thirty-five of them were seventeen-year olds. They're too young to go to Vietnam. I

1 only had a few—I had one excellent gunnery sergeant, Elmer Dungee, but only about
2 four or five staff NCOs. I should have twenty-some. I had a real leadership problem
3 with—it's like taking a Boy Scout troop to war. We were in Cuba, every night I had a
4 platoon up on a line with live ammo. The Cubans, I don't know why, but they were
5 always coming across the wire. They never did much. They usually got themselves blown
6 up in the minefields. But, you know, you put seventeen-year olds out in the middle of the
7 night by themselves with live ammo, you don't know what's going to happen. That was a
8 real leadership challenge. You may or not—I'm trying to think about this movie I had a
9 couple of years ago. Jack Nicholson was in it. They had a—it was about being in Gitmo
10 and a Marine got killed for violating some orders. I can't think of the name of it right
11 now.

12 JS: Was it *A Few Good Men*?

13 MH: Yeah, *A Few Good Men*. That code red was the big thing. Well, I had a
14 chance to talk to some, in recent years—a year ago up at A&M. Talked to some Marine
15 officer candidates. Rather than telling them war stories about Vietnam, I told them about
16 the challenges for have thirty-five seventeen-year olds, two of which weren't house
17 broken. They were defecating in their trousers in their beds. It was—I put one of them in
18 for a medical discharge and tried for nine months and he was still there when I left for
19 Vietnam. We were in Quonset huts in Cuba. No air conditioning. I was not opposed to an
20 NCO punching a guy if they wised off to them, because I had a lot of young corporals
21 who had jobs that a staff sergeant should have had, and they had contemporaries that they
22 had gone through boot camp with who when they told them, "You've got a dirty rifle,"
23 you can imagine what they were told. Instead of having office hours, I let it be known a
24 punch in the mouth would do everybody a lot better. I got them together and these two
25 kids, one of them, the one who was the worst one about defecating in his bed was
26 Michael Paos from Troy, New York. I don't know how I can remember it after all these
27 years. I said, "Look. I'm trying to get him a medical discharge. I don't want him touched.
28 I mean, "That's not the way we're going to cure him of his problem." One day I went into
29 the company office. Gunny Dungee was in there with a big grin. He says, "Come into the
30 office, Skipper." There was a pretty senior sergeant, was a platoon sergeant. He said,
31 "Sergeant Smith," he said, "Paos crapped in his bed again." He said, "Sergeant Smith

1 took him outside and spanked him with a shower shoe.” (Laughs) We, the two of us sat
2 there and laughed and said, “I don’t think anybody’s going to write their congressman
3 about that.” I said, “I hate to punish him, but it fits the crime.” I’ve told that story. The
4 last time was nine months ago up at Texas A&M. I said, “That was our code red.” That
5 really didn’t solve the problem. The problem was solved later.

6 JS: Right. Now, was there a particular reason why these guys were doing it, or
7 could they not help it? Were they trying to avoid duty or do you know why?

8 MH: It was a physical pri—no, they weren’t trying to avoid, because they
9 weren’t getting out of anything. Michael Paos, for example, he was caught asleep on his
10 guard post up on the fence line by the officer of the day from Marine barracks, and he
11 had a court martial and spent sixty days in the brig in Cuba, which was a tough brig. That
12 still didn’t cure him. He didn’t want out of the Marine Corps. He came in—we got back
13 to Camp Lejeune, he comes in and volunteered to go to Vietnam. I had him in. I said,
14 “I’m not sending you to Vietnam. You’ll just get good Marine killed. I’m trying to get
15 you a medical discharge.” About two days later he comes in and he applies for recon.
16 After about eight months I still hadn’t been able to get him to run three miles with the
17 company because he could never keep up, but yet he wanted to go to recon. You figure
18 out how his brains work. Like I said, when I left to go to Vietnam, the request for the
19 medical discharge was still in. I don’t know what happened to him. It was a medical
20 problem.

21 JS: Okay. All right. Well, um, let’s see. So when you left for Vietnam, uh, you
22 talked about the plane ride over. Could you tell me a little bit about, uh, the mood on the
23 plane? Was it, uh, anxious? Uh, anticipation?

24 MH: This was a regular civilian flight. There were civilians on it, as well. We
25 were all pretty happy. They were serving drinks and wound up dancing with a
26 stewardess. Remember, we’re talking about a lieutenant colonel, two majors, and a bunch
27 of NCOs, so we were all looking forward to it.

28 JS: Sure. Yes, sir. All right. Let’s see. Uh, and where did you arrive in-country?

29 MH: In Da Nang.

30 JS: In Da Nang. Okay. What was your, uh, first thoughts, uh, or your first
31 impressions of Vietnam?

1 MH: We flew down from Okinawa to Da Nang. It was on a Continental flight. I
2 think it was the first time the crew had been into Vietnam, because the plane was still
3 configured like a civilian, not a military airlift. We had eggs benedict on the way down. I
4 was sitting up in the front and when the little girl opened the—the stewardess opened the
5 hatch, she was standing down at the bottom of a ladder and with her white hat and white
6 gloves and polka-dot—not polka-dot. Seersucker uniform. The humidity and the smell
7 (unintelligible), the first of July hit me in the face. I thought, “What the hell am I doing
8 here?” She said, as I got off she says, “I hope you enjoy your stay.” That first the reaction
9 was, you know, “Did I do the right thing?”

10 JS: Right. Yes, sir. All right. Well, um, what was, uh, in-processing? What was
11 that like?

12 MH: I was travelling. I had orders to the 3rd Division which was up at Phu Bai
13 which was north about twenty-five miles, thirty miles north of Da Nang. I reported in and
14 the sergeant said, “Major, over here.” Went to a building and said, “I bet a helicopter will
15 come in shortly and take you.” I went and I’m carrying my sea bag. I checked in there.
16 The chopper came in. Nobody called my name so I started pushing, “I’m a major and I’m
17 ready to get where I’m going to.” I muscled on the next helicopter going to Phu Bai. I
18 reported in to the 3rd Division. The G-1 was a colonel and he asked me, he said, “Where
19 do you want to go, Major?” I said—he was looking at my record book and I said, “Well,
20 to a battalion, Colonel.” He said, “Artillery or infantry?” I had been a very good forward
21 observer as a lieutenant in the artillery, but then I had spent a lot of time both Reserve
22 and on active duty as an infantry officer. I said, “Well, an infantry battalion.” He said,
23 “All right. We need a field grade officer up at 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines.” So he took me
24 in and introduced me to General Hochmuth, CG (commanding general) of the division.
25 Later got killed in October of that year in a helicopter. Only Marine general to be killed.
26 They welcomed me aboard and so forth. Colonel said, “There’s a tent down there. Go
27 down find a cot and we’ll get you up there eventually.” So about a half hour later the
28 colonel comes running down and he said, “You didn’t tell me you had gone to civil
29 affairs school.” I said, “Well, no, sir.” He said, “Well, if I hadn’t already introduced you
30 to the general,” he said, “I would keep you here as my division of civil affairs officer.”
31 Which was the last thing in the world that I wanted. About another hour, some corporal

