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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Michael Garemko
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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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 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History interview with
2 Mr. Michael Garemko. Today is 10 September 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the
3 campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. Garemko is joining me by telephone from
4 Duluth, Georgia. Mr. Garemko, to begin this interview, I'd like to get some biographical
5 information from you if I could. Can you tell me when you were born and where?

6 Michael Garemko: I was born January 25th, 1949, in Middletown, Connecticut.
7 Halfway between Hartford, halfway between New Haven, and halfway between New
8 York and Boston. So it's in the middle of everything.

9 KC: Yes, my wife is from that part of the country. What were your parent's
10 names?

11 MG: My dad was Michael Sr., and my mother was Adele.

12 KC: Now, what did your parents do for a living up there in Connecticut?

13 MG: My dad was a sign painter. Actually, he did all kinds of—he was a complete
14 sign craftsman. He could letter and do gold leaf and worked in neon and did it all. He had
15 considerable art talent. He painted the nose art on his bomber in World War II and did all
16 the jackets for his crew, one of which is in the 8th Air Force Museum. So he was a very
17 talented man. My mom was a clerical worker. She worked at the hospital for many years
18 in Middle Town and went onto work for the state of Connecticut in their hiring
19 department and purchasing.

20 KC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

1 MG: I have a sister who's two years older than I am and she did not go to college.
2 She ended up going to work right out of high school in clerical roles and became an
3 executive secretary overtime. Eventually, married my best friend in Germany, who
4 became an attorney and they're doing fine in Albany, New York.

5 KC: You mention that your father was in World War II. Did he ever talk to you
6 about his experiences in the war?

7 MG: Yeah, he sure did. But not in the way that I would have liked it. It was kind
8 of a superficial view of the thing. He was in the 100th Bomb Group in Great Britain and
9 his recollections were never very detailed. They were always very general in nature and
10 so it was very difficult. I had a very deep interest in what his war experience was, and I
11 would try and probe that, but I could never really get him to open up on it. He gave me
12 little anecdotes that were interesting, but I tried to learn more, especially now that he's
13 gone, about his service and just I'm fascinated with that whole era and what that
14 generation was able to do. I've always loved airplanes, particularly World War II
15 airplanes. It's a lifelong advocacy of mine.

16 KC: What was life like growing up there in Connecticut? What sort of things did
17 you like to do? What was your home life like? Anything that comes to mind.

18 MG: Well, you know, it's interesting. I grew up across the street from a good-
19 sized pond. So the pond was my playground. I was a little bit of a childhood biologist,
20 you know, catching frogs and turtles and fish of all description. There was always
21 something to do at the pond. You know, throw bottles in or shoot them with BB guns. No
22 telling what kind of mischief I would get into with my friends. I was one lot away from
23 my school yard and that was the center of our neighborhood, so baseball was always
24 being played in the school yard. It was really kind of an idyllic boyhood setting. We lived
25 in a duplex house; my parents owned it. Ostensibly it was a pretty interesting and a good
26 place to grow up. You know, Middle Town is home of Wesleyan University and so there
27 was always the presence of the college students in the town and the sense that there was a
28 bigger and greater thing out there. I almost, from the very beginning anticipated that I'd
29 be going to college when the time was right and had that clearly in my focus. My parents
30 had a hard time of it and eventually separated and divorced. I was about fourteen when
31 they finally did split and that was right at the beginning of my high school years. I never

1 could make determination which of my parents was in the right and which was in the
2 wrong. So I always maintained objectivity in that direction. So it was a bit of a struggle. I
3 love both my parents and I did care about how things went. I felt bad for my father
4 because he was really cast out of the family and yet I knew he deserved that because it
5 had been a tough time for him and my mother. You know, if anyone was at fault it was
6 my father, but I think a lot of that was what in today's world we would call Post
7 Traumatic Stress. I can understand it a lot better now and I think almost anyone would
8 understand it better now. He'd have a hair trigger temper and he wanted things the way
9 he wanted them and if he couldn't get them that way it'd just cause him all sorts of
10 anxiety that caused difficulty. My mother was not a difficult person to get along with by
11 any means, but she was going to stand her ground when she thought something was
12 wrong. So they had their difficulties.

13 KC: Right. Well, that certainly must have been tough on you and your family for
14 sure.

15 MG: Yeah. Well, it's seminal. I mean there's a lot of things that float from that.
16 When you get to be sixty-two years old, sixty-one years old you can look back on your
17 life and you can see where some of the gravity that gets exerted in your orbit, you can see
18 where that had an impact. Certainly—we all thought that *Leave it to Beaver* was what
19 was out there, and it just wasn't true for a lot of people. I had cousins who did have that
20 *Leave it to Beaver* life extensively. You know, from the outside it looked like some of my
21 cousins were just living the life of Riley. So we always did kind of feel like the part of the
22 family that had more challenges, I guess.

23 KC: Growing up there in Connecticut, you mentioned off the record a moment
24 ago that you worked at Pratt and Whitney for some time. Obviously, a pretty big contract
25 there, making engines, etc. What do you recall about the larger goings on in the world? In
26 terms of the US role in the world, Cold War. You're growing up in the 1950's and the
27 1960's, what do you remember about the Cold War?

28 MG: Well, my father was always, always attentive to public affairs. I would
29 characterize him as a citizen. He probably read five of these papers a day back then and
30 he was always aware of what was going on and so I was always aware of what was going
31 on. He'd listen—there was a radio show on the weekends only on the 50,000 watt station,

1 it was monitored. I think CBS was the network that produced it. It was like a variety
2 news show that went on all day on Saturdays. I can remember him lettering out in the
3 garage. He'd do these moonlighting jobs and he'd have this monitor on and I'd be sitting
4 there watching him paint signs. We'd be talking about politics. I'd be a kid maybe ten
5 years old and I knew who J. Edgar Hoover was and I knew who William Fulbright was. I
6 always was aware of what was going on in my political environment. My dad was—I
7 shouldn't say obviously, but probably typically a Democrat. There was a time of
8 Kennedy and Nixon, and I was aware of all of that. Not only aware, but I had partisan
9 thoughts. It was baked in at a very early age for me. I absolutely loved Jack Kennedy. I
10 thought—he was a rock star to me. When he said, "Bare any burden, bare any price." I
11 really thought that was right. We had the Berlin Crisis had occurred and then we moved
12 into the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis and all of those things I watched unfold
13 and understood them. For a teenager or a preteen, I think pretty—you know, pretty much
14 in depth. I remember when Nixon and Kennedy debated, I kept a notebook of the debate
15 sitting there. I got what the questions were and what their responses were. I lived about a
16 mile from the main street of Middle Town, and I would ride my bike downtown and I'd
17 go to the Democratic headquarters, which was—Main Street, Middle Town is probably
18 about a mile long and I would go to the Democratic Headquarters, which is at the
19 opposite end, so it was a two-mile bike ride. I'd get bumper stickers and I'd go down
20 Main Street and they had parking on Main Street, and I put the Kennedy bumper stickers
21 over the Nixon bumper stickers as I was going down the street. Then I'd get to the
22 Republican headquarters which was on the south side of town, and I would braisonally go
23 in there and harass them. They had a little sixth grader come in and I'd have all these
24 Kennedy buttons all over my sweater and they'd say, "What are you doing in here?" I'd
25 debate. So the answer is I've always been very, very aware of my political environment.
26 You know, I don't get fooled very easily. I know what's going on in the world and I
27 knew what was going on in Vietnam. I was aware of it. I remember the Lei Ocean
28 discussion in the Kennedy, Nixon debate. I remember talking about Fumoi and Matsu,
29 the two islands off the shore of Hermosa that were important considerations in that
30 presidential campaign. What was Kennedy going to do with Quemoy and Matsu? That

1 area was being discussed in 1960 and not Vietnam, but certainly Laos and to a lesser
2 extent, Cambodia. Ultimately, we were led into the Vietnam debacle. I was aware.

3 KC: It sounds like you were very aware for a young kid. That's truly amazing.

4 MG: Yeah, I just was. I don't know why, but it's always been there for me.

5 KC: Alright, so you're armed with this kind of background. What was your
6 performance in school like? How well did you do in school?

7 MG: Well, as I said, my parent's split right when I was a freshman in high school,
8 and I was going to a private Catholic school that was just starting up. We were filling the
9 school, so I was always a senior. You know, the freshman class was recruited and then
10 the sophomore class was added and then the junior class was added. As we moved along,
11 we became the seniors and graduated. We filled the high school. It was staffed by the
12 Xaverian Brothers who were a very academic group, and it was right at the time of the
13 Vatican Council. So this was a time when giants walked the world. Pope John XXIII was
14 revolutionizing the Catholic Church. You had activities going on in Europe and Germany
15 and in the Soviet Union. It was just an incredible time. Martin Luther King was leading
16 the Civil Rights Movement. There was so much change going on in America that I was
17 awfully interested in what was going on. I didn't pay as much attention to my schooling
18 as I should have. I was a pretty bright guy, but I did okay. I probably was a B student
19 when it was all sorted out, but we were homogeneously grouped in this high school. I was
20 in the top group and holding on at the bottom of the top group with my fingernails. Very
21 bright guys in my class. I mean, they were moving a little faster than I probably would
22 have. In high school you're picking up basic knowledge. You pick up math skills, science
23 skills, and historical context. I could get A's just by reading a chapter in history because I
24 intuitively understood it. That kind of analogy to hear to my intellectual framework, but if
25 I had to learn something in Latin—I can remember trying to learn Latin and just
26 struggling and not being able to do it. I mean, I just couldn't martial the discipline to sit
27 down and just study the vocabulary and learn the declensions and the conjugations and I
28 just couldn't do it. So if it required study to play the game, I was not very good at it. So
29 math was never a strong point, the earth sciences were good because they were kind of
30 intuitive. Chemistry, not good, counterintuitive. I learned the things I wanted to learn and
31 didn't bother with the things I didn't care about. I inherited some of my father's artistic

1 talent and so I was kind of noted as a pretty artistic guy in our class. I guess I could draw
2 pretty well, but I wasn't all that intellectually creative. I was just a good draftsman. So
3 that was where I was at. I doubted my academic skills always, always. I never thought of
4 myself as being academically proficient in any way.

