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Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Patrick King  
Conducted by Mark Taylor  
February 13, 1990  
Transcribed by Mark Taylor

**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           Mark Taylor: My name is Mark Taylor. It is 4:08 on February 13, 1990. I am  
2 interviewing for the first time Patrick King. This interview is taking place at the office of  
3 Patrick King at 2406 Broadway. This is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project  
4 at Texas Tech University. The first thing I would like to ask you is, perhaps, how did you  
5 get into Vietnam? How did you initially get into the Marines?

6           Patrick King: Well, I went to college from 64-68, and of course the sixties was a  
7 really strange time. The war had been kicking off since '62. But nobody was really aware  
8 of it until 64 or 65. And I had been an air officer candidate, I'd been planning on flying  
9 since I was five years old. So, I had taken all my Navy tests. Since I was an air officer  
10 candidate, I was draft exempt as long as I maintained C's in college. Graduated from  
11 college in 1968. But because of the Tet offensive, the Navy and the Marine Corps  
12 especially lost a lot of pilots in the war, so the pipeline in Pensacola was full, and I could  
13 not get to Pensacola in September like I was supposed to; they were going take me in  
14 January. Meantime, the Army drafted me. Back then, you had no choice. They wanted me  
15 to go. I met a Marine Corps recruiter. I don't know if it was the best thing I ever did. I met  
16 a Marine Corps recruiter who said, "I can get you in," and I was the first and only officer  
17 that sworn in at Beauford, South Carolina, at the air station there. Went to Officer  
18 Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia. While I was there, Pensacola was still full. The  
19 Marine Corps was hurting for helicopter pilots especially. They gave us a big, huge

1 speech and they had this program to where they would hand pick four guys from each  
2 class that were air officer candidates, (usually about 20 in each class) and two would go  
3 to the Air Force and two go to the Army, get their Air Force or their Army wings, come  
4 out and get their Navy wings, and then go to Vietnam. All Marine Corps Officers are  
5 basically trained to be ground pounders too, which is different than other services, and I  
6 decided if I was going to be in the war, back at that time, helicopter pilots were looked at  
7 as really gutsy. In fact, even today, when you look at the air in Vietnam, there are all  
8 types of air, but the mystique of Vietnam is the helicopter. There's a thing about that. So I  
9 volunteered for helicopters much to my parent's terror, I guess. Got selected and went to  
10 Army Flight School in Texas in Mineral Wells then back to Hiram Air Field in Savannah  
11 Georgia. Went to Green Beret Jungle Survival School. Got my Army wings, went to  
12 North Carolina and trained in instrument training and got my Navy wings and got  
13 certified as co-pilot and then went to Vietnam.

14 MT: After getting to Vietnam, what were some of your initial impressions once  
15 you were in-country?

16 PK: Well, the tapes I was talking about earlier, (Mr. King has several tapes of  
17 personal narration during Vietnam) it's really kind of strange. You listen to the first tape,  
18 you have a 22 year old, very cocky young, 23 year old, very cocky young American and  
19 Marine Corps Second Lieutenant ...Naval Aviator, the best of the best, all that sort of  
20 thing. Couldn't stand Vietnamese. Interesting thing is, prior to going to Vietnam, I went  
21 and saw the movie "Woodstock." I went and we were not allowed to go, it was off limits,  
22 but I went anyway to watch and to see what was involved on both the peace protest  
23 marches, not as a participant, but just being there seeing it. I began to have grave doubts  
24 at that point about the war. Prior to that, I just wanted to be a pilot and get my wings and  
25 go fight in a war like John Wayne and the whole bit, like a lot of guys did. Raised in  
26 middle class American family, I felt it was my duty to do this sort of thing and never  
27 thought of evading the draft. This is where I get really kind of concerned and then to add  
28 on top of that is the fact that I was... the gold wings, the sports car, the wallet, the money  
29 in it. You know, walk into the bar, I wasn't a Christian at that time. Walk up to the bar,  
30 excuse my dearest, I'm not this tall, it's my wallet I'm sitting on, that type of attitude. All  
31 of a sudden, I have to pay for all that. College education, gold wings, dress blue uniforms,

1 the BOQ, the traveling in my own airplanes with my name on it. All that stuff, all of a  
2 sudden, I had to go in country and now Uncle Sam was saying, "Now I want you to pay  
3 for what you have done." This in my last tape, it's only 20 minutes long, the day before I  
4 left Vietnam, standing in my hooch overlooking the DaNang valley and the city of  
5 DaNang and the harbor and behind me is the mountains and Sherwood Forest and bad  
6 guy country. And I'm standing there next to my bunk and I'm the only one left in that area  
7 and my roommates were all gone. I was the fourth to the last Marine Corps officer to  
8 leave Vietnam. The Marine Corps left in April, they formed a thing called the 3rd Marine  
9 Amphibious Brigade. There were six officers and a hundred men, and I was the fourth  
10 from the last Marine officer to leave in country Vietnam proper. In this tape it's different.  
11 The voice sounds older and sounds tired, his whole view on life has changed, and if you  
12 listen to those tapes all the way through, it takes about 6 hours. You couldn't equate at  
13 first that kid and a guy a year older which lost his roommate, two of his best friends, and  
14 killed a bunch of people, seen a bunch of awful things and had it pretty easy in some  
15 ways too. That's basically my feeling for that time.