1 comes running in and says, “Get your gear. We’ve got a chopper for you.” I go over and I
2 thought it was wrong at the time and all these years later I still think it was wrong that
3 there was colonels, the COs of the 3rd Marine Regiment, 9th Marine Regiment, and 12th
4 Marine Regiment, and myself, a boot major, all on this chopper. If the chopper had gone
5 down they wouldn’t have lost much with me, but I thought three regimental commanders
6 in one helicopter was a little much. We wound up at the—dropped the 9th Marine CO and
7 the 12th Marine CO off at Dong Ha and CO of the 3rd Marines, Colonel Stockton, and I
8 went to Camp Carroll, which was west on Highway 9. I spent the first night at Camp
9 Carroll. That’s getting into some of these small-world interesting small Marine Corps,
10 which was one of the reasons I enjoyed it so much. The bunker that I stayed in that first
11 night at Camp Carroll belonged to the regimental chaplain who was on liberty up in
12 Japan. It turned out he had been our battalion chaplain down in Gitmo. I had been with
13 him for six months there, wind up sleeping in his bunker in Vietnam. Then the next day I
14 went down. 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines was out at a place called the Rock Pile on Highway
15 9. The colonel, Gary Wilder, was the CO. They had a change of command. Major Rudy
16 Sutter took over as CO and I came in as the executive officer.

17 JS: All right. Let’s see. Okay. You said, uh, you talked about being, uh, at Rock
18 Pile. Was there a, uh, firebase there at Rock Pile?

19 MS: Yeah, there was. There was—Rock Pile was a very large volcanic
20 outcropping. It was quite dramatic, almost cylindric. It was about five hundred meters tall
21 and then there was another long rocky. It was called the Razorback. It went off to the
22 northwest direction. Highway 9, which was old French Highway 9, which was basically
23 an east-west highway that went from Dong Ha on the ocean all the way through to the
24 Laotian capital. The Rock Pile had took—it went south for about twelve kilometers south
25 and then headed west again along the river through the mountains and through Khe Sanh
26 and into Laos. The 3rd Battalion had been in that area for about six months at that time.
27 We had a company north of the Rock Pile and we had two companies’ headquarters at the
28 turn of the road where it went south, and then we had another company. It was about
29 twelve clicks south down in a place called Ca Lu. We were spread out pretty thin for one
30 battalion.

1 JS: Right. All right. Can you tell me a little about, uh, uh, your quarters or
2 housing at, uh, at the Rock Pile?

3 MH: I can tell you that every night I was in Vietnam I lived in a hole in the
4 ground wherever I was. At the Rock Pile, like I say, there had been a battalion in there
5 before we got there so there was a couple of really good bunkers the engineers had made.
6 They were a medical bunker and our command bunker. They were well reinforced and
7 fairly good sized. Other than that, the bunkers were—had been made by the troops
8 themselves. That's one of the things that we did was continually improving the bunkers.
9 There was a shortage of building materials, which I was maybe curious at the time.
10 Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had the stupid idea of building the McNamara
11 Line across the so-called DMZ (demilitarized zone) which at that point, Vietnam was
12 only fifty miles wide. They were stockpiling timbers, barbed wires, sandbags, all to build
13 this McNamara Line, which I thought was a stupid idea then. Looking back, reading
14 history, it's even dumber now. So we had a shortage of building—problem being that we
15 had bunkers that would collapse on Marines and we were doing a lot of cutting down
16 trees ourselves and that type of thing. Everybody lived in a hole in the ground. We had a
17 lot of rats. The rats were huge. I've never seen rats that big anywhere in my life before or
18 since.

19 JS: Right. All right. Well, uh, how often would, uh, the firebase come under, uh,
20 fire from the enemy?

21 MH: Where we were in the time I was there, we actually only were hit twice by
22 mortars. What was going on was that there was a lot of NVA (North Vietnamese Army)
23 moving west of us. That would have been they're moving from north to south. Khe Sanh
24 would have been further west. Now, the Marines that were up at Con Thien, which was
25 northeast of where we were, and they were getting hit regularly. In the time I was there,
26 where we were we were only mortared once and we had counter-battery fire out on them
27 for the incoming and we had outgoing. We were actually only hit once. Because we knew
28 what was going. There were large numbers of NVA moving south, just west of us. I was
29 anticipating attack. I was surprised that some of the officers were a little complacent. I
30 had read while I was waiting at Camp Pendleton to go over, I had read Bernard Fall's
31 *Hell in a Very Small Place*, the French at Dien Bien Phu. Sitting there at the Rock Pile

1 was exactly the same with the topography was similar. We had a couple of small outposts
2 that I forgot the names, Mary or Joan or something similar to the French. I had an active
3 imagination that we were going to get hit at any time, and we actually weren't while I
4 was there. We did a lot of patrolling out of—we were actually at three bases and did lot
5 of patrolling. Then about the second or the third day I was there we had—there was a
6 multi-battalion operation. There were three or four battalions were going to move east to
7 west, and we were to move north and then east. That's when I really got the reality of the
8 situation. All that we were able to move in this battalion operation was about 150 men
9 basically, because we had three positions that we were ordered to hold by division and
10 higher. You had to keep people there. It wasn't unusual to take 150 men in a company-
11 sized field problem back stateside. You were lucky if you had an effective hundred-man
12 companies. The battalion sweep was the first one we went on which we didn't do
13 anything. It was a long, hot walk in the sun for three or four days. It was about 200,
14 maybe 225 men out of a TO strength of a battalion of 1,100.

15 JS: All right. Well, uh, talking about it, on these patrols and things, could you tell
16 me a little bit about, uh, the type of tactics you would employ on these units when out on
17 patrol?

18 MH: Well, the patrols were different. I mean, the daily local security patrols that
19 went out were defensive in nature and in the area where we were, there were very, very
20 few civilians, and very few Viet Cong, which made operations a lot simpler. Units that
21 we had to contact with mainly were NVA regulars that were moving south. So the patrols
22 were—the regular daily patrols were defensive in nature. I beefed them up. They'd been
23 mostly squad-sized. I have having to go out platoon-sized, which in essence really was
24 two squads, and go a little further out than they previously had done. That was one of the
25 things I initiated. Those patrols didn't really run into much contact and, like I say, were
26 really defensive in nature. The battalion operation we went on, I forgot. It had a name.
27 It's in the history books, but I can't remember the name of it. As a battalion, we didn't hit
28 anything, either. We went north almost to the DMZ and then went east, north of Dong Ha
29 Mountain. Didn't run into anything. I said the area that we were in, we only had one VC
30 (Viet Cong) contact, and we ambushed them. That was under Mike Company which had
31 been down at Ca Lu and there was a couple of very small villages close, and we had been

1 running patrols in and out of there for months, doing the same thing. Go in the morning
2 and back at night. It was noted that there was a lot of young babies, very young kids,
3 young women, old men, no young men. We got a new company commander in and he
4 asked permission which we gave and he went out with a bigger patrol, came back, kept
5 part of the patrol out, and right around dusk all of the young men of the ville came back
6 in just singing and dancing down the road, and they ambushed them. We ambushed them.
7 That was the only Viet Cong contact we had while I was there. Most of the other
8 civilians, and there weren't very many in that area, were Montagnards which the
9 Vietnamese both North and South really didn't care much for the Montagnards. That was
10 the Brue tribe, B-R-U-E was a tribe in that area where we were.