5 KC: Hmm, strange. With the awareness that you had and the intuitiveness that
6 you had, these topics, these subjects, that you would doubt your abilities there.

7 MG: Well, you know what's interesting? I thought about this a lot. I thought that I
8 wasted a hell of a lot of time trying to learn stuff that I never was going to use or be good
9 at. If I could have majored in political science, public affairs, and history starting from
10 sixth grade, and learned enough math to do scientific studies and polls and that sort of
11 stuff, I would have been equipped for life. And I would have much further along by the
12 time—I probably would have avoided Vietnam if that had been available. If there had
13 been a charter school for public affairs and citizenship. I would have gone into that and I
14 would have loved it. I didn't really care about Algebra II or quantitative analysis or
15 physics. And I was taking all those courses and I hated them. "I'm not going to learn this
16 stuff."

17 KC: There may have been something wrong with you if you did enjoy
18 quantitative analysis as a sixteen year old boy.

19 MG: (Laughs) Exactly, and I had friends who did, which was very disturbing.

20 KC: All right. With all of this background, what did you want to do when you
21 were finished with high school? What did you want to be when you grew up?

22 MG: Well, I was just telling my son this the other day. I sort of thought I could
23 make a good architect because I had good draft skills. I mean, I could draw almost
24 anything I saw. I thought that—I liked looking at buildings and my dad had taken me to
25 see Eero Saarinen's hockey rink at Yale and I realized that architecture was a big,
26 important thing and I just gave it up. I had an art teacher and he'd gone to Brown, this
27 smart guy. We were talking and he said, "What do you want to do, Mike?" I said, "Well,
28 I was thinking about architecture." He said, "Well, how are you in math?" I said, "I'm not
29 too good." He said, "You've got to make your buildings stand up." And he said, "You
30 really have to buckle down and do the math." And that just scared me, so I never pursued
31 that. I went out to school, almost as an artful dodge. I went into the industrial design

1 program at Syracuse, and it was a five-year professional program and when you
2 graduated you were an industrial designer. I didn't even know what any of that meant. I
3 just did it. I had terrible guidance. I think what it was, was that our guidance department
4 was paying attention to the guys who were getting scholarships and going to Harvard and
5 Yale. Here was this guy at the bottom of the top class and we've got to get him off to
6 school somewhere, but we were not going to put a lot of time into him because he's not
7 going to get scholarships and he's not going to bring honor and glory to the school. So I
8 just kind of went off to school really foolishly and stupidly doing things. I mean, I should
9 have known better. My mother could not afford to send me to Syracuse. I don't know
10 where I got that idea that I could do that. I could have easily gone to the University of
11 Connecticut at that point. Admission standards were much lower, and I got accepted. I
12 had lots of friends who were going to U Conn. My best friend went there, and I would
13 have been happy there if I'd really done that, but I could never—I don't know, I was
14 trying to impress my now wife, then girlfriend. I thought that going to Syracuse was a big
15 deal. So off I went on bank loans and just made a terrible mess of it. Terrible, terrible
16 mess of it. I was doing the wrong thing, learning the wrong things and it just wasn't
17 meant to be.

18 KC: You say you were doing the wrong things and approaching it properly. What
19 sort of things were you doing wrong do you think?

20 MG: Well, first of all I had no commitment to art. I had no real fire in the belly to
21 be an industrial designer. In the art school, I remember the freshman convocation, we
22 went into Crouse College which is a brownstone building on campus. They had an
23 auditorium and the dean of the art school got up there and said, "Look to your left, look
24 to your right. One of the people of you three will not be here when we finish up." And I
25 said, "Boy, those poor schmos, they're not going to make it." I didn't realize that they
26 were looking at me.

27 KC: But you were one of those poor schmos.

28 MG: Yeah, but it was very competitive. It was rigorous in art. I was not prepared
29 for that. I was nowhere near the artist that my contemporaries were. I remember going to
30 figure drawing class and it was a three-hour studio. It was on the top floor of this old
31 rickety building, and it had these skylights so that there was good lighting in the studio. I

1 walked in the door and there's this nude woman standing there with a bunch of benches
2 around her. Immediately they sent you down to the bookstore to get a great big newsprint
3 pad and vine charcoal, and you started sketching the minute you walked in the door. I had
4 never even—I never filled up a page as big. I guess these were about twenty-five to
5 thirty-inch pads. I'd never filled the page that big. I mean, my drawings were always
6 much smaller, on a much more modest scale. I had to learn to think in a much bigger
7 plane and to imagine the subject matter in a much broader way. It was a huge adjustment
8 for me. I was not good at it. It took me a long time to figure out how to readjust and get to
9 the point where I could make good, three-minute pose pictures and capture the essence of
10 what was out there in front of me. What I learned from all of that is that art isn't about
11 your hands, it's about your eyes. It's what you see and allowing your hands to interpret
12 what you see without being overcome with what you think you know. Because when
13 you're drawing, you think that you have this image of what the world is like. So that
14 image kind of creeps into what you're trying to draw. You have to fight that the whole
15 time. You have to pay attention to, "How is the light really striking that cheek? What's
16 happening in that eye, what defines the eye?" And you know, "Don't draw it by outline,
17 draw by its shadow and how its shadow gets presented." All of that kind of learning has
18 to happen. Most people, when you get to a professional level art school, have that under
19 control. They've already figured all that out. I really had a long, steep, upward climb to
20 make. It was hard. I was homesick and I missed my girlfriend viscerally and all of that
21 just added up to disaster. My sister and mother came to visit me for parent's weekend and
22 had a very bad car crash on the way home. That complicated things as well. So it was not
23 a good launch to a college career. I mean, I suffered. I did not do a good job.

24 KC: So you lasted there one year? Syracuse?

25 MG: Yeah, I did. I kind of picked up a heavier load in liberal arts in the second
26 semester. I had an accident when I was home on Christmas vacation, and I tore a
27 ligament in my knee, and I was put into a cast for six weeks. So now I'm trying to
28 navigate a Syracuse winter with a mid-thigh to angle cast on my leg. It just was tough to
29 get to class and it couldn't have been a worse freshman year. I suffered. I did a bad job
30 and kind of withdrew to the dorm and just didn't do a lot of the work that I should have
31 done. By the time spring came around, I knew I was just in huge trouble. I didn't know

1 how to go and talk to a professor, and how to explain my predicament and kind of work
2 things through. So I ended up just making a mess of it. I remember sitting on the steps of
3 Hendricks Chapel and looking out over the quad at about two o'clock in the morning and
4 saying, "You bastard, you beat me." And knowing that there were consequences from
5 this and knowing that I wasn't going to have any benefits from this. I was going to have a
6 black mark as a result of it and just felt like I'd been totally destroyed by it. It was tough,
7 it was really tough.

8 KC: What year did you leave Syracuse?

9 MG: So I left the spring of '68.

10 KC: Spring of '68.

11 MG: My life is right in the heart of it all. I mean, The Beatles came out in 1964
12 when I was a freshman in high school. I mean, perfect timing, right? I mean they matured
13 as we matured and the whole rock scene unfolded during my maturation as a young adult.
14 In '68, I mean, that was the seminal year. I loved Bobby Kennedy, I adored him. He had
15 turned into such an incredible human being. Martin Luther King had been shot that April
16 and I remember going to the memorial service in the chapel with a guy named John
17 Godbold, from West Virginia. He was a freshman football player and a friend of mine.
18 And just being proud that he and I had so many conversations that I felt comfortable to
19 walk into that chapel with him. You know, to experience that with someone, you know,
20 those were really incredibly charged times. I'll give an example of that. Every spring
21 there was a water fight on Syracuse campus. It was a major deal. It started out on the
22 Greek row and people would throw waste baskets full of water at each other and water
23 balloons. Then eventually, someone would get the bright idea to open up a fire hydrant
24 and then fire hydrants would be opened and—open-ended beer cans to direct the spray at
25 passing cars. It just became a whirling mayhem in the first week of finals. I wasn't going
26 to miss that kind of good time. I got all involved in that. I remember that the Syracuse
27 police were nervous about this because it was civil unrest, really. I remember that I was
28 out in front of the D-couch and they had their stereo on the porch, and they were playing
29 "96 Tears" as the police came on campus and were spraying tear gas to suppress this
30 water fight that was going on. I remember thinking to myself, "Why are they even
31 bothering with this?" Of course, just off the hill from Syracuse was the ghetto in Syracuse

1 at that point. The ghetto existed between the city and the campus. They were afraid that
2 this kind of unrest would spread into the ghetto and that there was going to be—that was
3 in the summer where Rochester burned, and Hartford certainly had big civil riots. It was a
4 time when things were very fiery. We were very close to the civic fiber of America
5 breaking down completely. As a college kid, you're potentially oblivious to how there are
6 consequences and some of the things that you do, but it was an interesting time to be in
7 school. So '68, that's when it was.