16 MT: You flew helos. What were your primary missions as a helicopter pilot in  
17 Vietnam ?

18 PK: I did two things in Vietnam. I started out from July of 1970 into February of  
19 1971, I flew in a squadron called HML 167 which was a Marine Light Helicopter  
20 Squadron 167. There are no longer HML's in the Marine Corps, they are called HMA's,  
21 Attack Squadrons, made of Cobras mostly, which is the skinny. The Huey gunship, the  
22 reason why I got in that squadron, I went to Vietnam trained as a medium lift helicopter  
23 pilot, big tandem rotor helicopter. When I got to Vietnam, they just lost, had two crashes  
24 in this Huey squadron ...and my orders came through and they said, "This guy is an Army  
25 trained pilot, he's got 150 trained hours in Hueys. He's already trained with the Army and  
26 worked with them and done a lot of liaison with them. Let's put him in this squadron." I  
27 walked in and I already had enough training. I wasn't prepared for what was going to  
28 happen, but I got in there and I flew. We had a number of different missions. Everything  
29 is fragged out of Saigon, the Air Force handles all the orders, in other words, you were  
30 told what you would fly. It wasn't one of these things where you would just get up in the  
31 morning and go fly whatever you want. We had missions we called Ass and Trash which

1 was just hauling people and gear, boring. Now flying gunships, we didn't haul the people  
2 and a Huey gunship was like a fighter plane. We had two 20-shot rocket pods on each  
3 side, two M-60 machine guns on each side, carried 8,000 rounds of 7.62 mm rounds, all  
4 tracers so you could see better at night, and we carried a mix in the rocket pods  
5 depending on the mission, usually half of Willie-P, White Phosphorous for spotting LZ's  
6 and things and half HE, High Explosive. Of course, the gun platform you are only doing  
7 140 knots in a dive so it wasn't a real stable rocket platform. I mean, anybody who could  
8 say they could put one in a windmill was really kind of blowing smoke because you had  
9 to be careful, you get pretty good at it, but even then you couldn't guarantee that you  
10 could hit this building from a mile away, because those rockets, they are designed to go  
11 off much faster, more like 200 knots. Their spin fins stabilize so the rocket kind of comes  
12 out and wobbles a little bit and then if you're low, 200 feet, 400 feet away, no telling. So,  
13 we flew gun cover if they were going out taking mail, taking troops or transferring guys,  
14 went out and covered like a fighter plane, a section or two and a wingman and a lead. The  
15 lead always ran the mission. A crew of four in each one, a door gunner, a crew chief, a  
16 co-pilot and a pilot. So we hauled gear for people and we did rocket belt VR's. We went  
17 out every morning and every night to look for North Vietnamese. When I was there, we  
18 were fighting very few Viet Cong. Where I was in I Corps was just right near the DMZ,  
19 down past Chu Lai, that is I Corps, down the Khe Sanh Mountains. Quang Nam and Thua  
20 Thien province in the Quang Chi province is where we were. Basically, we would look  
21 for those 122 mm rockets they were firing those big ones, and we would look for that and  
22 we would see guys in the open and we would greet them. Unfortunately, the interesting  
23 thing was that quite often, we were controlled by a unit called Da Nang Dask in Da Nang  
24 and we had a secure radio, it was a secure thing and we would call Da Nang Dask and  
25 say, "We got two gunners in the open. One of them is carrying the back section to a  
26 122mm rocket, they just *di di*'ed (*di di* means to move real quick), behind a pile of rocks,  
27 "request permission to waste them." They would say wait one and they would have to  
28 call the village chieftain in the local province and ask permission. Often, they would  
29 come back and say, "No you can't do it." We had ways of working with that. The crew  
30 chief, we would do this among ourselves, it wasn't pre-briefed in the open, it was all once  
31 you knew your crew. He would say "I've got a hang fire, sir." Then you would hear a

1 burst from his machine gun. "My weapon froze up on me, sir," and you would grease him  
2 and leave him. I had a friend one time that his roommate and him got a couple of them in  
3 the open and dropped their weapons and started to run and tackled them right outside the  
4 helicopter at 40 miles an hour, captured them both, which made everybody mad. Other  
5 guys would take their pistols and shoot them out their windows. Sometimes we would  
6 just leave. I've actually had times on rocket belt VR's where we would be orbiting the  
7 area and we couldn't get permission to shoot and there was too many villages around and  
8 too many people in the area and too many people on the radio net. We would fly by low  
9 and they would wave at us and walk off into the bush and usually the crew chief would  
10 flip them off and say we would get you next time. It was a game we both knew. I had  
11 great respect, always for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. I never, I hated some  
12 of the things they did, but even to this day I have great respect. They're just as tough as  
13 they come. I also believe that the Army that fought in Vietnam and the Marine Corps  
14 were the best that the country has ever had. I think we were very good at what we did. So  
15 we would do rocket belt VR's. We also did hunter killer teams, two gunships and a LOH,  
16 a small Hughes 500 aircraft called the LOH. We had a Marine Corps observer and an  
17 Army pilot and sitting in the backseat on the floor with a bungee cord and a M-60 would  
18 be the door gunner. And we would snoop and poop in an area. We had free fire zones  
19 where we dropped leaflets and got everybody out clear everybody out and they had these  
20 huge areas that might cover the size of Lubbock and they are marked in grids. You would  
21 take a hunter-killer team out and you just get in one corner and start flying down it,  
22 anything in there: birds, water buffalo, dogs, cats, men, women, children, any poor farmer  
23 left out there who didn't get the word, you grease them. You didn't have to ask for  
24 permission or nothing in a free fire zone. And those little LOHs would go out and snoop  
25 and poop and they would find a big rice cache and drop a C-4 grenade or any number of  
26 things in there and burn it up or blow it up with the C-4 or whatever it was they were  
27 using or a pyrotechnic grenade to get it caught or they would smoke it and we would hose  
28 it. Shoot up sampans in the river or stuff like that, that was another mission we did. Troop  
29 insertions, major assaults where Marine Corps would head out to Toulse towards Laos or  
30 that sort of thing and we would prep the area and cover them when they land and stick  
31 around for Medevacs afterwards. Another thing we did was work with recon teams. Our