11 JS: What was, uh, your relationship? What was the relationship with the Marines
12 to the Brue tribe?

13 MH: Well, it's the same. Of course, they're basically nomads and they weren't
14 always—they did slash burning. There was one tribe that had been out on Highway 9
15 west of Ca Lu and we had—there was a big ambush. Back up a minute. I was actually in
16 three fairly good-sized battles. Twenty-first of July, twenty-first of August, and the
17 seventh of September. They were all similar in that they were convoys that were
18 ambushed. To answer your question, this one—it was a small group of Montagnards,
19 maybe fifty, sixty people. When we went back out after the twenty-first of July we found
20 some Marine dog tags, Marine web gear, canteens and stuff in the ville. They claimed
21 they knew nothing. Well, they had to know something. I wanted them moved. I didn't
22 think it was a good idea for Marines to be going in and moving these civilians around so I
23 got in touch with the Army advisor at the Cam Lo district headquarters. He came down
24 with an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) captain and I told him where. We
25 went up in an Army chopper and I pointed out where this Montagnard tribe was. I wanted
26 the ARVN that were they had—they had some Regional Force people at Cam Lo to move
27 them, and this ARVN captain said, "Oh, they're Montagnards. Just toss some artillery in
28 on them." I've forgotten the Army advisor's name. He was a major. Looked like Colonel
29 Sanders, the chicken guy. I said, "I'm not doing this." I'm not a bleeding liberal, but I'm
30 not over here to kill innocent civilians. They actually moved themselves. They moved
31 further back up towards our main base on Highway 9. We tried to take care of them. We

1 would send corpsmen periodically and the battalion doctor occasionally down and treat
2 them for minor wounds. The point was that we were never in any of the civilian villages,
3 whether they were Vietnamese or Montagnards, after dark. We didn't have enough
4 people. This one Montagnard tribe, after they had moved east and north up Highway 9,
5 the NVA mortared them one night. Next day we went back down and the village chief, he
6 was all upset. Not because his daughter had gotten killed, but his water buffalo had gotten
7 killed. He was demanding that we, the Marine Corps, pay him for the water buffalo. We
8 tried to get it across to him that we didn't do that, the North Vietnamese communists had
9 done that. I had empathy for them because we were there during the day and they were
10 friendly. We tried to help them. We didn't give them canned goods, but we gave them
11 some fresh food from time to time and tried to help them with medicine and stuff. Then at
12 night we weren't there and the NVA came in. They didn't help us and they didn't help
13 the NVA. They were kind of neutral. Fortunately there weren't too many of them and
14 they became less of a problem after the NVA mortared them.

15 JS: All right. You mentioned, uhh, the ARVN. Um, how often did you work with
16 them and, uh, what was your impressions of the ARVN?

17 MH: The only contact I had with the ARVN was that one captain. He was the
18 district chief. He didn't have any ARVN units. He had some Regional Force units with
19 him. We didn't actually—I didn't think too much of him. We didn't actually use them in
20 any of the firefights that I was in. We had some interpreters who were ARVN, ARVN
21 sergeants. They had been college students in Saigon. They didn't like being up, living in
22 a hole in the ground with the rats and us. We captured quite a few documents on the
23 twenty-first of August. The one thing I had done at that civil affairs school that I didn't
24 want to go to, on my own I went and took some evening courses in Vietnamese language.
25 I really didn't have a chance or a need to use it over there, but these interpreters looked at
26 these documents and said, "They don't mean anything." Well, I had learned enough to
27 know that they had geographical terms, they had military terms. I didn't believe them. I
28 sent them back up to regiment and division and they were operations orders. They were
29 pretty valuable. That's when I recommended to my battalion commander that we send
30 these guys back to Saigon. They weren't doing us any good and I didn't trust them. We
31 never worked with any ARVN units as such.

1 JS: Okay. All right. Now, you mentioned these, um, three big battles on the
2 twenty-first of July, twenty-first of August, and seventh of September?

3 MH: Right.

4 JS: Okay. You said they all surrounded or had something to do with ambush
5 convoys?

6 MH: Right.

7 JS: Okay. Could you tell me about these?

8 MH: Well the twenty-first of July we were told by this time—back up a minute.
9 We had a major come into the battalion, Harvey Harper, who had been selected for
10 lieutenant colonel. He hadn't been promoted yet. I went down and became the S-3
11 operations officer. It was only—there was a captain, Roger Zenson, and then the S-3. He
12 stayed on as my assistant, but Harper wasn't going to be there very long so I became the
13 ops officer as opposed to the exec, which was a good job. I thoroughly enjoyed it. On the
14 twenty-first of July we were informed by regiment that there was a hundred-plus vehicle
15 convoy went through resupply to Khe Sanh. We didn't have any responsibility for it. It's
16 just they were telling us it was going to be going through our area. They had some Army
17 175 guns. The engineers, three vehicle engineers had gone out that morning along
18 Highway 9 which had a lot of curves, switchbacks along the river when it went west of
19 Ca Lu and then a very steep mountain. It went up to the north. The road was cut out of
20 the side of the mountain along the river. The engineers went and said it was all clear.
21 Came back and the convoy started out. Some of these hairpin curves, the 175 guns
22 couldn't negotiate them, which was fortunate because about four or five clicks west of Ca
23 Lu where we had our Mike Company 3/3 was. Mike Company sent a regular patrol out
24 along the highway and the company commander was with them. They started back in this
25 convoy. You can imagine 125 vehicles backing up on this narrow road. If you look at the
26 official Marine Corps history in 1967 they say that the ambush was sprung, that Marines
27 saw some NVA urinating. I don't ever remember that when I was there. I don't know
28 where that came from. At any rate, as the convoy's backing up Mike Company sprung
29 one end of what could have been a horrendous ambush. We found out in the next couple
30 of days the NVA had set up—had a 1,500-meter ambush, very well dug in with mines
31 along the river, hidden fighting holes. If the convoy had gone a little further it could have

1 been a disaster, but it was sprung. Obviously, there's a lot of confusion. We get this
2 information back up at our headquarters. At this time I'm still the exec. I got a couple
3 platoons out of Kilo Company and we go down Highway 9 into Ca Lu. We pull in and
4 the exec of Mike Company, Joe Salone, who happens to be a very successful attorney
5 here in Houston, Texas. I see him on—we try and get together on the twenty-first of July
6 and toast to the fact we're still alive. He comes running up to me. His helmet's off. He
7 had reddish-blond hair and had been nicked. He had a minor wound on his neck. He had
8 blood all over him, and he runs up to the jeep and he says, "Major, there's a massacre out
9 there. You've got to do something." I've only been in Vietnam about three weeks at this
10 stage and still hadn't been shot at in anger. I can laugh about it now, but I mentally
11 thought, started thinking, "What page did it have massacre on it in the book?" I got—we
12 had an Army duster section that was attached to us. We had an M-42, an Army tracked
13 vehicle. It looks like a small tank. It had twin 40s on it. A second vehicle which was a
14 truck, it had quad .50 machineguns mounted on the back. I got those two, I had literally
15 some cooks, anybody that was standing around, and more or less two platoons out of Kilo
16 Company and we head off down Highway 9. The vehicles are still backing up. We got
17 out to this point where the Mike Company patrol was. It was—there were dead Marines
18 and NVA all over. There were about four or five hundred NVA coming down through.
19 There was a cultivated field that the Montagnards had and they were coming down
20 through that field. The Mike Company people that were still out there were pretty well
21 shook up and just about out of ammo. These Army duster guys, they bailed off over on
22 the riverside. The road was cut out of the side of the mountain. I hollered at the staff
23 sergeant. I said, "Get them up on the guns!" He literally threw them up. Once the .50-cals
24 started and the twin 40s, that pretty well stopped the NVA coming down the hill. The
25 reason I brought it up, I put the Army staff sergeant in for a Silver Star. I've been trying
26 to follow up, see whether he ever got it but I don't know whether he did or not. He did a
27 tremendous job. We were then, with that massive amount of fire, we were able to get our
28 wounded and the rest of Mike Company pulled back into Ca Lu for the night. Then the
29 regimental commander and battalion commander—I picked up an M-16 on the road that
30 day. The NVA was so close I was pulling my .45 out. I saw the M-16 and I thought, "I'm
31 a pretty good shot with a .45, but I think I'll do better with the M-16." The rest of the