8 KC: Very interesting. I'm glad you added all the rest of that because it really does
9 add a lot of context to what you're seeing and what you're going through. Now, let me
10 through this bit of background at you, or what would have been looming in your
11 background. That is, the draft. You are officially a college dropout. You're out. Uncle
12 Sam is going to come calling. What's in your mind about this? Are you considering this
13 at all?

14 MG: Well, naively I thought that they weren't going to be that good about finding
15 me. I thought, "Well, there's millions of kids out there. How are they going to find me?"
16 But I did know that I had to get in under cover. You know, I had a 2S deferment and I
17 lost it. So I tried to get into U Conn and U Conn said, "Thank you very much, but no
18 thanks. You're not showing the kind of academic performance that looks eager to bring
19 you on as a transfer student." I offered to go in as a freshman again and they were not
20 receptive to that idea either. So then I thought a little bit about—we had a community
21 college that started up in our town, but the thought of going from Syracuse to a
22 community college just really—I was arrogant and I didn't want to do that. Growing up
23 in the shadow of Wesleyan I understood what a good university was, and I understood
24 what it meant. I was just too arrogant to accept that as a possibility. I really didn't know
25 what I was going to do. I was very secretive about it. I wasn't telling anybody of my
26 plight and I went to work in a brick yard that I worked in the year before. I was loading
27 bricks in the truck with all the summer college kids. I didn't even realize that I was out in
28 the cold until everybody went back in September and here I am. Now, I don't know what
29 to do. I really don't know what to do. It's like September and like Rod Stewart, "It's late
30 September and I really should be back in school." So I didn't know what I was going to
31 do. I had left the brick yard because I didn't want people to think I was not going back to

1 school. The selective service was selectively servicing me. (Chuckles) They called me up
2 for a—this gets interesting. Well, interesting to me, not to many other people. So I've lost
3 that deterrent and I know I could hear them coming for me. If you kind of keep the
4 context correct, Johnson had been holding up the draft calls all through the summer for
5 Humphrey because already there was negative pressure building in the electorate over the
6 Vietnam War. The real leverage there was the fact that everyone knew somebody who
7 was involved in the war. It wasn't like it is today where only 1.5 percent of the
8 population participated. It was permeating the entire society at a time where there were
9 other social influences that were also driving wedges through the society. Johnson and his
10 advisors had decided they were going to hold up calls and keep them at minimal levels
11 through the summer of '68. In the fall, they realized, "We can't sustain our engagement."
12 Westmoreland was calling for more and more troops at that point. They said, "Well,
13 we've got to have some serious draft calls." So in October of '68, they took sixty
14 thousand and then they followed in November of '68 with another sixty thousand then.
15 That's a hundred and twenty thousand men in two months. I mean, that's huge. That's
16 like the whole presence in Iraq in two months. So there was no question that I was going
17 to get called. I wasn't stupid, I could see that starting to come. So I got called into New
18 Haven and did the Arlo Guthrie thing. You know, I was inspected, dissected, and
19 rejected. It was funny, I showed up there and there was a guy—I told you I'd been in a
20 homogeneously grouped class in high school and there was this guy that I knew from the
21 fifth group. I was in the first group; he was in the fifth group. He was on the football
22 team, and he was just as big lug of a guy. He was probably more physically capable than
23 I was. I remember that he got deferred because he had some kind of a knee problem, and
24 I was pretty sure I was going to get out because I had a bad knee. Remember I told you I
25 had that torn cartilage?

26 KC: Right.

27 MG: I also I had asthma, a very long history of asthma as a kid growing up. So I
28 think, in a more sane time, I probably would have gotten a 4F deferment. But looking for
29 a hundred and twenty thousand men, if you could still walk, they were taking you. So as I
30 came out of New Haven, I was classified acceptable for induction, but not enlistment.
31 Which was like, "What? I'm an acceptable at cannon fighter, but I'm not acceptable to go

1 in as an enlistee? This is unbelievable.” And they said, “Well, you have to go and see
2 your doctor and get, you know, a statement about your physical situation with respect to
3 the asthma.” So I went to my allergist and he just flat out said—and this guy delivered
4 me. He was my mother’s obstetrician before he became an allergist. So he’s known me
5 all my life, from the very moment I was born. I want to leave his name out of this, but I
6 said, “Doc, I’m being chased by the selective service. I’m not trying to get out of going
7 into the Army, I just want to be able to enlist.” And he said, “Well, I just don’t make
8 comments about this. I made it a policy I don’t make comments.” I said, “You
9 understand, if you don’t make a comment about this, I will be drafted and that will
10 probably mean I will be in the infantry. You know me, I’m going to die in the infantry.”
11 He said, “Well Mike, if I do it for you, I’m going to have to do it for somebody else.” I
12 said, “Okay, thanks a lot.” And I stormed out of his office. I went and told my mom who
13 worked at the hospital, and she had a good friend who was an internist, and he wrote a
14 letter saying he’s known me for so many years and I’ve never complained or shown signs
15 of—or presented with any symptoms of asthma. So he got be past that hurdle. Then I
16 could talk to a recruiter. So I started talking to a variety of recruiters. I’m talking way too
17 much in this thing, I know.

18 KC: No, that’s fine.

19 MG: So I was talking to a variety of recruiters. I started with the Marine Corps
20 because they had the coolest uniforms and it was an interesting thing. I liked the guy and
21 he was very eager to get me on board, but I was afraid that I wasn’t athletically—I didn’t
22 think the cut on my jib was going to work out in the Marine Corps somehow. So I was a
23 little bit timid about that. So I went and talked to the Navy and in both cases it was a four
24 year enlistment. When you’re nineteen years old, four years is a pretty big chunk of your
25 life. I couldn’t seethe that. They were all in the basement of this one room in our post
26 office in Middle Town. So they hear you trying. One would be giving you his pitch and
27 then the other guy would be sitting there thinking, “I could get this guy.” So the Army
28 guy says, “You need to talk to me. Let’s go out and we’ll have lunch.” He and I talked.
29 “Look, you’re a smart guy.” I think that you take the ASQT (Armed Forces Qualification
30 Test) in the induction center or you take at least the Armed Forces Qualification Test—I
31 maxed out the test, I did really, really well. But that’s not saying much because it really

1 was a stupid test. I tested out to maybe the top 1 percent of the Army. So they said, “We
2 can help you. Here’s the thing, the Army only has a three-year enlistment. In the Marine
3 Corps, you go in and they tell you what’s you’re going to be. In the Army, you can pick
4 your school. We’ll guarantee your school and that will give you your MOS (Military
5 Occupational Specialty). You don’t want to be in the infantry, that’s what’s going to
6 happen to you if you go into the Marine Corps.” He said, “There’s lots of good jobs.
7 What do you like to do?” I told him about the art stuff, and he said, “Well, there’s no way
8 to become a combat artist or an artist without first going through a military experience.”
9 He said, “So one way in, in the graphics career group is map compiling.” He said, “That
10 and cryptography, I guess.” And he said, “Why don’t we look into that as a career group
11 for you?” I said, “Yeah, okay great.” So he set me up to join the Army as a map compiler.
12 He came down the Monday when I was supposed to go in and I already had second
13 thoughts about it because I started thinking, “Where do they need maps? They need them
14 in Vietnam. What could a map compiler do? It sounds to me that they’re probably out
15 there compiling data to make maps. Where’s the data coming from in Vietnam? I don’t
16 want to go there. This is crazy, I’m not going to do this.” So I chickened out—not
17 chickened out, but I blocked and said I didn’t think that was the right MOS for me. He
18 said, “Interesting, I was going to call you. We have an open in the Intelligence Corps. It’s
19 for a photo interpreter.” He said, “The only hitch is you’ve got to get into basic training
20 like next week. If you don’t make it into basic training, you won’t line up in time for a
21 class for your AIT (Advanced Individual Training) and all bets will be off. With your
22 scores, you really ought to be in the Intelligence Corps. You’re going to love it.” He said,
23 “It’s like going to college. It’s all smart guys that are all college educated. It’s none of the
24 Army bullshit.” He said, “You’re going to love this.” I said, “Okay, I believe that.” I did
25 like the sound of it. “Army Intelligence, sounds pretty cool.” So I thought about it a little
26 bit and decided to talk with my mom a little bit and my dad, too. I actually asked my dad
27 what he thought, and I guess—I said, “Look, I’m not going to have any choice at all if I
28 allow myself to be drafted and I’m not going to have any choice—which is two years,
29 and that’s a good thing. If I go into the Marine Corps, it’s the same as being drafted and
30 it’s a four-year enlistment. I didn’t want to do that.” I said, “As far as I can see, it’s
31 probably my best option.” My mother hated it, but she said, “Okay.” My dad said he

1 thought that it made some sense. He said, “With your love of airplanes and everything,
2 why don’t you consider the Air Force?” I said, “Well, I did Dad, but unfortunately it’s a
3 four-year enlistment and I just don’t feel like I can go for four years.” So that’s why I
4 went. I enlisted under pressure from the draft. It wasn’t a voluntary thing. I never would
5 have done it. It wasn’t like a patriotic thing—although, there was an aspect of it that, this
6 is my duty and I will do it. It’s almost like punishment for my failure at Syracuse. I did
7 feel that the baring the burden of Kennedy had some resonance with me. I did think that
8 we were trying to help the Vietnamese people gain some liberty and freedom and stable
9 off communist aggression. All of that had some kind of—I believed some of it, I mean
10 most of it. I guess I was not aware that the Tonkin Gulf incident, I think that happened
11 when I was in school. You’re kind of disconnected when you’re a freshman in college. I
12 was not as aware of what was going on in that year that I was suffering through freshman
13 year. So I didn’t understand—when was the Tonkin Gulf Incident? Was that ’66?