1 recon teams were similar, people say they were similar to Green Berets in the Army.  
2 Green Berets worked more in the pacification program, worked in the hamlets with  
3 Popular Forces and kept it secure. Our recon team corresponds to the Army LRRP  
4 program. Specialized teams, radio operator, medic, sniper and all that. Their whole thing  
5 was to go out into the bush and do intelligence work. Not mix it up with them. We were  
6 dropping those guys in Laos at a time when you were not supposed to. They would brief  
7 us before the mission and say, "You're going into Laos today. We are asked for  
8 volunteers, and you just volunteered. If you crash in Laos, we will try to recover your  
9 body and dump it on the Vietnam side and tell your parents you were killed in Vietnam.  
10 If you do die and we can't recover the body, we'll say it was an accident and you drifted  
11 off course." We did not get air medals. To get an air medal, you have to get fired upon  
12 three times and return fire three times in a hazardous area. In missions in Laos, you didn't  
13 get those, it didn't count because you weren't supposed to be there. The President and  
14 Congress said you couldn't be there, but we were flying there all the time. I don't think it  
15 was wrong, we had to, that's where all the stuff was coming from, so that makes sense.  
16 And finally, the last thing we did and the most important, the scariest and the roughest  
17 was Medevac. Night Medevac and day Medevac. Medevac missions in the Marine Corps  
18 ran from six in the morning to six at night was one group and from six at night to six in  
19 the morning. There were three types of Medevac, emergency Medevac, guys close to  
20 dying, routine Medevacs where guys got bit by a snake or broke his leg and permanent  
21 routine where a guy was already dead. You save the permanent routine for the morning,  
22 as the other team comes on, we take off and go and pick up all the dead bodies. We don't  
23 pick them up, we flew gun cover for them. Medevacs were the most important because  
24 time was of the essence. In Vietnam, most of the area, we could get a guy from the point  
25 he got hit to the operating table in Da Nang at the most, 20 minutes, 30 minutes. A lot of  
26 times we didn't make it. The guy died. I've been on missions where the helicopter would  
27 get shot down and kill six people to save one guy that lost his foot. But, you can't send  
28 them out there unless you're willing to lose them. It worked for the Army too. I have great  
29 respect for Da Nang Dustoff. They didn't have gun cover and I've been in plenty of hot  
30 LZ's where we got our fannies shot off. A bunch of those guys would go in by

1 themselves. We would try to break off and cover them too. I tell you those guys were  
2 gutsy. They were just excellent. That's the kind of missions we flew.

3 MT: What was your general impression on how the war was run?

4 PK: ( A long sigh ) It's been quoted and it's true that we never lost a battle in  
5 Vietnam. There was never an engagement we didn't kick the fire out of them. I don't  
6 mean just like they would show up and kill some of us and then they disappear. We  
7 always kicked tail. The gunships were pretty awesome to the North Vietnamese and Viet  
8 Cong. They had great respect for them. They called them dragons and they hated them.  
9 But sometimes, you would get them in a corner and they would fight back. There have  
10 been accounts in my squadron where a guy came back in just totally out of it. "I caught a  
11 Viet Cong in the open today. The guy stood there with a single bolt rifle in the middle of  
12 a rice paddy firing at a gunship rolling in with all that firepower and just kept shooting  
13 until they cut him to pieces." You know they were awesome. They were dedicated. But, I  
14 didn't agree, but the interesting thing was that the Marine Corps had the pacification  
15 program that really worked, it was a thing we needed to do for everybody. People called  
16 the Marine Corps the killers. The Marine Corps came out of Vietnam smelling like a rose.  
17 Even though our mission is not ...the Marine Corps design of amphibious assault is to go  
18 far enough inland to secure a place where they can build a runway to let the Army come  
19 in. The Marine Corps spent 11 or 12 years in Vietnam with equipment that was designed  
20 for short time stuff. I was using a World War II .45 holster and cartridge belt and old  
21 weapons and things in Vietnam. Politically, a lot of books you read today, General Giap  
22 of North Vietnam, was the mastermind of Dien Bien Phu and the French and the Tet  
23 Offensive, I tell you the Tet Offensive was a major failure, as a military. Walter Cronkite  
24 has since recanted, he gave that famous speech "There is no light at the end of the  
25 tunnel," he has since then said in that Vietnam CBS series at the very end said, "I was  
26 wrong." But it was because of Walter Cronkite somebody said, who people respected,  
27 and other people and American people, as Giap said, the American people. There are a  
28 number of North Vietnamese who don't want to admit that happened, but Tet was a total  
29 failure. We destroyed almost 68% of the infrastructure of the Viet Cong and we destroyed  
30 almost 45% of the North Vietnamese capability. Had we continued on with the war, we  
31 would have stopped them. Also, never bombing the Red River dikes and basically