1 time I was in Vietnam I carried an M-16. I've had people say, "That's not what field-
2 grade officers are supposed to do." I say, "I understand that." That was a—then what we
3 did, we got reinforced. We had some companies from 1st Battalion, 9th Marines came
4 down and then Lima Company and the rest of Kilo and we went back the next two days
5 and cleared the road, ran into a little contact up on the ridgeline, then got the convoy
6 minus the 175 guns out to Khe Sanh. I am ninety-nine percent sure that's the last
7 overland convoy that got through to Khe Sanh before the siege set in. They never did—
8 the 175 guns were supposed to go out for an artillery raid into Laos and they never made
9 it.

10 JS: All right. Okay. Let's see. How about the August twenty-first ambush?

11 MH: To answer that, the battle of the twenty-first there were—I've forgotten
12 what the official—we claimed four or five NVA, four or five hundred NVA dead and we
13 had twenty-something casualties. Mike Company got chewed up pretty bad. It was
14 obvious that north-south movement was picking up by the NVA. We were running re-
15 supply convoys down to the company at Ca Lu. We originally were running just two,
16 three vehicles at a time and weren't having any problems, but I was getting a little
17 concerned after having seen what had happened the twenty-first to the twenty-third. By
18 this time I'm the ops officer. We had some engineers were going to go down and work on
19 a small bridge on Highway 9 so we had about a twenty- or thirty-vehicle convoy. I had
20 two tanks going with them. I had been surprised. When I first checked in I checked our
21 defensive fire planes for the main position. They looked very good, right out of the book.
22 Turns out that's what happened. Somebody had drawn up a diagram right out of the
23 book. It had no relationship to where the automatic weapons were. The artillery had
24 never fired in the defensive targets, and that kind of thing. I was anxious to get this done.
25 We got two new second lieutenant artillery officers came in as forward observers on the
26 twenty-first. Right out of Fort Sill, which is the finest artillery school in the world. We
27 got permission to fire our defensive fires in that afternoon. Apparently things were calm
28 in other sectors. We didn't have anything going on except for this routine resupply
29 convoy going. I went up with two second lieutenants and we started calling in the
30 defensive fires. I was sitting there kind of looking through the glasses out at the greater
31 distance, "Oh, yeah, we're getting squared away." I'm kind of happy. It's a nice day. I

1 see four to five thousand troops in columns moving south out at a greater distance. I
2 thought, you know, I knew I hadn't been drinking, but I thought maybe the sun had
3 gotten to me. I grabbed the radio, gave them a check-fire. I called in a fire mission which
4 is like three thousand left, add three thousand, four to five thousand troops in the open
5 moving north to south. I thought somebody—and I identified myself, my call sign. I
6 thought somebody was going to get on there and question my sanity. They came back and
7 that was the last fire mission I ever called and it was the best one I ever called. It was
8 right on target. I gave them a fire for effect. Camp Carroll was a big artillery base. I don't
9 know if there was six or eight batteries of different caliber and they were from 105 to
10 175. They just blew the side off this mountain. About that time—I had a radio up there, a
11 tactical net. That this resupply convoy had been ambushed. Lima Company moved out to
12 relieve the ambush so I go back down on—I was up on a little hill where we were, where
13 the main base—didn't go on a base, our base for 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines. By the time I
14 get back down in the ops center, the CO of Lima Company 3/3, John Ripley, who just
15 died a month ago—have you ever heard of John Ripley?

16 JS: No, sir.

17 MH: I just digress a minute. He, in his second tour in Vietnam, he got a Navy
18 Cross for blowing the bridge at Dong Ha during a mission.

19 JS: Oh, right. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

20 MH: Same John Ripley. He was my Lima Company commander. He gets cut off
21 with his radio operator and a runner and his gunnery sergeant. He's out in the elephant
22 grass someplace and just keying in. He's got a couple platoons wandering around. We
23 had another company—Mike Company was moving up from the south, moving south to
24 north. The convoy's out there someplace. There was a lot of confusion. I had my
25 command group saddled up ready to go. I turned to the CO and said, "You know,
26 Colonel, move out whenever you say so." He turns around and walks into his bunker.
27 This is the part that is not in *No Shining Armor*. I've given Otto Lehrack a hard time
28 about it. After all these year I don't mean to—I don't know what was going through the
29 CO's mind, but all I could see was we had a fragmented company with the company
30 commander cut off. Two other companies moving. No radio contact with this convoy,
31 and I thought, "Somebody needs to be out there trying to get some order out of

1 confusion,” so I moved out. I look at the XO. He just turned around and went and sat on
2 his stool. So we took off down Highway 9 and got things moving. There was a tank, one
3 of our tanks. We still had NVA at a distance. Distance of maybe four to five thousand
4 meters west, but they were still visible. I had this tank take them under fire and we still
5 had artillery coming on. We finally got an air strike up a large draw that went southwest.
6 One of the Lima Company platoon leaders, Jack Wright, he comes up to me. He’s all
7 shook up. He said, “CO’s cut off.” I said, “I know. We’re going to go get him. Let’s go.
8 You take your platoon and move out.” I said, “I’ve got people behind me and we’ve got
9 this tank.” So he takes off. I’m banging, typical of the Marine Corps, the tank infantry
10 phone never works on the tanks, so I’m banging on the side of the tank with my M-16.
11 He’s not moving. I’m getting anxious. I take off. There was a nose that came out, the cut
12 where Highway 9 then took a long, straight shot south, maybe six or seven thousand
13 meters straight south. I come past this nose and I’m expecting to see a platoon of Lima
14 Company. I don’t see anything. I don’t see any NVA. I don’t see any Marines. All of a
15 sudden I’m the point of the battalion, which I didn’t think that was my job description. I
16 go a couple of meters down the road and out from the elephant grass comes John Ripley
17 and his radio man, a gunny, and a runner. He come running through the grass and he
18 says, “Major, I’m glad to see you.” I said, “Where’s Lieutenant Wright? His platoon?”
19 He says, “I haven’t seen anything but NVA for the last four hours.” Wright had gone
20 across this nose through the bush instead of down the highway. The rest of the day was a
21 mop up. Mike Company picked up the convoy and got them down. Lima Company
22 regrouped and came back in. I wanted to climb a couple of thousand NVA because I
23 knew what we had done with the artillery, but I think the official—and we didn’t—since I
24 was the senior man out there at that point I wasn’t going to take the time to go out and
25 count bodies after what we had been through and all the confusion. I was pulling back in
26 and it started to get dark. I think the official Marine Corps record claims four hundred
27 kills, but whatever. It was a busy day and I think we really put a hurt on them that day.
28 We took—I don’t know the exact count. We had a couple killed and maybe half a dozen
29 wounded. That was the twenty-first of August. Not every year, but many years I would
30 find Ripley someplace in the world. Call him up and ask if I need to come rescue his ass.
31 He was a fine Marine. It’s too bad he died. It’s just a—last week of October. Died in his