14 KC: ’64.

15 MG: ’64? Wow, so well maybe I missed it. You know what, I didn’t get it. So I
16 wasn’t that aware or as aware as I should have been, but I knew that Vietnam—I
17 remember my Latin teacher used to say, he was an old Xaverian brother, “Michael
18 Garemko, you are a lazy, lazy guy. And if you don’t start studying your Latin
19 vocabularies, you’re going to find yourself in a rice paddy in Vietnam.” That resonated
20 with me very loudly about five years later. So that’s how I got in. I left that map compiler
21 thing on the table and went off to join the United States Army as a photo interpreter. I
22 was also told—and I had this other avenue in my mind of officer candidate school.
23 Because I qualified so highly, they said that I had the potential to become an officer and
24 that there was a pathway that I could pursue that would let me become an officer. So that
25 really drove me as a recruit. We had a company lieutenant and he’d be marching us and
26 I’d be thinking, “I’ll be doing this six months from now, marching these guys. I’ll be a
27 lieutenant so I just have to distinguish myself as a private and I’ll get this all worked out
28 and it won’t be long before the Army will recognize my words and I’ll be running
29 things.”

30 KC: Let me ask you this, you mention Vietnam now and again and now all of a
31 sudden, it’s going to become much more of a reality. What did you know about the

1 Vietnam War at the time you signed up to join the United States Army? What did you
2 know about the way the war was being fought with politics? Tell me what you knew to
3 be Vietnam at that time.

4 MG: There was an anti-war movement on campus by that time, but it wasn't a
5 massive movement. I was opposed to the war because Bobby Kennedy and Gene
6 McCarthy were opposed to the war. You know, I knew that Johnson had been escalating
7 the war and it didn't look like—I remember his speech when he said he would not seek
8 reelection. I knew how Kennedy had been hedging his bets and not really committing. As
9 most young people, I wanted it over with so I wouldn't have to participate in it. I saw the
10 storm clouds gathering for me and I didn't like that. I will say I was ambivalent, but I
11 always held out the possibility that it was important that we intervene and hold the line
12 there. That there was a broader American interest in that whole part of the world. I didn't
13 think we were pursuing it properly, but I didn't know what properly would have been. It
14 just seemed like it would have been pretty fucked up. It sounded to me like guys were
15 getting ground up in the meat machine without anyone really thinking very carefully
16 about how to prevent them from being chewed up and I didn't like the idea of personally
17 getting chewed up in that thing because it didn't seem like it was being properly
18 executed. I didn't necessarily oppose it. I opposed it because I didn't think we were doing
19 the right thing. I didn't think we were going after it in the right way. I was more like—I
20 viewed it kind of from Kennedy's perspective that if you're going to do this thing, let's
21 do it correctly and humanly as much as possible. As much as you can possibly prosecute
22 a war in a humane way. Let's do it that way. Let's just not be carpet bombing things and
23 all of that. That was kind of like my perspective.

24 KC: Alright, here you are, Vietnam in the background. You're trying to mitigate
25 the worse affects that Vietnam can have on you as a new member of the United States
26 Army. You've enlisted for fall of 1968, I guess?

27 MG: Yeah, I went in on October 21st, 1968. So almost right after that was the
28 election. If you recall, Wallace had his third-party candidacy that year and he siphoned
29 off enough democratic votes from the south to propel Nixon into the White House.
30 Humphrey lost by a hair's breadth. I mean, it was that close, and Humphrey would have
31 stopped the war. I mean, he just couldn't say it because he was a much more liberal

1 senator than Johnson was, and I think Humphrey would have heard the democratic voices
2 and it would not have taken—the liberal wing of the Democratic Party was truly a liberal
3 wing at that point. They were coming to get them. I believe in my heart that Nixon won
4 because he had this secret plan to end the war. Which was to bomb them into submission,
5 I guess. I don't know what his real objective was, but Henry K. was going to figure it out
6 for him. I remember being very nervous that Nixon was going to win. I was like, "If he
7 wins, we're dead." I remember in basic just kind of saying to people, "This is it, man. If
8 they vote Nixon in, we're screwed. We are fucking screwed." Sure enough, he wins that
9 election. I hold him personally responsible for twenty thousand American deaths. I mean,
10 George McGovern and Humphrey both would have found a way to negotiate that war.
11 Much sooner and much more realistically. We were at thirty thousand deaths when he
12 had taken office and there's twenty thousand that occurred unnecessarily as a result of his
13 really arrogant, stupid politics. But that's just me.

14 KC: Alright, here you are, October 1968. Despite what's going on in the national,
15 political scene, despite what's going on in Vietnam, there you are. Where do you go to
16 basic training?

17 MG: Yeah, that was another thing, I figured I was going to Fort Dix. I mean,
18 everybody I ever knew in Connecticut that went into the Army and went through the
19 army or through the National Guard went to Fort Dix. So when I went to New Haven for
20 induction, I was shocked that they said, "Well, you're going down to South Carolina to
21 Fort Jackson." To be honest with you, I don't think I could have ever picked out South
22 Carolina on a map at that point in my life. The furthest I'd ever been away from home
23 was Syracuse. One the one end, I thought. "This is going to be amazing. I'm going to go
24 to the south. I can't imagine that." And then on the other hand I was like, "Holy shit, this
25 is amazing. I'm going to be going to the south." I remember I ran into this guy, his name
26 was Button, Ken Button. He was from Trinity College. I was wearing a Syracuse jacket
27 and he had his Trinity jacket, so we started talking to each other. He was a graduate, he
28 just graduated. He was going into the Army Language School and he was impressed that
29 I was going into the Intelligence School. So we started talking and I kind of struck up a
30 barracks friendship immediately. He was surprised that they made me the leader as we
31 were going to the—he was surprised that they made me a leader to take the group down

1 to South Carolina because he wanted it. He thought that that would be something that was
2 more befitting him. Anyway, so I remember we flew out of La Guardia at about six
3 o'clock at night and got to Atlanta, maybe at eight o'clock at night. And then from
4 Atlanta we flew to Columbia and maybe arrived in Columbia—I'm going to say at
5 midnight. I remember I had the orders for everybody. Because you could drink in New
6 York at eighteen, all these guys that were with me were drinking in the lounges. It was
7 tough to get them all on the plane. Finally, all the orders and when we arrived there was
8 nobody there to meet us. And so now I've got all these guys in South Carolina and it's
9 like midnight and I don't know what the hell's going to happen. Finally, some guy comes
10 over and he's got a uniform on, and he says, "Okay, are you the recruits from
11 Connecticut?" And I said, "Yes, sir. Yes, we are." He said, "Alright, go on outside and
12 there will be a shit green bus that drives. You get on the shit green bus and you just
13 follow instructions from there on out, alright? You are now in the United States Army." I
14 remember thinking, "Oh, Christ. Now it starts." So we go outside and this guy gets off
15 the bus. I know this sounds gracious and I just plead with you to believe in my heart and
16 soul that I'm not racist, but this guy really looked like a gorilla. I mean, he was short and
17 barrow chested and angry looking. He said, "You guys are keeping me up. Get your asses
18 on that god damn bus." I remember thinking to myself, "Oh my god, this is
19 unbelievable." It was like going to prison. It really was like going to prison. Button and I
20 got on the bus. We're sitting on the bus and he leans over and says, "Are you scared?"
21 "Jesus Christ I'm scared out of my gourds. Oh fuck. It's unbelievable." (Laughs) It's
22 black as can be looking out the windows. I mean, you can't see a thing. Then, all of a
23 sudden, the lights come on and it looks like a concentration camp. It says, "Fort Jackson.
24 Welcome to Fort Jackson, South Carolina." There's a reception station there, an army
25 reception station. These are all World War II barracks that looked like garages. There's
26 no sheet rock on the inside. They're just studs with exterior cladding. I mean, these are
27 the most rudimentary barracks that you've ever seen in your life. They shove us into
28 these barracks. I guess they gave us some food in a mess hall that looked like a prison
29 mess hall. It had those little seats that were attached to the tables and you're eating off of
30 the typical mess hall trays. They look like something from Auschwitz or something.
31 You're thinking to yourself, "Holy shit, this is unbelievably bad. I can't believe I've done

1 this.” If Button hadn’t been, I don’t know how I would have fared. I was really scared. So
2 they gave us some sheets and some blankets into this little barracks. By this time, it’s two
3 o’clock in the morning. You’re still in your civilian clothes. So you bunk down, you go to
4 sleep at two o’clock. Five o’clock, they come around. Maybe four thirty, they start
5 banging on the garbage cans to pick you up. You haven’t even gotten a wink of sleep. So
6 you go to the bathroom and there are no stalls in the bathrooms. It’s just twenty toilets
7 lined up on the floor. Your sense of privacy is now gone completely, right? You have to
8 go take care of business and you make this formation. You don’t even know what a
9 formation is by five minutes or something. So you have to do your (unintelligible) and do
10 whatever you got to do and then get out for this formation and then they’re going to take
11 you to breakfast. You get out there and it’s still dark and they call your names on the
12 roster and you’re in some kind of a company of some sort. So you answer off. Of course,
13 being 6’4, I stood out. I was trying to shrink as much as I could. I just wanted to be one of
14 those little guys who never got noticed. I could never quite pull that off. So they had road
15 guards and they had flashlights like the guys at the air ports used to guide the jets in.
16 They’d have those flashlights on the corners of the columns. I guess these were company-
17 sized columns. Although, they might have been platoon-sized columns. I’m not really
18 sure. We’re marching along in these groups and I remember it, the sun was just beginning
19 to show over the horizon. You’d see these caterpillars with the flashlights on the corners
20 of them going over these hills and dales on the way to mess halls and haircuts and
21 different things. I just remembered thinking how, “Wow, this is what it must’ve been like
22 to be a POW (Prisoner Of War) in World War II.” You’re completely—you’ve been co-
23 opted. You’re gone, you have nothing. So we had breakfast and I guess we had shots, I
24 don’t know what. Then they go and take you to get your haircut. Everybody knows it’s
25 coming, and everybody dreads it. This is the sixties, it’s ’68, everybody had hair.
26 (Chuckles) Now you know you’re going to be turned into an asshole immediately. Sure
27 enough—and those barbers were the coolest bastards. “What would you like, long on the
28 top or how would you like it?” You’d tell them what you think and then they’d just budge
29 you right off, down to nothing. So you go in knowing a whole bunch of people that you
30 run into over the last twelve hours. Then, you come back out the other side and you look,
31 and you can’t find anybody because everybody looks exactly the same. (Laughs) You’ve