1 industrially shutting down North Vietnam. This idea, I don't believe Kissinger was as  
2 sharp as people think he was. This idea of negotiated peace, building off a major war, just  
3 doesn't compute. And then when the Church Amendment came out where it started  
4 cutting back our supplies, my Mother said, "isn't this great." I said, "Yea, we're fighting  
5 the same war with less stuff and less people and less equipment and guys are dying over  
6 this thing." We finally in this day and age separated the war from the warrior. The warrior  
7 was excellent, the war didn't make sense. Of course we were fighting a war that was very  
8 difficult, it was a guerilla war. You know, in the daytime, we owned it and at nighttime  
9 they owned it. We came inside our bases and shut down, locked our gates, put up our  
10 perimeters and sent Air Force Specter gunships out. We flew missions at night. Air Force  
11 did some bombing, did interdiction and artillery stuff all night long. Every night I would  
12 hear ka-bloom ka-bloom in the distance. When I came back to the States, it was one of  
13 those things I had a hard time sleeping the first couple of weeks because I couldn't hear  
14 it. I didn't hear helicopters go over. I couldn't hear the artillery all the time in the  
15 background. I think Westmoreland, all these guys that came out of the Korean, World  
16 War II Conflict, they had no concept of what was happening. I think we wasted a lot of  
17 people's lives. One of the things that was very clear was that even in your interviews, I  
18 can't tell you what Vietnam was like, only from the view of a Marine helicopter pilot,  
19 which is just one, small, tiny sliver of the whole picture of Vietnam. A riverine boat  
20 captain says, "Vietnam is this." No, that's what Vietnam was for him, that's his sliver. A  
21 grunt in the bush in the Central Highlands is one sliver. Now, you take all that, the war  
22 from 62-66 was a different war or 68 than the war from 68 to 72. Back with the Blues in  
23 the Central Highlands, an Army unit, those guys kicked tail and took names. I know  
24 you've heard of that expression before. Basically, it means to wipe a unit out where it no  
25 longer exists and take their name away from them. Well, the Highland Blues were  
26 awesome, guys who fought their first tours, the Blues, who were just beating up people  
27 wherever they went, came back after 68 and it was a different story altogether. It's a  
28 number of different wars, by a big global view. A cook in the Ia Drang Valley in the Iron  
29 Triangle, a radio operator on Hamburger Hill, a Marine at Khe Sanh, each could do an  
30 interview with you and say this is Vietnam but in reality that is just Vietnam for him.  
31 Vietnam is this huge kaleidoscope of things. I think we just didn't fight it correctly. I still



1 believe it was right. I can tell you some other time, my last day in Vietnam as I was  
2 getting ready to get in a jeep, and I stood on Highway 1 looking toward the north what I  
3 was thinking one time. But anyway, go ahead.

4 MT: He had a question. (can hear unknown person in background.)

5 Unknown Person: I was going to get your general impression. Was there a lot of  
6 corruption in the South Vietnamese government and did you believe you were fighting  
7 for an appropriate cause with that corruption or did you question it at that time?

8 PK: Yea, I questioned it a lot. As you know probably by doing some studying and  
9 reading, the average American soldier or officer had little or no respect for the  
10 Vietnamese Army, ARVN. It had great respect for the Vietnamese Marine Corps. I can't  
11 think of the name of the unit, but back in 1975, when the North came down in the South,  
12 there was a Ranger battalion of South Vietnamese which almost died to a man and took  
13 the North Vietnamese a number of days to get through to those people, some excellent  
14 individual units. But, by and large, I wouldn't give you a nickel for an ARVN soldier.  
15 They had the ascots and jungle boots and the shiny M-16's but they didn't want to fight. A  
16 lot of people say that Vietnam was a revolution, that it was uniting a common people.  
17 But, I don't agree with that. The people of the South and the people of the North are two  
18 different kinds of people. It's always been that way in their culture. They were only united  
19 by French colonialism. Now, I will say this. I believe our support of the French after the  
20 Geneva Convention after World War II, was wrong. To support colonialism back there,  
21 we shot ourselves in the foot and shot every guy on the wall in Washington DC in the  
22 back, in my opinion, by doing that. They had fought against the Japanese and all of a  
23 sudden war is over, they got their independence and Mi Ni Hoauc who was know as Ho  
24 Chi Minh, people like that. All of a sudden, we put the French back in and colonialism  
25 starts and there is no reason why they reason why they wouldn't hate us, because we  
26 betrayed them. But, that was our ally, you know, DeGaulle and all that kind of garbage.  
27 But, somehow in all this, as we did all this sort of thing, we missed the boat. Rephrase  
28 that question again. I want to make sure that I get the right answer.