1 sleep. The next one was the seventh of September, almost a repeat. Again we had a
2 resupply convoy going down to Ca Lu. I had put some extra infantry on it and a couple of
3 tanks. They got down. They got ambushed. It was the same kind of thing. We had
4 companies moving north. South to north, north to south. Even with the radio relays we
5 had up on the Rock Pile we had lost contact. I took a relief down with India Company
6 this time. I was concerned about the India Company commander. He was big. He looked
7 like a poster for Marine Corps recruiting. But he had been at Cherry Point, North
8 Carolina, a few years before he came over and he had had jobs like wildlife preserver. He
9 hadn't been out in an actual unit. I had recommended that he be relieved a couple days
10 before. The exec said, "It'll ruin his career." I remembered that in years since when I was
11 a commander. Ruin somebody's career is minor compared to having people killed. We
12 moved out and I got the same reaction. My battalion commander just went to his bunker
13 and sat down. He didn't say, "Major Harrington, shut up and sit down," or "Go to hell,"
14 or anything else. I moved out with a command group and we went down Highway 9
15 again. There was a cut where there were some curves in the highway that went through a
16 large draw. I was concerned about that. I was staying up close to the India Company
17 commander. We didn't run into any contact. It was a straight stretch. So I kind of fell
18 back with the command group and then Lima Company was behind me. We move on
19 down and all of a sudden I hear a large volume of fire. I move up and India Company was
20 deployed online moving through this big field to the east of Highway 9. It's where the
21 next year they put Landing Zone Stud in there when they relieved Khe Sanh. This time it
22 was just a big field with a lot of grass and some small trees, but it was a quite large
23 valley. There was an NVA machinegun about a hundred meters down the road behind a
24 small bridge. They were firing enfilade fire down the long axis of India Company. The
25 company commander is standing there with his command group. He had one of these M-
26 42s with twin 40s and they're not doing anything. I come up and I still didn't know where
27 the convoy was. I knew the convoy couldn't have been too far away. I had a section of
28 81s with me. I looked at this India Company commander and I said, "You're relieved,"
29 and I pointed to his exec and said, "Take charge." Then I said—I'd like to tell you
30 dramatically I said, "Fix bayonets and charge," but I think I said, "Let's go." My
31 command group and India and this M-42, we head down Highway 9 and knock out this

1 machinegun. There were probably fifteen or twenty NVA around them with rifles. I'm
2 over with the command group and my command group were passed this little bridge
3 down alongside Highway 9. Lima Company was coming up and I was going to have
4 them move out. India Company had been torn up pretty bad. They had a platoon
5 commander killed. We had a lot of wounded. We were putting them—I didn't want to
6 bring any choppers in there because it wasn't a hot zone at that time, but I wanted to take
7 them back up to our main base which I knew was secure and take the choppers in there.
8 We had a six-by full of Marine wounded. We started getting mortared. I had just told my
9 radioman, "Look, I have a way of moving around and you don't need to be right on my
10 tail. Radio's important and I want you to stay where you can keep the radio safe, but if
11 something comes in or I need you I can holler at you." He says, "I'm going wherever you
12 go." I said, "I'm telling you, take care of that radio." I jump up. Then we've got mortars
13 coming in from the west hitting us. The driver of the six-by jumps out into a ditch and all
14 these wounded Marines are on this truck and I go to grab the driver and it turns out that
15 there was an NVA in the ditch on the other side of the road playing dead. He throws a
16 satchel charge between me and my radioman from behind and killed my radioman. That
17 ended my—I wind up on the truck and actually Ripley comes through with Lima
18 Company and I turned the two companies over to him. I got medevac'ed out to an LPH
19 (landing platform, helicopter, or amphibious assault ship) the first night and then over to
20 the hospital ship. Spent eleven weeks on the USS *Repose*.

21 JS: Okay. All right. I want to talk a little bit about that, about being medevac'ed
22 and the treatment you received, but before we get to that can we talk a moment about the
23 enemy for just a moment?

24 MH: Sure.

25 JS: How would you evaluate their fighting skills?

26 MH: I don't know that there's—they were tenacious and they were brave in that
27 they would stand up. We had a couple of tanks that were hit with RPGs (rocket-propelled
28 grenades) which were very effective. They were—the three, other than the first one on
29 the twenty-first of July, which they were looking for a set-piece ambush which if they
30 had been successful would have been tremendous for them. The other two, they weren't
31 actually attacking us. They were meeting engagements. Those documents that we got on

1 the twenty-first of August, they had maps. The maps were inaccurate. I think they were
2 further east in moving than they thought they were. They thought they were further west.
3 I didn't think at the time and looking back and talking at reunions and so forth, they
4 weren't attacking us. Those were meeting engagements. To evaluate their skills would be
5 hard for me to say. They were tenacious. They were brave. They damn sure didn't run.
6 They stood up against us with—in those three battles if it hadn't been for our supporting
7 arms, we were numerically outnumbered. I find Marines that I talk to that were down
8 south around Da Nang, Chu Lai at other times when they were fighting VC, they look at
9 me when I say I saw four to five thousand troops in the open and called in an artillery on
10 them like you're smoking funny cigarettes. I can't really attest to their skills. Most of
11 what we ran into was the 324-B NVA Division.

12 JS: Okay. All right. Okay, well, back to when you were wounded, how long were
13 you on the field before you were medevac'ed out?

14 MH: Well, like I said, I was having the wounded moved out by—so that was—
15 we got the driver back up and so it was probably a ten-minute, fifteen-minute ride back
16 up to our main LZ (landing zone). They had choppers there that were waiting for us. Of
17 course, that's where our main battalion aid station was. Fortunately, I had a flak jacket
18 on. I had started to take it off because I had—our standard procedure for the battalion was
19 to have three canteens of water at all times. We had moved out that day and I hadn't
20 filled my three canteens. It was the afternoon and hotter than hell and I had run out of
21 water and I wasn't going to ask the troopers for water. I was seriously thinking about
22 taking my flak jacket off because I thought we had been through the worst. I didn't, thank
23 God, or I wouldn't be talking to you. It killed my radioman because he took the blast in
24 the front. It got me from the waist down and the legs and arms and butt, thighs. It was
25 probably fifteen minutes, twenty minutes before I was on a medevac chopper. We went
26 out to an LPH. The Navy medical doctors, corpsmen, nurses were outstanding. They're
27 really superior. They had a couple of other battalions had been hit that day and they had
28 the hangar deck set up receiving the wounded and then doing triage. They kept me a
29 while. Everything had been blown off me. I'm buck naked with the exception of some
30 pressure bandages on me. Eventually I get into the operating room and they had a team of
31 surgeons waiting. They just gave me locals. Then the next day they choppered me and a