1 already gotten your recruit fatigues. You're wearing these shit green fatigues and these
2 stiff boots. You just look like a complete sad sack. I don't care how glamorous a person
3 you are. I guess Elvis went through it. You just look like a complete jerk, and you feel
4 like a complete jerk because you know nothing about this society that you have just
5 become a part of. You've been reduced to square one. You are nothing but dirt. It was
6 sobering, man. You realize that you just grew up. Right there, you grew up. You're not
7 making any choices for yourself and now you're part of the big, green machine. It was
8 quite an experience.

9 KC: (Chuckles) Tell me about your routine in boot camp from PT (Physical
10 Training) and chow and how they were taking you through this. Part of the goal, of
11 course, you've touched on this already, is to break you down and to rob you of your
12 personal identity and to give you a new identity. Take me through this whole process of
13 boot camp.

14 MG: You know, I honestly have a lot of respect for basic training. A couple
15 things. I went in October 28th and they cleared the entire post out on December 15th. So
16 we had to go through the reception station to get through the basic training company. By
17 the time I got there, there were seven weeks between when I was assigned to basic
18 training, and we were set to complete the cycle. The normal cycle was an eight-week
19 cycle. So they had to accelerate it. So naturally, we had to work harder. I ended up in E21
20 Eagles. So it was Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Combat Training Brigade. I guess this
21 company that I was in was the company of the cycle for five cycles in a row and the
22 captain who was the commander was intent on making us the sixth or whatever. With my
23 luck, I ended up getting in the extensively best basic training company, which I did not
24 need. (Chuckles) I would have been more than happy to be in the middle company. This
25 guy, this guy worked us hard. We really did work harder than all the others. I can
26 remember we'd go on these forced marches and the other companies would be resting
27 and he'd march us through singing our Echo Company fight song or whatever the hell it
28 was just to show them that we were tougher. I remember thinking, "This is some shit I
29 don't need." Basic training, I thought was really impressive, I did. I had the attitude,
30 "Look, these guys know more about being in the Army than I'll ever know. So I'm going
31 to listen and I'm going to pay attention, and I'm going to try and learn how to be a good

1 soldier because it could save my life.” So I did everything. I had shiny boots, I had a
2 buckle that glistens, my weapon was spotless. I did all of the things as hard as I could do
3 them and as well as I could do them. It was our misfortune that our platoon ended up
4 having a sergeant who was really—I think he might have been a little shell-shocked. I
5 mean, this guy was not—his synapses were not all firing with this guy. He was really
6 inept. He just did not know what he was doing. We had him for about two weeks and
7 then he was demoted to assistant platoon sergeant and then they brought in this guy, this
8 buck sergeant, an E5, and he’d been in the 1st Division. He was in “Big Red 1”. His name
9 was Sergeant Stang, and he was about 5’8. Just a little banting rooster of a guy. Boy, he
10 was smart. He knew everything about the Army. It was like night and day. We went from
11 being the sad tack platoon to being really strack and knowing our stuff. He was helpful to
12 us. I mean, he pushed us hard, but he gave us respect. I really admired him a lot. Then we
13 had a 1st field sergeant who was from Hartford, Connecticut and I was really proud of
14 him. He was this tall, black guy who looked like Morgan Freeman. Boy, he was just an
15 impressive guy. Both of those influences were just—I thought, “This is impressive, this is
16 an organization that gets it. They’ve got a big job to do and the logistics of this is huge
17 and they’re making it happen.” I’m impressed. I really was impressed. Our company, half
18 of it was made up of reservists and National Guard guys from Columbia—Greenville,
19 South Carolina. The other half was all these recruits from Connecticut and New York. So
20 you were right there. I mean, it was the Mason-Dixon line right there in the barracks and
21 on my bunk stand. I had the upper bunk and this guy, Gillam, was on the bunk below me.
22 He came right out of the back hills of South Carolina. He was just as different from me as
23 I could imagine. He was just a different kind of guy. He would say, “Mark, you don’t like
24 that rock and roll do you? I can’t even listen to that crap.” (Chuckles) I said, “Are you
25 kidding me? Yes, of course I do.” “You like the Beatles? I just into Waylon Jennings and
26 Red Soul Vine and people like that.” I said, “Okay, I don’t know what to tell you. But
27 you’re missing out on a lot of good music.” So basically, it was just a different place.
28 What they had to do, the kinds of things they had to teach you. They had the curriculum
29 posted on the bulletin board. You know, they would take you there to wherever the class
30 was going to be. They’d give you the class, tell you what they were going to tell you.
31 And then they’d tell you what they told you. It was always—and you learned. You

1 became a soldier incrementally, week by week. I thought it was pretty impressive, really.
2 There was a lot of chicken shit in it for sure, but that never bothered me. I was always
3 able to handle the chicken shit. I wasn't so old that that stuff was vexing to me. If I'd
4 been a college graduate, I think I would have found all of that very vexing. But because I
5 was nineteen, I was at the right age where I was malleable, and I wanted to be a good
6 soldier and I wanted to look good in my uniform and I wanted to do the right thing. So
7 anyway, eight weeks and I think by about the sixth week, they'd take you out to the rifle
8 range and you'd spend a week or so learning to fire. And we were the first cycle to have
9 M16s in basic training. Up until that time they were all M14 training. So the drill
10 sergeants were learning how to teach the manual of arms and what was going to happen
11 with the M16. In a sense, we were under educated in our riflemanship. They'd march us
12 out to the rifle range, and you'd get out there early in the morning. By this time, it's like
13 November and it's starting to get a little chilly in the Carolinas and all you had was a
14 field jacket and they'd give you some gloves. You'd sweat up on the march out there and
15 then you'd get there, and you'd be all wet and steaming. It'd be like in the thirties and
16 you'd be cold and shivering. It was very regimented on the firing line. Everything you
17 did was very carefully coached and very carefully—somebody could get killed very
18 easily with stupidity in that environment. They were good about making sure that you
19 didn't goof up. Everything was by the numbers. If you didn't pay attention there, you
20 paid for it. They would slap you around and you'd be sorely disappointed by your failure
21 to pay attention. I remember one morning we were looking down the firing line and I was
22 a coach, so I didn't have to get into the fox hole. They said, "Firers, enter the fox hole." I
23 don't know exactly what the command was. You could see everybody jumping into the
24 fox holes looking down the line. And then one guy pops up like a jack-in-the-box. He
25 was about thirty guys away from me. He pops right back up again. I was like, "Holy shit,
26 what the hell's happening there? They're going to kill him." It turns out there was a
27 rattlesnake in his fox hole. So the drill sergeant came over and blew the rattle snake
28 away. It was a big one, it was a big snake. I remember thinking, I said, "Wow, that's
29 impressive." I think somebody did end up getting shot in the foot, but it wasn't in my
30 platoon. It was in one of the other platoons. I remember they took somebody away, but I
31 don't remember exactly happened. I was nervous that some of these Carolina guys

1 weren't paying attention because they thought they knew how to shoot. They would do
2 something stupid. I was always very weary and paying attention and keeping my wits
3 about me because I thought that you could easily get killed in this endeavor. I didn't want
4 to die in basic training. That just didn't seem like it was a worth sacrifice to make for
5 your country.

6 KC: Alright, so it sounds like you embraced basic training early on and
7 throughout. I assume you did a good job here.

8 MG: Yeah, I might have even been soldier of the cycle. I'm not sure of that, so I
9 don't want to take a claim if it wasn't true, but I might have been. I know I was vying for
10 it at one point. I remember my motivation was I wanted to go to OCS (Officer Candidate
11 School) and I thought that the better the idea, the more I would look like officer candidate
12 material. I tried to look like an officer as much as I could without wearing ugly recruit
13 fatigues and all that stuff. I did try and look sharp, and I think it worked to a certain
14 extent. My drill sergeant thought well of me, and I did well. I fired expert and maybe two
15 coming out of basic training, which was about what you could do. Got my bolo badge
16 and that was about it. (Chuckles) You're right, I embraced it. I did.

17 KC: With the success that you had here, you're going to roll this over into your
18 next level, AIT (Advanced Individual Training). Where do you go after the basic?