29 UP: I was trying to get your general impression of the South Vietnamese  
30 government and if it was evident if they were corrupt or was it maybe they were kind of  
31 giving a bad light of them?

1           PK: I think it's a little of both. There was some bad press. There were excellent  
2 Army units and the Vietnamese Air Force did some wonderful stuff. You know, when the  
3 brothers were both killed, Madam Ngo's husband and his brother were killed and it says  
4 Kennedy was distraught when it happened. I'm not convinced Kennedy wasn't in on it  
5 when he allowed that coup. There's military coup after military coup, and they're found  
6 murdered in the back of an APC, and we didn't know about it? Either we were very stupid  
7 or we wanted to get rid of him. The whole thing with the Buddhists and this and that and  
8 our image and we were so worried what the world was thinking that we forgot we were  
9 fighting a war. We're funneling American soldiers in here and the South Vietnamese also.  
10 One of the difficulties is there is a whole different thing on hubris and pride between the  
11 American and them. To see, for example, a helicopter land in a bunch of villages. And  
12 these little kids, I'm talking about in the bush not in the cities, but out in the bush and see  
13 little kids and women terrified, out comes a guy six foot four, flight suit and helmet and  
14 visor down, carrying a M-60 on his hip. He takes his helmet off and his skin is black with  
15 big white teeth and a low voice. They didn't know what this guy was, he is a monster.  
16 There have been instances where in different areas where we ran into a lot of problems.  
17 The Marine Corps had less problems because we learned how to work with the people  
18 real well. But, if you're in an area and working with a Vietnamese unit, and you're a  
19 captain and he's a captain, they continually worry about losing face. Because you've been  
20 trained, we need to go over here, we need to be over here, call in some artillery support,  
21 get a Medevac and the captain says, "No I'm in charge, it's my country." This liaison,  
22 some people worked very well with it, the Green Berets worked excellent with it. The  
23 Marine Corps and their pacification program worked well with it. We would go into a  
24 village with what we called stars and Bars bring the Marine Corps Band, bring doctors in,  
25 bring in all this kind of stuff. We worked on getting the hearts and minds of the people,  
26 that was a big thing, the hearts and minds of the people. There were other times where we  
27 didn't do that. But, the South Vietnamese government was corrupt in my opinion. But,  
28 there were some good people in it too. Ironically, in Dallas I have some friends who own  
29 a restaurant who are Vietnamese. I have some friends here who are Vietnamese, and a  
30 friend of mine here is a doctor, Dr. Nguyen. He said at dinner this last spring, remember  
31 the guy in Saigon who was the Chief of Police who put the gun to the guy's head and shot

1 him? He lives in Dallas, the guy who did it. We sat at the table with Nguyen Cao Ky who  
2 was the Air Force general who later became president of the country and my friend sat  
3 between him and that guy. The whole table was all Vietnamese seen on TV who live in  
4 America now. Those guys are good at what they did. People don't realize that the guy  
5 who shot that man in the street. That guy was head of that sapper team that assassinated  
6 half this guy's family. There was a misunderstanding between the Vietnamese and the  
7 Americans. When he did that, his assumption was that the Americans would gripe about  
8 getting these guys out of here and cleaning them up. I've got one of them and I'll show the  
9 Americans our intent to fight, so he blows his brains out. What happens in America? Oh,  
10 how can you do this, it's cruel and unusual punishment. And on TV, here is Mildred  
11 Smith eating her casserole, her TV dinner, and all of a sudden this guy's brains fly out of  
12 the hole and blood starts spurting everywhere and she starts tossing her cookies and her  
13 lunch and her dinner. How can they do this? I think there were good ones and bad ones.  
14 Overall, there was no stable government from week to week and a lot of guys were  
15 getting rich. The warlord concept is very big in Asia, so they were getting rich. Whereas,  
16 the North Vietnamese were very dedicated. Nobody has anything. We're going to go  
17 down there and do it. I know one time I came home and from February I quit flying  
18 helicopters and flew C-117's, old DC-3 Dakotas modified as a flare ship. So I flew up  
19 north to rescue downed Air Force pilots. I came home, I lived in the old French fort in  
20 Da Nang Airbase. In my hooch, my mamason was huddled in the middle of the floor and  
21 she was crying and I walked in there and I had on my flight suit, my shoulder holster and  
22 my .45. You carried a gun everywhere, it was like a tool, it wasn't like a macho thing. It  
23 was like carrying a screwdriver or your wallet. I walked in the room and she didn't speak  
24 much English. I said, "Mamason, get up, what's your problem?" She's huddle. Whenever  
25 I got her, her face was black and blue and her nose was bleeding. And I picked her up,  
26 she didn't weigh but about fifty pounds, she was a little thing. Picked her up and put her  
27 on my bed and I said, "What on Earth is happening here?" "No can talk, no can talk, nun  
28 batin, nun batin," over and over again. "I said what is going on?" She said, "They beat  
29 me, they beat me." I said, "Who? The Americans?" She said, "No, no, no, No Americans.  
30 I can't talk. You must leave, dangerous." I walked out in the hallway and as I walked out  
31 into the hallway, I saw a Vietnamese boy about 16 years old. This will kind of tell the