1 bunch of other marines to the hospital ship, the *Repose*. They said—you weren't
2 supposed to be on a hospital ship for more than thirty days. Either back to duty or
3 medevac'ed someplace. They said, "You'll be back in thirty days." So I sent a message to
4 battalion I'd be back in thirty days. Well, thirty days later I still couldn't walk. I wound
5 up spending eleven weeks on the *Repose*. They kept finding other things wrong and
6 operating, and finally they came down and said, "Get Major Harrington off this ship." So
7 they wound up taking me to—that's when the Air Force got a hold of me. The Air Force
8 took me to Yokohama Army Hospital, a thousand-bed hospital. I was the only Marine
9 there instead of the Navy hospital in Yokosuka. I don't know how much more you want
10 to know about the medevac. They did an excellent job. Our local corpsmen, we had an
11 excellent doctor, battalion surgeon. He had been trained for an orthopedic surgeon and he
12 was very good when you get those massive casualties. There were some doctors, and a
13 couple of them wound up on a hospital ship as patients. When they see massive casualties
14 they just broke down. They hadn't had that kind of training and the trauma training that
15 they really needed. But we didn't. Our battalion surgeon was excellent. The doctors in the
16 hospital were excellent. Can't say enough for them.

17 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. All right. Well, how long did it take you to recover?

18 MH: They took me, and I'm in this Army hospital. I went in on a stretcher, but I
19 could walk with a cane. I asked an Army nurse captain. I said, "How long am I going to
20 be here?" "Three or four months." I got there on my birthday, twenty-seventh of
21 November. I said, "No. I'm going to be back with my kids in Kansas City for Christmas
22 if I have to take a commercial plane." I said, "I don't mind going back to Vietnam." I
23 volunteered to go there in the first place. I raised enough hell with them and orders finally
24 came through to send me back to a naval hospital in Millington outside of Memphis. I
25 eventually got there and was there until March of '68 and then went back to duty.

26 JS: Okay. All right. What was your next assignment when you went back to
27 duty?

28 MH: I called Headquarters Marine Corps and they said—they told me they were
29 about ready to release me. They said, "We're going to bring you to Headquarters Marine
30 Corps. It will be good for your career." I said, "Take another look." I said, "I'm a Reserve
31 officer. I'm back on a contract." I said, "Send me out to the Infantry Training Regiment

1 at Camp Pendleton. All the experience I've had the last four or five years, that's the best
2 place for me to go and the best place for the Marine Corps." They said, "We don't have a
3 need for a major there." So they sent me to—"So we'll send you back to Lejeune." I said,
4 "I'm not going back to Lejeune. I've been there, I've done that." Liberty at Camp
5 Lejeune was not the best, particularly in the '60s, even though I had gone to school for
6 four years in North Carolina. I said, "All right, how about the Landing Force Training
7 Command at Coronado, California?" They said, "All right. Now you're talking." So
8 that's where they sent me which was a great place to be stationed, Coronado, California. I
9 wound up in the embarkation section and there were five Marine majors. All of us had
10 been in infantry battalions in Vietnam and we're in embarkation which is an essential part
11 of the Marine Corps, but I felt like they could have had some other logisticians there
12 instead of us, so that's where I was. It was an interesting duty in that I wound up running
13 a school over in Okinawa for six months. I would have rather have been teaching
14 something else, but Okinawa in those years was a pretty nice place. It's still being run by
15 a military government. They would bring up officer and enlisted out of Vietnam and we
16 ran them through a thirty-day course on how to load amphibious ships. That was
17 interesting duty. Like I said, I didn't really enjoy the subject, but Okinawa in those days
18 was a pretty pleasant place to be.

19 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. All right. How closely after you had gone away from
20 Vietnam, how closely did you follow the war after you had left?

21 MH: Well, of course, being in the hospital, being on the hospital ship, we had
22 daily news reports and when the ship was off of South Vietnam it'd be entertainment.
23 Once I was able to get up into a wheelchair I would go up on the weather deck at night
24 and watch the H&I (harassment and interdiction) fire. You don't see anything like that on
25 the Fourth of July. I followed it. Of course, when I was at the amphib base besides the
26 public we got daily reports. Same way at Okinawa. We were getting daily reports. I
27 followed it very closely.

28 JS: Okay. All right. Were you able to, or did you keep in touch with any of the
29 guys that you had served with while you were there?

30 MH: Yeah. Well, while I was still on active duty, yeah, a couple of them came.
31 As a matter of fact, I was out there running the school at Okinawa, the battalion

1 commander, Bob Needham, his tour was up. When he finished as CO of 3rd Battalion, 3rd
2 Marines, he went up and was Exec O of the 3rd Marine Regiment, the exec officer of the
3 3rd Marine Regiment. I saw him. I was coming out of the officers club and I saw he was
4 just coming in. I saluted, “Colonel, good to see you. Can we have a beer? Have a drink?”
5 He said, “Yeah. I’ll meet you at the O club in an hour.” He never showed up. I wrote him
6 a letter. I never heard from him. I had Roger Zenson, who had been my assistant in the
7 operations, he came through. We went down, sang the *Marine Corps Hymn* at the Cadena
8 Air Force Officers Club, and then one of the company commanders who later became the
9 3 came through. I saw and got filled in on what had gone on with the battalion after I got
10 hit. Then socially, we’ve had ten reunions with 3/3, the last one being July. We had over
11 five hundred Marines that were there. I tried to stay in touch while I was still on active
12 duty. I could tell by ’69 that it looked like the Marine Corps was going to be drawing
13 down in Vietnam, which it was. The 3rd Division was out by October of ’69.

14 JS: Mm-hmm. Right. All right. Well, can you give me just a brief description of
15 your duties? I know you talked about Okinawa, but could you give me a brief description
16 of your duties after that until—and when did you retire from the Marine Corps?

17 MH: I retired out of the Reserves in 1986, July of ’86. I got off. My standard
18 written agreement was up in March of ’69. The CO of the—Landing Force Training
19 Command was a joint command of Army, Navy, and Marine. The CO had put in for me
20 to get a regular commission as opposed to Reserve, which would have ensured me twenty
21 years of service for retirement. I fully intended to do that, but I had been divorced before
22 I went back on my active duty. I had three kids in Kansas City and without going through
23 all the gory details, I finally realized that I was going to get custody of the three kids. I
24 wasn’t sure how I could juggle being a single officer on active duty and a single parent,
25 too. Friends that I had had in the civilian community in between active duty time, one of
26 them was living up in Palos Verdes, California. He said they thought this company he
27 had gone to work for needed another man and was I interested. I said, “No. I want to stay
28 in.” He said, “Well, we’ll fly you back to New York headquarters and around Christmas
29 you can stop by in Kansas City, spend Christmas with the kids, and then make your
30 decision.” I went. I did that. I like the people I saw. They liked me, but they were looking
31 for somebody in Houston, Texas, which I wasn’t sure about that. Then my trip to Kansas