19 MG: Well, as I said, they were going to clear Fort Jackson out by December 15th.
20 So come hell or high water you were going home for a fifteen day leave from the 15th
21 through the 30th. And so I don't know exactly if they pushed their criteria or what they
22 did, but I mean, they got us all through basic training. I don't know if there might have
23 been some medical guides who got held over. You know, there were a bunch of smart
24 guys from Connecticut who thought we were going to beat the system. We went to the
25 travel office on post and made our own travel arrangements. (Laughs) And so we had
26 made these reservations to fly out of La Guardia together and I guess somehow the field
27 1st sergeant found out about it because the Army was going to send us home, which we
28 didn't know. We thought we were going to get our travel booked early, so that we didn't
29 have to schlep around. We were worried about flying standby, so we made these
30 reservations. The field 1st sergeant found out about this and I never saw him mad, but he
31 was pissed off. He said, "What are you guys doing? You're embarrassing me. Your

1 Uncle Sam will tell you when you move in this mans Army and you don't move until
2 your Uncle Sam says you move. And who the hell are you to think that you can make
3 your own travel arrangements?" So he made us cancel all of our flights. Which pissed us
4 all off because we had arranged it the way that we wanted it, right? So then the 15th
5 comes up and it's just an amazing endeavor. Everybody's going home. So we graduated
6 from basic training at eleven o'clock in the morning. You had a little parade, and I don't
7 know what else they did. Then they'd send us back to our barracks and they'd already
8 taken the linen off of the beds and they rolled the mattresses up. We're all dressed in
9 Class A uniforms and we're all sitting around, and we've got our duffle bags packed,
10 we've got our boots spit-shined, we're going home. We're thinking in a matter of hours
11 we're home to see mama and the loves of our lives. So eleven o'clock to about three
12 o'clock in the afternoon, we're just sitting there in the barracks, seething. Everybody's
13 saying, "This is bullshit, I can't believe—fucking hurry up. Goddamn Army, Jesus
14 Christ." We're all swearing and bitching and moaning and finally they said, "Okay,
15 we've got some trucks down at the end of the company street. Everybody get up and one
16 of those cattle cars will take you to a holding station." Okay, great. So we get on these
17 trucks, they're open-air trucks. Not with canvas tops or anything, they're just like flat
18 trucks. We're sitting on our duffle bags and they drive us in the cold. Now it's mid-
19 December and Carolina is warmer than New Jersey, but it was freaking cold. They drive
20 us all over Fort Jackson and we finally arrive at this station of some sort. I guess it was a
21 repo station or something, but they heard us into this place and now we stay in there for
22 another four or five hours. Now everybody's really getting pissed. They're saying, "Well,
23 we've got to get you on the flight manifest." And they got all of this information, but I
24 think they gave us a box lunch with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or something like
25 that. So now it's getting to be probably about eight o'clock at night, right? They say,
26 "Okay, we're going to call this manifest." They take you out to—I guess it was Columbia
27 airport. So I'm thinking, "I'll be out of the claws of the Army. I'll be in the airport." They
28 gave me my orders and my manifest and I can get on this plane. No, you're not free in the
29 airport, you must go downstairs into the basement of the airport where there isn't even a
30 paved floor. It's like a dirt floor. Throw your duffle bag down there and you sit on the
31 floor in this dirt, infested place with insects crawling all over the place. That's where you

1 wait for you flight. My flight goes off at one o'clock in the morning. It was a Delta flight,
2 I remember. They flew from Columbia—I'm not sure if I went back to Atlanta or not, but
3 from Columbia up to La Guardia, we arrived at La Guardia at three thirty in the morning.
4 Needless to say, there's nothing happening at La Guardia at three thirty in the morning. I
5 didn't even know how I was going to get from New York to Hartford. They just got me
6 back to La Guardia because I guess that was my station of record when I went in from
7 New Haven. So in the morning I was able to book a flight on Northeast Airlines. It was
8 Northeast Yellow Bird Service, I remember. I flew up and there was snow on the ground.
9 It was nice back in Connecticut. So I flew into Connecticut and I called my mother who
10 was at work and told her I was flying in and she didn't have to come pick me up, but if
11 she wanted to—of course, she dropped everything, drove up to the airport, pick me up. It
12 was great, I was home, redeemed. So for two weeks we had that two week vacation. The
13 only bad thing was my hair was all short all and I'd see my friends and they'd laugh at
14 me. I felt kind of like a douche for doing all this. But then I knew I was going into the
15 Intelligence Corps, and it was all going to be good. So I got through Christmas and I was
16 supposed to report on January 30th, which I think was a Friday. My recollection was that
17 it was a Friday. Of course, that's the day before New Year's Eve, right? Boy, I did not
18 want to go back. I was with my girlfriend who was going to be my wife and it's just
19 brutal. So we separated again and then off I went. You know, I make my way to Fort
20 Holabird, which nobody in the world has ever heard of. What the hell's Fort Holabird?
21 You're going to Fort Mead, you're going to Fort Jackson, Fort Bliss, Fort Dix. These are
22 real forts. Fort Holabird, who's ever heard of this? So I got to Baltimore and went to
23 some information thing and I asked how to get ground transportation to Fort Holabird and
24 they didn't know where it was and so I spent fifteen minutes where it was. It turns out it's
25 in the Dundalk section of Baltimore and you take the Dundalk bus. You had to take a bus
26 downtown and then take a Dundalk bus out to Dundalk Avenue to Fort Holabird. So I did
27 all of this and I remember seeing Baltimore for the first time and Baltimore's just the
28 neatest city. I mean, they have a style of housing there that's just rows upon rows upon
29 rows of these houses. They're right up on the property line and they're all the same.
30 Three windows up, two windows and a door down, and they go for rows, and rows, and
31 rows. The whole city looks like its populated this way. I've never seen anything quite like

1 it. People in Baltimore really take pride in how clean they keep their stoops. They were
2 like marble stoops and they were all polished and it was just impressive. I thought,
3 “Wow, this is something I never thought I could be, Baltimore.” This is where the Orioles
4 play, man.” I said, “Babe Ruth grew up in something like this.” We got to the post and it
5 was just so different from Fort Dix or Fort Jackson. I mean, at the front gate I got left off
6 at the bus, you know, stuffing my duffle bag. I got to the gate and the MP (Military
7 Police) says, “Oh, you must be new for training.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well private,
8 let me see if I can get someone to carry that duffle bag for you. You must be tired.” I
9 said, “What?”

10 KG: Wow.

11 MG: Yeah, and he said, “Here’s what you’re going to do, you’re going to go
12 down to building 36 and you’re going to meet the CQ (Charge of Quarters). They’re not
13 expecting too many people at this point, but they’ll get you set up. Thanks for coming
14 and welcome aboard.” I was like, “What? This is not what—” Well, it was my hope, my
15 dream, but I couldn’t believe it was actually true. Because a recruiter said it was like a
16 college campus. I kept thinking, “Sure.” I went to the charge of quarters, and it was this
17 guy with his shirts kind of pulled out. It looks like he’s been in the Army for a while. He
18 says, “What the fuck are you doing here?” I said, “Well, my orders said I had to be here
19 by the 1st.” He said, “Jesus Christ, nobody’s here to put you in. Everybody’s gone, man. I
20 don’t know what the hell to do with you.” He said, “Why don’t you just go back?” I said,
21 “Well, I can’t go back. I’m from Connecticut.” He said, “Alright, okay. Well, I’ll see if I
22 can get you a bunk down in casual company.” So he did. And casual company, again,
23 were these World War II barracks that looked like garages that had no sheet rock in them.
24 I think they had cold stoves that we used to heat them. We might have had steamed heat,
25 universal steamed heat on the post. They were just very primitive. I remembered walking
26 into the barracks and this guy was eating a pizza on the top of his bunk. He goes, “Oh,
27 new man. Oh, look, we got new meat.” He said, “Hey, what’s your MOS?” I said,
28 “96D2T.” He says, “Oh, you’re going to ‘Nam, baby. I hope you know that.” I said, “No,
29 no. You can’t be serious.” It was like a knife went right through me. “Yeah, a hundred
30 percent. Everybody goes.” I said, “Are you kidding me?” Well, this guy is Paul Benoit,
31 and he becomes important in my story here. I met him right from the very beginning,

1 right? He's the one that kind of rocks my world and makes it clear to me that I'm
2 probably going to 'Nam. My little personal conceit was that I was going to end up in
3 Germany or even better yet, an instructor and stay at Fort Holabird. None of that was
4 meant to be, but he was absolutely right. If you were a 96D2T in the 1st month of 1969,
5 you my friend were going to Vietnam. So in the casual company they had us pulling
6 details. You know, stupid stuff like policing cigarette buds and things like that. I found
7 out that if you donated blood, you wouldn't have to pull details for two days. So I went
8 off and donated blood. I did it all the time when I was in the Army because there was
9 always some benefit of giving blood to get out of a lot of work in the army. Then, I got
10 put in the class pretty quickly. They were running two classes through the intelligence
11 school, two II classes at the same time. There was a morning class and an afternoon class
12 and I was very lucky to get into the afternoon class because I'm an afternoon kind of
13 person. The morning class went from six to noon and then we went from noon to six. So
14 these two classes were going through at the same time. I think they were probably—I'm
15 going to say twenty, maybe twenty-five guys in the class. That may be high. I don't
16 know, maybe twenty. We had a nice little bay in this big, huge building. It was very
17 private, and we had our own shower. It was a private shower, which was very strange for
18 the Army. It was very kind of homey. I really liked my existence at Fort Holabird. It
19 looked like a Civil War kind of barracks, and it was brick and it had these big buildings
20 and there was a big parade field in front of it. They developed a Jeep there in World War
21 II. So the post had some history. I don't know, it had a gate around it. It looked like
22 maybe a World War I kind of military. It was right on the base of Colgate Creek, I
23 remember. Across the way there was a beer factory or yeast factory, and you could smell
24 the yeast, lasting when you're in formation. I mean, it was minimal chicken shit. I mean,
25 they treated you like a human being. You just were not harassed all that much. You'd
26 have to pull your typical Army details. You'd have to clean up your bunk and make sure
27 your uniforms are strapped out and all that stuff. They just didn't hassle you a lot. So
28 guys did things out of their own personal will and pride than it was being hassled into it.
29 You know, there was a sense that you had to study. You really did have to learn some
30 stuff. I would study at night; write letters and study and I worked pretty hard. I was doing
31 well. Most of the guys in my class were college graduates and I was up against them and