1 whole story about corruption. About 16-17 years old Vietnamese boy, pair of nice slacks,  
2 pair of loafers, no socks and kind of a Aloha shirt on. He had some papers in his hand.  
3 Another kid down at the end of the hall about 17 or 18. They saw me and they froze. I  
4 didn't even think to take my pistol out. I was so mad. I had Mamason at my side and said,  
5 "Are those the guys?" She said, "Yea. Nun batin." I pushed her back in my room and  
6 closed the door. And I told them freeze. They started to run down the long hallway. I  
7 yelled at the top of my lungs "I've got a couple of gooners," I hate that word because it's  
8 racist, that's what we called them zips or gooners. "I've got gooners in the hallway." The  
9 guy at the end of the hall throws open his door and comes out with his .45 and this time I  
10 pulled my .45 out. We locked and loaded on these guys, and they freeze. But, they froze  
11 right next to a doorway and zipped out the door. We were both standing there, Jesus.  
12 They got nabbed right outside the door by a couple of other guys who heard us yelling.  
13 Grabbed these guys and went back in and took a shower. Got my mamason cleaned up  
14 and sent her home. Got my jungle clothes on and walked out and my roommate came in  
15 and said you need to be out in the compound, the General is out there right now. Walked  
16 out and these two guys were handcuffed to a flagpole. All the officers, all the troops who  
17 weren't on duty. Here was the Headquarters of Marine Corps Air of Vietnam. Three star  
18 general named Armstrong. The Chief of Staff, everybody was there. My boss calls me  
19 over, a colonel, Chief of Staff and says, "Did you see these guys beat up your  
20 Mamason?" I said, "Yea, yea, you'll get a full report tomorrow." Gates open up, in comes  
21 two South Vietnamese tanks, two Deuce and a Half trucks and a jeep. In the jeep dressed  
22 up is this elite battalion of air cav, armor type guys, South Vietnamese Army, gold ascots  
23 I think with a pin on it of some kind. A little short guy gets out, a general. I'm standing  
24 there you know and they call everyone to attention. Up the flagpole comes the American  
25 flag, right next to it the Vietnamese flag, the Marine Corps flag and something else. He  
26 comes up, looks at the flagpole, spits on these guys, walks over to the general and starts  
27 apologizing with his interpreter. These guys are both Viet Cong infiltrators. They were  
28 putting pamphlets and putting drugs in people's lockers to discredit officers and all this  
29 kind of jazz. Our general says hey we're sorry but what can we tell you? This guy asks for  
30 these two kids. Our General says, "What are you going to do to them? That's my  
31 problem." Got this major standoff between my General, who's already called Washington

1 and already talked to the Pentagon and the Marine Corps, the Air Force and everyone and  
2 his mother. "What are we going to do with this guy?" To make a long story short, he  
3 says, "I want to make sure these guys get treated, this guy says they will be treated under  
4 South Vietnamese law." Well, come to find out, that one kid was that General's son. I  
5 don't (know) if that's true or not but that's what came out later. Our General says, "OK,  
6 take them." They pull up the Deuce and a Half to the flagpole, it's hotter than all blazes  
7 out there, 95 degrees and the humidity's real high. They untie these kids and these are all  
8 really tough elite Army types with spit shined boots and everything. They pick these kids  
9 up and throw them back of the Deuce and a Half and their heads hit the back, oh man it  
10 was sick. Beat them up inside this truck and drove off. They found their bodies in the  
11 canal the next day, they were murdered. That General was sacked, kicked out. Half the  
12 staff was fired and discredited. So, a lot of problems that way. This is a particular story of  
13 something I saw.       **END OF TAPE . START REVIEWING AGAIN HERE.**

14           UP: I have one more question. Where you involved in Tet? "Much has been  
15 written about Tet and its strategic surprise.

16           PK: Tet was January 68 and February 68. I got there in summer of 70. I've read a  
17 lot about and talked to a lot of people about it but wasn't there. My personal opinion was  
18 that they knew for quite a while. They just didn't know what it was. They never  
19 anticipated that the North Vietnamese would move into the country with what they  
20 considered to be 25% of their forces. That all the locals would join them and make a  
21 people's army and push them into the ocean. They also were not aware, interesting  
22 enough, Saigon was caught completely by surprise. I mean there at the US embassy. It  
23 was a big face losing thing. As far as the Vietnamese were concerned, it was terrible. The  
24 Marine Corps recovered very quickly. The bloodiest fighting was in Hue Phu Bai and  
25 securing Da Nang. But, I think the Marine Corps and different Army units and  
26 intelligence units had been writing all along, let's get our act together, something coming  
27 down. But in Washington, they wouldn't believe it. It did more damage from a morale  
28 point of view than it ever did strategically. Strategically, it was the major victory for  
29 American forces in Vietnam. All the books say so nowadays.

1 MT: I guess the final question here is what effect do you think Vietnam had on  
2 both the country from the end of Vietnam to now and also maybe in possible relation to  
3 the United States policy toward Central America?