1 City I realized what was coming down from my personal life. I wound up taking the job
2 in Houston which was the right thing to do and I wound up with the custody of my three
3 kids. I stayed in the Reserves. In September of '69 I joined 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines as
4 exec Reserve Infantry battalion air. I stayed for two and a half years as executive officer
5 and then became the CO of 1/23 which was, you know, was a fun, satisfying job, good
6 unit. Then my tour was up the end of '74 and started going to schools. Really all my
7 worthwhile duties were behind me now. Now I go to the schools to find out how I should
8 have done it. That's what happened. Probably the next best thing that I—for three years,
9 the last three years I was on active reserve, the Marine Corps, and I can't really argue
10 with them, you get passed over for the next highest rank and out you go. I made colonel
11 and then I got passed over for brigadier three times. I would have liked to have stayed on.
12 I was fifty-two when I had to retire. I got selected to serve on the Marine Corps Reserve
13 Policy Board for three years at Headquarters Marine Corps. I got in where I was involved
14 in enlisted MOSs (military occupational specialties). It was interesting. It was a little
15 frustrating when I saw the bureaucracy trying to move some of the staff sections at
16 Headquarters Marine Corps, what I thought were logical decisions. It was a good way to
17 wind up a tour. I learned a lot about the Marine Corps. Some of the sessions were held
18 down in the Pentagon at SECNAV (Secretary of the Navy) offices. I even got called—I
19 retired on 1 July 1986 which gave me, actually it would have been a little longer than
20 thirty. It was thirty-one years, and then got called back by the Secretary of Navy to finish
21 out the fall term on the Policy Board.

22 JS: Okay. All right. What have you done—what do you do to occupy your time
23 now that you're retired?

24 MH: Well, in civilian life I've had a steel distribution company. At this stage of
25 the game, down to me and a part-time bookkeeper. At one time I had 250 people working
26 for me.

27 JS: Okay. All right. Well, before we wrap things up, I've got just some general
28 questions for you about your service in Vietnam and you can say as much or as little as
29 you like about these. Looking back on your experience, what do you think about your
30 experience in Vietnam and about US participation in Vietnam?

31 MH: I can go on for a long time.

1 JS: Take as much time as you'd like.

2 MH: I think we should have been there, number one. I'm glad I went because I
3 had a great job. Would have liked to have been there as a captain, as I've said. I probably
4 saw enough close ground combat to satisfy that. Not as planned, but as things turned out.
5 Militarily, we won that war. It was ridiculous. The three battles I was in, even though—
6 we inflicted tremendous casualties on the NVA. To go into the lighter part of it, I thought
7 at the time, even though I was up in the mountains and a long way from the ocean, I
8 knew we were not utilizing our main asset which was the Navy. I think if we had put a
9 blockade on Hai Phong in '65 or '66 instead of '72 the war would have been over in a
10 matter of a few years with far fewer casualties. The equipment that we captured, and we
11 got quite a bit of it on that twenty-first of August battle, was the weapons were Czech and
12 Polish. A lot of the equipment or their web gear, they didn't have web gear, they had
13 leather belts that smelled new. They had a very good supply system. It was all—it wasn't
14 Chinese, it was Russian, Czech, Polish. We found letters that had been postmarked seven
15 days before in Hanoi. It wasn't the Chinese that were resupplying. It was the Russians
16 and the East Bloc countries. I mean, I've read McNamara's book and he still doesn't
17 understand what happened. They were concerned about the Chinese, and the Chinese
18 were life-long enemies of the Vietnamese. To really get on my soapbox, just like I don't
19 think we read the history of Iraq, but we had people that didn't read the history of
20 Vietnam. My main thing is—Kennedy put out at blockade on the missiles going into
21 Cuba and the Russians backed off. I don't think the Russians would have done a damn
22 thing if we had had a blockade on Hai Phong. That's where the material was coming
23 from. It wasn't Chinese. They're Russian. Over the years the Chinese did send materials,
24 there's no doubt about that, but the bulk of it was coming from Eastern Bloc and Soviet
25 countries. That would have been very easy to cut off and we wouldn't have had to invade
26 North Vietnam. I think strategically it was wrong and diverting things like McNamara. I
27 read about the French and the Germans. That kind of thing didn't work. A lot of assets
28 went into that. Later, it didn't happen with me, when I was there like I said, we had very
29 few civilians. People were moving around. They were either our people or the enemy.
30 There was no problem with bringing in artillery, bringing in air. In other parts of Vietnam
31 there were. That was a different story. Then later my battalion had shortly after I got hit

1 they moved north up towards Con Thien and east back over towards Gia Linh over
2 towards Highway 1. They got—I've talked to the people that were there just months after
3 me. They would get hit from rockets and long-range artillery from the DMZ and north of
4 DMZ and couldn't call fires back in. I would have gone berserk with something like that.
5 I think we were right to be there. I mean, how many people fled South Korea to go north?
6 How many? Look at the tens of thousands that left North Vietnam to go to South in '54,
7 '55. I'm not saying that the South Vietnamese government was a democracy like New
8 England town meetings, but you had—we got almost sixty-thousand Vietnamese living in
9 Houston, Texas, including the last commandant of the Vietnamese Marine Corps who
10 worked for me for eighteen years. That's another story. That's a long-winded answer to
11 that question.

12 JS: That's perfectly fine. That's what we're looking for. Let me ask you this one.
13 What do you think about US policy towards Vietnam today?

14 MH: Well, I think—let me elaborate on that. There were eighteen of us,
15 including nine of us from 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, went back to Vietnam in '97 for two
16 weeks. We went to Hanoi because we were told by the travel agency it was politically
17 correct, but we spent most of the time—we tailored most of the two-week trip to be up
18 around the DMZ where we had all been before. We went out as far as Khe Sanh and Da
19 Nang and Chu Lai and we spent a couple of days in Saigon. The people that we saw, they
20 were all happy to see us, even ones that were obviously communists. I mean, everywhere
21 we went even though we had a Vietnamese interpreter who was a very sharp young man,
22 a history professor from Hanoi. They had a local. Some of them were obviously former
23 NVA and would eventually admit it. I didn't see any beggars. I saw a lot of people selling
24 things on the streets in Da Nang, but nobody begging. Even some of the bamboo huts out
25 around the Rock Pile had television sets in them. I didn't see anybody starving when I
26 was over there in '67, either, except some civilians that the NVA had pressed in to acting
27 as carriers for them. I mean, hell, we deal with China. We've dealt with the Russians.
28 We've dealt with other dictators, and I think we should open up as much as we can with
29 Vietnam. Although I attended a Vietnamese Marine anniversary three years ago here.
30 There were quite a few former US Marine advisors. My friend, the last commandant, if
31 he could get the transportation he'd lead the Vietnamese Marines back to Hanoi to take

1 over. There's a lot of Vietnamese Americans who don't think we should have anything to
2 do with the government, but I disagree with that.

3 JS: Mm-hmm. Okay. All right. Let's see. All right. What do you think about US
4 military—you touched on this earlier just a little bit, think about US military intervention
5 into countries, say, like Iraq and Afghanistan and all that?

6 MH: Well, I think the world is probably better off without Saddam Hussein, but I
7 think Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz totally underestimated and ignored history. I think it's
8 ironic that Obama is bringing this former Army chief of staff back as veterans who
9 correctly predicted we were going to need several hundred thousand after the initial
10 attack. All you have to do, I've got a couple of books about the end of World War I
11 where the Brits went in to Mesopotamia, Iraq, thinking that they had liberated them from
12 the Turks and within ninety days the Shias and the Sunnis were fighting each other and
13 were killing the Brits. They were out of there by 1921. There's a book. I've forgotten
14 who wrote it, *A Peace to End All Peace*. You read through it and it's like reading through
15 current events. There are the people who are supposed to know those things?