1 I was doing okay. There was a certain amount of photogrammetry and algebra and things
2 like that, stuff that did not come naturally to me, but I enjoyed it. I liked the job. The job
3 was interesting. We'd get these photos and stereo pairs and look at images. We paid a lot
4 of attention to Soviet ID. We had to identify Soviet vehicles and be able to distinguish
5 one kind of truck from another, one kind of tank from another. You know, estimate—you
6 could measure the gauges of railroad tracks to find out the scale of the photograph and
7 then you could start doing takeoffs on how far distances were. It was fascinating work,
8 really. I loved it. I was proud of it, too. It wasn't dopey stuff. You had to understand
9 TO&E (Table of Organization and Equipment), tactical strengths of units, you had to
10 have a sense of how big various units were and how they would maneuver. They'd give
11 you different kinds of tire coverage so that you could establish how things were prior to
12 the movement of a unit through an area and then you'd see what the impact of how a
13 mechanized unit moves through that area. A lot of it was focused in on Soviet, NATO
14 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) kinds of things. Then we spent a lot on counter
15 insurgency in Vietnam and trying to understand what items of interest we were likely to
16 find when we were reading our missions in Vietnam as well. All of the instructors were
17 veterans. They were guys that had been there and seen it. I remember there was on
18 colonel that came in and taught and he was from the—everybody had their combat patch
19 on their uniform and his combat patch was the old Army 8th Air Force combat patch,
20 which was my father's unit.

21 KC: Right, right.

22 MG: I was like, "Wow". There's still guys in the Army who wear the old Army
23 Air Corps patches. That just was so cool. He was smart, he was a colonel. I don't know
24 what he was teaching us, but he was always this aviation link to what we were doing
25 because it was aerial photo interpretation. Talking about RF101's, C-Voodoo's and RS4C
26 Phantoms and Mohawks with airborne radar and infrared Mohawk imagery. So I knew
27 the airplanes, I understood the airplanes and I understood the cameras. I was well suited
28 for it. Kudos to the Army for figuring out I could be a good photo interpreter. Their
29 system picked me because I was pretty well suited for that I liked it, I never had a
30 problem with it. I think I came out third in my class, I think. The rumor was that if you

1 were in the top three, you would go to Germany. They would take the top three guys and
2 go to Germany. I thought I made it, you know.

3 KC: When did you stop believing these rumors?

4 MG: When they gave us our orders. They gave us our preliminary orders and we
5 all were a hundred percent Vietnam. I remember this guy, Berry Ross was a good friend
6 of mine in AIT, he and I were devastated. He came from a Jewish family, I think from—I
7 don't really know. Yonkers, maybe? I'm not really sure. Suburban New York City. A
8 lovely family. I met them when we were heading out to Vietnam. He and I, the two of us
9 were probably the most immature about this. We both thought we were going to die.
10 We'd never make it through, and this was like a death sentence. I really was being a
11 drama queen about it, and I didn't realize it at the time. I was crestfallen, it was like a
12 death sentence for me. Yeah, as I said, I thought the training was good, I thought the food
13 was good, the living conditions were great. It was lots of fun, really smart people. It was
14 intellectually stimulating. I got home a couple of times. It was a fourteen-week course. I
15 think it was fourteen weeks, it might have been twelve. Yeah, they'd cram a lot of crap in
16 you in fourteen weeks. Academically, I think it was worth a year of college, really. It was
17 a lot of learning going on there in a very short period of time. I had a good time with
18 them.

19 KC: So you finish up here sometime in late winter, early spring of 1969. You
20 know you're going to Vietnam; you get the orders to go to Vietnam. Did you have some
21 downtime? Was there a leave? Many people get like a thirty day leave by the time they
22 get their orders to when they have to report?

23 MG: Yeah, it was kind of nice. They sent us to Washington DC for a week at the
24 behavioral research laboratory. They were doing a study to try to find out what makes a
25 good imagery interpreter and how interpreters find things. You know, how can one guy
26 see it and another guy not see it. So it was the study they had underway and they'd have
27 us read out a whole bunch of imagery and compare the results. I don't know what they
28 were using. Maybe they were the control group, I don't know. But we were in
29 Washington for a week in early—I guess it would have been late March. It was cherry
30 blossom time and so Washington was just gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous. You know, we
31 would do our testing at I don't know, 8 AM to maybe about noon. They'd let us go. So

1 we were free in Washington from about noon to 8 AM the next day and the last holder
2 had his car down from New York and it was a (unintelligible). We were tooling around
3 Washington going to American University and Georgetown and trying to meet chicks. It
4 was just great. I remember this one night we climbed the Washington Monument and
5 then we were walking down the mall toward the Lincoln Memorial. We climbed the
6 Washington Monument in the afternoon and then we had gone to the Lincoln Memorial.
7 By this time, it was already nighttime. I remember there were these two hippies sitting on
8 the rim of the reflecting pool. They were a boy and a girl, and they were drinking wine
9 and eating cheese. We walked by and they said something. I think we were in uniform
10 because—that's another story, but I think we happened to be in uniform that day. I said,
11 "Oh, there goes some soldiers." And they said—they said something, and we said, "Yeah,
12 we're on orders for Vietnam, so don't hassle us." Or something like that. They said, "Oh
13 bummer, man." So we sat down with them and they gave us some wine and we chatted
14 and they said that they wished us good luck. I remember thinking, "It's going to be a long
15 hall." And being pretty upset about it. Anyway, it was a nice moment with those two
16 people. I don't know who they are, but it was a very nice moment. So we had a good time
17 in Washington and then went home and I think you're right, I think it was a thirty day
18 leave. So this would have been—well, I reported on May 15th in Oakland, California. So I
19 think it was 30 days prior to that, so it was April 15th when we left Washington. So we
20 left the week of April 7th through the 15th that we were in Washington. My wife was
21 going to Wheaton College at the time, so I drove up to Wheaton and we had a great time.
22 Wheaton College is a girls school in Massachusetts. She had a nice group of friends, and
23 they were going to Wheaton night at the Pops in Boston. They invited me to come along.
24 It was just guys in the Army haircut. It wasn't as bad as basic training anymore, but it
25 was still an Army haircut. I go into the Boston Pops with like ten really nice-looking co-
26 eds from Wheaton College. I had all their tickets and they're saying, "He's got them, he's
27 got them, he's got them." Finally, I go through the door and the ticket collector said, "I
28 don't know what you got going for you, but you got it going good." It was a nice night.
29 Jason Williams was there, and he was doing classical jazz. It was just a great night at the
30 Pops. All of her friends were just lovely, just great, great girls and we had a good time.
31 Finally, I stayed there for about a week and then went back home. Then Emily came

1 home, she got out of school, and we were together. We both knew it was going to be
2 painful and that there was going to be a lot of separation. And that was it, that was the
3 deal. So you had to do it. I remember just dreading it. It was like this doom was over me
4 and knowing that you'd have to report, and it was not going to be good. We knew a lot
5 because the guys in the intelligence school would tell you the truth. They weren't trying
6 to bullshit you or scare you, they wanted to help you. So we knew a lot about what we
7 were facing. They told us the prat falls of going to the repo station and how not to be
8 worried about things and don't let them intimidate you about stuff. That was the nice
9 thing about the Intelligence Corps. People were humane and decent. I should just take a
10 quick little aside here, I'm kind of running on.

11 KC: No, it's fine.

12 MG: But I had wanted to go to OCS (Officer Candidate School) and so there were
13 two things that were going on at Fort Holabird. One was that there was a TA (Territorial
14 Army) course, which would get you to E5. It was another fourteen weeks or twelve
15 weeks which I was dying to do. I'd do that in a heartbeat, and they would give you NCO
16 (Non-Commissioned Officer) training and also more advanced photo interpretation
17 training. I wanted to do that, but my cycle didn't line up for some reason and I would
18 have had to be in casual company for I don't know, four months or something and the
19 regulations didn't allow for that. And so I couldn't go to the TA course which was
20 disappointing to me. I thought that I was a good candidate for it. I scored high in my
21 class, and I was a strack soldier with my stock and trade.

22 KG: Right.

23 MG: I would have liked to have gone to that, but I couldn't go because of the
24 regs. And then another thing was OCS and they came and they interviewed me for OCS.
25 When I was in basic, they had at least offered me the opportunity to go to the Army prep
26 school which would lead to an Army commission or Army appointment to West Point.
27 You know, four years at West Point and then six years of officer commission. You know,
28 that was an eleven-year commitment at that point. I just said, "No, I'll take a pass on that.
29 That's not going to happen." But OCS was still an option. So I went and interviewed with
30 a couple of officers and they were telling me that OCS is great and that's a good way to
31 get a commission. There was only three branches that you could be commissioned into.