4 PK: Oh yea, We had never been in a situation like that. I served two tours in  
5 Vietnam. I was on the team that went to North Vietnam in '73 to bring the POW's out of  
6 Hanoi. I was on the [?] took helicopters and stuff. The reason why I went back on that  
7 mission, I came back to the States as a flight instructor. I couldn't stand living back in the  
8 States. I never got spit on, but I got treated very rudely. I got off the airplane in 1971,  
9 June. It was raining at Travis Air Force Base. It was pouring rain. I was the only officer  
10 on board, it was myself and 120 enlisted men. The sign says, "Welcome home soldier,  
11 America is proud," was broken and banging against this window of this building. Two  
12 jerks that were Sergeants were there to receive, get them in a room, these guys were all  
13 wet, no umbrellas, nothing, had to walk 50 yards off a airplane in the rain. Supposed to be  
14 in their uniforms, that is all they had. Were told they couldn't go out into the street unless  
15 they cleaned up, that was a joke. Sat there in the front seat of this thing, wet myself. It  
16 was Army and Marines, they had all their orders. These two guys were smoking  
17 cigarettes leaning against the wall and finally I walked over to them, I was a Lieutenant at  
18 the time and I said, "What time does this show go on the road?" He said that we don't go  
19 except on the hour, it's 20 minutes to go. I said do it now. I was angry. I think I would  
20 have beat the garbage out of them and gone to jail for it. I said, "Get your behinds up  
21 there." That's exactly what I said. "Get this thing going." "We'll talk to our officer and  
22 get a Second Lieutenant." I said, "Listen jerkweed, get up there," then went up there and  
23 got this Captain, who outranked me and said, "Who do you think you are?" I said, "I've  
24 got 130 men here," and none of these guys that were doing this were Vietnam Veterans.  
25 You could tell by the ribbons they wore. They didn't even have their highway ribbon,  
26 International Defense Ribbon. This really made me mad. I said, "These men are waiting,  
27 if I have to go call someone in Washington, I'll do it, let's get going." Then the whole  
28 attitude of cab drivers is this big shot coming to America. I got in an airplane one time  
29 and was in uniform and some drunk was on board and gave me a bunch of flak. He  
30 started mouthing off to the stewardess, so I reached over and grabbed him by his tie and  
31 pulled the back part of his tie and pulled as tight as I could get it. I said, "If you don't shut

1 your face, I'll shut it for you." I carry this anger around. Went home and my family, today  
2 if you talk to them, everything we could do wrong to a returning vet, we did. Forget about  
3 the war, I'm sitting there in my first night home and I've got a cut in my hand that I got in  
4 a helicopter door, it wasn't even healed yet. I still had sunburn and some skin problems  
5 from Vietnam. Still had, in the shower, you know it takes some time to get that red dust  
6 off you. To me, Vietnam was right there behind my shoulder, it was my family that  
7 wasn't. The American people just despised the soldier so bad and the war. Girls wouldn't  
8 go out with me because your hair was short and you killed people, especially if you were  
9 a Vet, especially if you were a volunteer. It was just to be in America. I haven't seen the  
10 movie "Born on the Fourth of July." I can watch Vietnam movies, I thought "Platoon"  
11 was great. But I can't stand to watch a protest movie without getting mad. I hate to hear  
12 people say bad things about my friends who died an all this kind of jazz. I believe that  
13 the War Powers Act to me is unconstitutional. But because the power of Vietnam is so  
14 strong, they won't repeal that. I think our government is deathly afraid to get back  
15 involved in something like that. That is why I think the thing in Panama was good. It  
16 shows you can do it right. It was right. Get in there. To do a night airborne assault and it  
17 come to that, for anybody who's had military experience it's awesome, awesome thing. To  
18 lose a few casualties, it's awesome. That was clean. Of course, all those folks were all  
19 elite, 82nd Airborne, 101st Airborne, Marine Recon, Special Forces, it was all top people.  
20 They knew what they were doing. But America has gotten snake bit by this thing, and it  
21 tempers everything we do. You know what I mean [?] in Vietnam. I never saw too many  
22 Congressmen's sons or Senator's sons in Vietnam. Lieutenant, uh Captain Robb, who was  
23 Lyndon Johnson's son-in-law, was in Vietnam when I was there. So I never saw, I never  
24 knew any Congressmen's sons, any rich guys' sons in Vietnam. They weren't there. But  
25 those were the guys who were all the time griping back in the States about it. So I think  
26 we, they're so deathly afraid of our national image we lost the war in Vietnam. But what's  
27 happened is the Vietnam Wall being built, in fact I met the fellow who was responsible  
28 for it, Jan Scruggs. He was here and he autographed this book I got, The Wall, and Jan  
29 autographed it, "Many thanks to a fellow Vet." They walked up to a table, Vets know  
30 Vets. I walked up, you can tell who is trying to me. I said, Jan, Pat King. I said I was  
31 with the Marines in so and so and so and so. We talked for about an hour just about life