16 Afghanistan, that's the last place in the world I could imagine the Marine Corps ever
17 having gone. It doesn't use any of—Vietnam was the perfect place relative to
18 Afghanistan; long sea coast. I think we've got a big problem in Afghanistan. I think we
19 created a problem in Iraq. Not necessarily going in, but you know—you've opened up my
20 soapbox hear and you didn't want to hear it. The Marine Corps tactics in Vietnam, there's
21 a book written by General Krulak, Krulak the first. His son was later a commandant. But
22 Krulak the first was commanding general of FMFPAC (Fleet Marine Force, Pacific) in
23 the '60s. He got permission to go back and talk to Lyndon Johnson. He was against
24 Westmoreland's tactics of, that you could eventually kill off all of the enemy. He wanted
25 to keep the Marines in the populated areas, which was along the sea coast. The Combined
26 Action Platoons of the Marine Corps were quite successful, which is the same tactics that
27 the Marines used in Anbar Province, and Petraeus with the so-called surge. He put the
28 military out where the people are. That was a big—and Johnson saw Krulak but didn't
29 give him very much time. Salute to him and then ushered him back out. Marine Corps—
30 nobody should have ever been in Khe Sanh. Khe Sanh had no importance unless you
31 were going to go into Laos. It becomes very apparent when you go back thirty years later

1 with a chance to read it and analyze it. Number one, I think Vietnam could have been
2 successfully a democratic country like South Korea could have been achieved.
3 Apparently Nixon when he went to China—I've got a couple books—he and Kissinger
4 got the Chinese to say, "We won't help you, but we won't help the Vietnamese," in '72. I
5 feel—when Saigon fell I felt personal guilt. I really felt personally that somehow I had let
6 them down. When I see those pictures of the choppers taking off from the embassy I just
7 cringe. The politicians let us down. I don't know if they'll ever get out of Iraq honorably
8 or not. There was a Marine general—I'll think of his name in a minute—was
9 commanding general of Central Command. He proposed much larger forces going in and
10 he was relieved. I'll think of the name as soon as we hang up. I saw him last year at
11 Duke. He was a visiting professor of the business college. There was. There were people
12 who recognized that there was a religious problem, tribal differences. Iraq, really as a
13 nation, the Brits just drew a sand in the line, the lines in the sand, and called it a nation.
14 Afghanistan is an even bigger problem. I think we had more reason to go into
15 Afghanistan than we did Iraq, but for the same token, I'm terribly disappointed in George
16 Bush, but I think he made a mistake in not saying, "Well, Saddam Hussein. We didn't
17 find any weapons of mass destruction but he had the capability of making them. He made
18 them in that past. He used poison gas against his own people and the Iranians. He had the
19 capability and he could have done it again." I don't think he made that point to the
20 American people, which I think might have gotten him off the hook somewhat.

21 JS: Right. Yes, sir. All right. Well, just a few more questions. How do you feel
22 about the media's coverage of the war, the Vietnam War?

23 MH: Terrible. I thought it was terrible and it still is. I can still occasionally see on
24 TV, I don't think they—they never covered the good things, the successful pacification
25 efforts that remained. They always show the US forces as bombing the villes, killing
26 babies. I thought it was terrible. I won't buy *Time* magazine. I haven't bought *Time*
27 magazine since 1968. Where I was in the timeframe I was there, that was that portion and
28 that time in Vietnam. We were numerically outnumbered. You don't see that. It wasn't—
29 and we were not fighting farmers in black pajamas. That's not who we were fighting.
30 That part of history hasn't been told right. I had friends that were in Da Nang and then
31 with the Army down in the Delta. It was a different war. There were different aspects to

1 it. They didn't—Ho Chi Minh would have fought that to the last Vietnamese. I mean,
2 they call him a hero, which they still do at least in Hanoi. Where did all that come from?
3 Particularly in '72 and then again in '75 when they came down, they had surface-to-
4 surface missiles. They had tanks. Thank God I didn't have to face any tanks. Where did
5 all that sophisticated equipment come from? It came from the Soviets. It wasn't just
6 heroic Vietnamese farmers. I don't get many people in recent years of Iraq question me
7 about Vietnam, but years past, think of how many steel mills are in Vietnam? There's
8 one—I'm in the steel business now in civilian life—got maybe one reinforcing mill near
9 Phu Bai. Where did all that sophisticated equipment come from? It came in from outside.
10 I think it could have been stopped with a naval blockade.

11 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Well, just a couple more questions. How would you say, or
12 if it has, how has the war most affected you?

13 MH: Well, that's hard to say. I mean, I've already said several times my job
14 satisfaction throughout the Marine Corps was better than anything I've ever had in
15 civilian life for a lot of reasons. I felt like I had a good job in Vietnam and I was doing—
16 to go back to something that I hit on earlier, after I had been down in 3rd Battalion, 3rd
17 Marines for six weeks or so, orders came down for me to go back to division as civil
18 affairs officer. I was furious. The battalion commander said, "I don't want you to go, but
19 I can't do anything." So I requested to meet with the regimental commander. He said,
20 "Well, I'll save you for six months, but your last six months you'll probably be back at
21 division." Well, I got hit and went out on a hospital ship. I wanted to stay. I didn't like
22 seeing Marines wounded and killed, for sure, but basically I enjoyed my job. I felt like I
23 had trained for it for years and was utilizing the training. That's not a—I think about
24 Vietnam a lot. I think about the people. At one of the first reunions we had this guy
25 comes up to me and said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "Well, one, it's been twenty
26 something years." He said, "I shot the NVA that through the satchel charge at you." He
27 had been a lance corporal in India Company. I got all emotional and he started telling me
28 some things. I said, "Let me buy you a drink." I bought him a drink. I started thinking.
29 He's an attorney in Chicago now. I started thinking about that night. The next day I saw
30 him, I said, "Why in the hell didn't you shoot the guy before he threw the satchel
31 charge?" I said, "From now on you're 'Slow Draw,' so you've got the nickname Slow

1 Draw.” We stay in touch. He calls me. I call him. He’s had some health problems this
2 year, but he’s done a good job. He went to law school when he came back. There’s quite
3 a number of people. I think about them and we stay in touch. They call every once in a
4 while. That friendship means a lot. I would have to say if you add it all up, my experience
5 in Vietnam was positive. I didn’t like getting wounded. Not because it hurt, but it was
6 because I really would have liked to have stayed in that position longer.

7 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. All right. Well, is there anything else you would like to
8 say about your experiences before we wrap it up?

9 MH: We got off into a lot of minor details and some personal aspects, but no.
10 Like I said, I think militarily we won that war in Vietnam, but the politicians by
11 hamstringing us and with misguided policies kept it from coming to a satisfactory
12 conclusion. Having said that, you drive around Hanoi and see all the trucks delivering
13 Coca-Cola and Pepsi and you wonder who won the war. No, unless you’ve got something
14 else.

JS: All right. Well, let me go ahead and stop the recording and I’ll talk to you for
just a few minutes.

MH: All right.