1 and things in general. That was a powerful thing. We finally after all those years, when  
2 Veterans went into hiding. A whole bunch of Vietnam Veterans groups tried to get  
3 together in the 70's and 80's, but it never worked because there was no common  
4 acceptance like the Legion and all that, the Legion didn't want you. Because of the fact of  
5 the World War II and Korean guys were winners and you are losers. Well now, all the  
6 history has come out and all this writing and all this stuff is happening, and all of a  
7 sudden it's dawned on people, hey these guys were good at what they did. They did what  
8 their country asked them to do. There is a separation between what these guys did and  
9 what happened. That's been amazing. Now there are only two or three Vietnam Vets  
10 groups that are strong. The strongest are the aviation groups, they're very strong, I don't  
11 know why. The government, I believe, has never known how to handle the situation.  
12 How can you lose something? If you look at all these videos and things, a lot of these  
13 guys were Secretary of Defense and Ambassadors, have tried somehow to separate their  
14 involvement with what happened. Somebody messed up, it's obvious that Lyndon  
15 Johnson wasn't a very strong guy. As much as I thought Richard Nixon was kind of a  
16 crook in some things, General Giap said they were terrified when Nixon took over as  
17 President, justifiably so. When I got to North Vietnam, in the spring of 1973 in February  
18 '73, and went to Haiphong Harbor, I tell you a little secret I don't think many people  
19 know about. When we went there with the ships, the head of the minesweeping  
20 detachment was a guy named Art Buker who was the captain of the Pueblo. Remember,  
21 they got captured by the Koreans and there was a big scandal. One night in the officer's  
22 club in Subic Bay in the Philippines, there is a big officer's club, there is a small officer's  
23 club for the single guys and it was rowdy, I mean we're talking rowdy. My roommate,  
24 Pete Ferris said that I want you to meet somebody standing over by the bar having a drink  
25 he says, "This is Art Buker." He said, "This is my roommate, Pat King," and another  
26 friend from the ship, Randy. We sat there and drank and played pool, I got to Art Buker  
27 pretty well, terrific guy. We went into Haiphong harbor in February and Art Buker led the  
28 squadron of three minesweepers to clear a path for our carrier. And Art went in there and  
29 we got it all clear and the Navy jerked him off and kicked him out of the Navy and put  
30 another guy in there and the headlines said the other guy's name. That's typical of the  
31 military. Art Buker was embarrassed, you see, he was a loser. He did everything he was



1 supposed to do, but he didn't sink a ship or die with his ship which is Navy tradition. A  
2 lot of guys didn't do that, but Art embarrassed America. The American forces  
3 embarrassed America supposedly. That was the big excuse. All they were was a bunch of  
4 dopers. These guys were guys like me and you. I didn't smoke dope in Vietnam. I drank a  
5 lot but that doesn't make me better than anybody else. But they were just guys like your  
6 Dad, my Dad, me, you, people in the street, people you know at Tech, your professors,  
7 average guys doing a very strange thing called war and combat. All the movies where the  
8 guys were kind of wierd and freaking out, I had a crew chief who was like that. I took  
9 him almost at gunpoint out of my helicopter. I got out of the helicopter and took his gun  
10 out of his hand. My crew chief took his pistol out and held it on him, the guy was strung  
11 out on drugs. I got him kicked out; he was gone. We can't have guys like that. For most  
12 guys it was just nine to five, just gutting it out. Combat is not just getting shot at one time  
13 and surviving, combat is doing day after day, just doing it and trying to keep from losing  
14 your mind. I think the American people saw in themselves what Shakespeare wrote, they  
15 saw the animal underneath. How you can train men, your next door neighbor, Billy,  
16 shoots an eight year old kid in the head, blows his head clean off his shoulders on  
17 national TV. The kid had C-4 strapped around his waist and was going to blow up  
18 something. They used to take crushed fiberglass and put it in Coke bottles and guys  
19 would drink it, get a hemorrhage and die. Someone comes running out of a hooch, what  
20 do you do? It isn't like a line with all the Germans lined up with tanks, you don't know  
21 who it is. I've killed women and children. I will say this, Lieutenant Calley (referring to  
22 My Lai) by and large most soldiers I knew at the time did not condone what Calley did,  
23 line up a bunch of kids and women and shoot them in a ditch was wrong. But to be firing  
24 on a village, it's a mute point. There is a village, a big fire fight going on, you go in and  
25 you blow it up with one bomb, you kill women and children, is there a difference? Yea.  
26 One thing I ought to comment about is when Jane Fonda went to North Vietnam I was in  
27 Vietnam when she did that. And that picture came out with her in that gun thing, there  
28 were guys who were volunteering to take their gunship and go get her. I knew guys who  
29 would fly to Hanoi in a Huey gunship and hose Jane. To this day, I will not watch her in a  
30 movie, I don't care about her exercise videos and I think she is a waste and I think she is a  
31 traitor. She made a big apology last year to apologize to the soldiers. The guys said Jane,

1   you're a jerk. Not saying that Jane is a jerk, two different points of view, but I believe that  
2   the American people because of their fear and disgust and their dread of what they saw in  
3   themselves, sold a whole generation of men. One thing about Vietnam that was different  
4   than World War II was that the average age in World War II was 27, Korea like 23 or 24  
5   and Vietnam, 18, 17, 18, 19. It's different seeing all that at that age. But, I think , what  
6   happened down in Central America, we're so afraid of committing ourselves. George  
7   Bush did us a favor with the Panama thing. We can do it, and nobody in America  
8   sweating it, even the liberals aren't sweating it. This Nicaragua thing, everyone knows  
9   Noriega is a crook, but it's kind of "in" to still have that liberal image. So I guess that's  
10  how I'd answer that question, I guess.

11           MT: I guess that's about all the questions I have. I appreciate you doing this for  
12  us.