1 Infantry, artillery, and combat engineers. Now, I know I could not get into combat
2 engineers. I didn't have the math skills that would have allowed for that. So the infantry
3 and artillery—the artillery was heavily dependent on math, I didn't really feel
4 comfortable that I'd be successful there. So Mike Garemko, 2nd Lieutenant, you know,
5 25th Tropic Lightning Position didn't sound like it was the right answer for my world
6 considering the fact that I was already a photo interpreter. So I said, "No, I guess no. I
7 don't think I'm going to do it." I gave it up with great regret because I always felt like I
8 was officer material and that I wanted to be an officer. I let pragmatism take over and I
9 just felt like I wouldn't be able to get back into the Intelligence Corps after OCS and then
10 I'd be stuck pumping the ruck sack in the boonies. I just didn't think that was a good
11 idea.

12 KC: Right.

13 MG: So that was the disposition to that and I was done with it forever. I thought
14 maybe after I got back from Vietnam, I might do something. You know, maybe apply for
15 OCS or something. I could see how it all worked out. And then, I went through leave and
16 I had the springtime in Connecticut and really kind of idyllic. Then, I had to fly out. I had
17 made an arrangement with Rosholder that I would fly down to New York, and we'd get
18 together and fly out on the plane to Oakland together. This was cool. I left Hartford and
19 of course, remember seeing my mother out of the window and I was waving, and she
20 couldn't see me. I felt so bad, you know what I mean? I thought I'd never see her again, I
21 thought she was going to die. I was very upset that she didn't see me as the plane was
22 going away. I could tell she didn't. My sister was in tears, so it was tough. I went down to
23 New York and then Barry left his family and I went through it again. All of the crying
24 and the separation and stuff. I remember we were on the plane. This is to show you how
25 different things were back then. I don't know if they had jet waves or not, I guess they
26 did at La Guardia. I remember we were sitting in the plane and this guy—and the plane
27 was full of Army guys. I mean, guys in khakis all heading for Vietnam, all going to
28 Oakland. This one guy was infantry, and you could tell by the blue under their brass. He
29 was this Puerto Rican kid, and his mother came running down the aisle. They had
30 separated when they got on the plane and she came running down the aisle, just
31 heartbroken and emotional. Barry had already said goodbye to his parents, and he was

1 kind of recovering. I was also emotionally very tenuous, and his mother comes down and
2 she was screaming and crying. Just my heart was breaking. It was like—oh my god, this
3 is awful. So we take off and fly off to Oakland. We got there and we didn't have to report
4 until the next day. So we didn't have any real money. We bought a motel room together
5 in this flea bag motel. It had a TV in it and so we went out and got some potato chips and
6 beer—no, we were too young to drink beer, so we had sodas. We'd hold up in this motel
7 just off the post and had to give us a wakeup call. In the morning we got dressed up and
8 put on our little army suits and went down and reported. That was pretty freaking
9 frightening. When you got to Oakland, on the Oakland Army Base, you were engaging in
10 the machine. They had a process to get you to go. You were like one of the ants in the ant
11 hill. After being at Fort Holabird, where you had some identity, going back to the army
12 machine was a little different. We had ranks, we were E4's by that time. We all graduated
13 as Spec (Specialist) 4's. Which was good because if you were a really proficient
14 infantryman, you'd be a PFC (Private First Class) by that time. So that was a whole—you
15 had one rank on everybody and that was pretty nice. You got a little bit of privilege and
16 sometimes it worked out in terms of pulling details or drawing some kind of minor
17 little—you didn't have to get the top bunk on the three-bunk layout because you were a
18 Spec 4. "Sorry, but I'm going to take this bottom bunk." And it was good. I don't know
19 how long it took. I'm going to say about three days it seemed. You took a while. I
20 remember giving blood out there. Again, it was on my donor card that I gave in San
21 Francisco and I kind of liked that. I remember calling home and calling my girlfriend and
22 promising that we would wait for each other. Just going to the chapel and thinking how
23 my father had gone off to Europe and he probably didn't fly over, he probably took a
24 boat. Thinking that he was in replacement centers like this. It must have been tough for
25 him, knowing he was going into the real war. Knowing that a lot of these guys around me
26 weren't going to make it because there were a lot of infantry and artillery and real Army
27 guys. I remember thinking to myself, "You know, I'm really lucky and privileged in the
28 Intelligence Corps. They won't let me get killed. At least I know what." All of our friends
29 from Holabird were there. All twenty-some of us that got through it—I don't know what
30 the number was. So we were traveling in the group and it was good. We were all kind of
31 working it out together. I remember this guy Strauss was with me quite a bit during that

1 time, Rosholder and a guy named Pete Martin. We could have hung around and there was
2 a USO (United Service Organizations) hamburger place and we ate all our meals there.
3 The military food, whatever the hell that was. It was disgusting. You're waiting and it's
4 all focused in on getting on a manifest roster and they call you for formation and call out
5 your names and get you into groups. Once you were in a group, that was the plane that
6 you were going to fly on. They knew when the planes were coming, and they'd get you to
7 where you were going. I remember, finally they called our names, and we were all on the
8 planes—they called our names and we were all lined up ready to get on the busses to go
9 to Travis Air Force Base. This was like in the middle of the afternoon, about three
10 o'clock in the afternoon. It was nice, California sun. It's May—I don't know, 13th or
11 something like that because my DEROS (Date Estimated Return from Overseas) was
12 May 15th. I remember that all of a sudden, these busses, these Army busses come driving
13 up, shit green busses, and you can hear these guys cheering, screaming at the top of their
14 lungs. They come off of the bus and they've got guitars and stereos that they're carrying.
15 They all have those jungle hats cocked and had a very rakish attitude. They're all canned
16 as can be. Their fatigues are like five shades lighter green, kind of like a sage green. Ours
17 are like an olive drab and we're wearing these jungle boots that look like we went down
18 to the Army surplus store. We look stupid. We've got army baseball caps on. They
19 looked so good and they were so happy. They're yelling at us and telling us that we don't
20 know what's in store for us. They're yelling, "Hey new man, you think you've seen rain?
21 New man, you have not seen rain." I remember thinking, "This is all I want. I want to
22 have this same moment in 365 days. This is what it's all about for me." What's
23 interesting was, remember what the day is here. We're talking mid-May 1969. Nixon is
24 all the talk. When we were in Oakland, in that motel room, the talk is that Nixon's going
25 to be making a big policy statement on Vietnam. He announced stage 1 troop
26 withdrawals that night, when we were in the motel room. So we're thinking, "Wow,
27 they're going to call this fucking war off. This is awesome." We were talking about how
28 they're going to call us back over the Pacific and we'll fly back in and there will be a
29 band there welcoming us home. (Chuckles) We're going to get all the benefits from being
30 in Vietnam with none of the hassle. It was the absolute apogee of the war. American
31 participation in the war was never higher than that moment, really. He announced phase 1

1 troop withdrawals right at that night when I was in Oakland. I did think that that was
2 going to save me. I was on orders to the 9th Infantry MID, Military Intelligence
3 Detachment, which was—they were de-attached and associated with the 9th Division. I
4 was very upset about that because I was hoping that—but everyone said they'd change
5 your orders when you got to 'Nam and not to even think about it because whatever it is, it
6 was irrelevant. I knew that was so, but I wasn't sure I could count on it, so I was still
7 pretty upset about it. When I got to Vietnam, it was true, they did change my orders to
8 MIBARS (1st Military Intelligence Battalion Aerial Reconnaissance Support), but it was
9 pretty impressive.

10 KC: Why don't we stop there for today, Mr. Garemko?

Interview with Michael Garemko

Session [2] of [5]

Date 5 October 2010

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Mike Garemko. Today is 5 October 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University, and Mr. Garemko is joining me by telephone from Bufort,
4 Georgia. Okay, Mr. Garemko, as we were talking a little bit ago, we had you at Travis
5 and you're getting ready to go to board the plane, you're getting ready to go to Vietnam.
6 Your orders did not say intelligence or MIBARS, I believe it was the 9th Infantry
7 Division? And you weren't particularly comfortable with all of this. So pick up the story
8 there in San Francisco, there at Travis.

9 Michael Garemko: Well, just to correct that a little bit, I had orders for the 9th
10 MID, which was attached to the 9th Infantry Division. So it was intelligence, but it was
11 out in the boonies and that's what I was really pretty nervous about because I didn't think
12 I'd survive in the boonies. Anyway, off to Travis and we boarded the busses after the old
13 guys. They're all carrying ukuleles and short-timer sticks and all sorts of memorabilia
14 from Vietnam and just doing nothing but enjoying the fact that we had 365 days to go at
15 best. I remember thinking to myself, all I want, and all I want is this moment when I
16 return. I just want to be able to go out, assemble our ration of crap to a bunch of newbies
17 when they are mustering out. I kind of let that whole experience drive my Vietnam
18 experience. I just thought of that incisively. Anyway, long flight. We flew from Travis
19 North to Anchorage. And then to Anchorage, flew out along the Lucian Islands. As a
20 photo interpreter I was constantly looking out the window and trying to see what I could
21 recognize and figure out where I was. I remember flying by Japan and distinctly seeing
22 Mount Fuji and knowing that was Honshu down there. We flew and we landed in
23 Okinawa. That was a bracing experience.

24 KC: Tell me about that. Tell me about Okinawa 1969.

25 MG: Well, as you probably well know, there were bombing operations that were
26 going on from Kadena Air Force Base, which is where we landed. They had an
27 operations terminal and so we all got off the plane. I remember being struck by how

1 humid it was. I could hardly breathe, it was like breathing water. The air was so heavy.
2 We were walking up a sidewalk and a pipe rail, and I remember looking at the pipe rail
3 and there was water dripping. It was a sunny day, but there was water dripping off the
4 bottom of the pipe rail because it was condensing from the air. I mean, it was the most
5 humid place I have ever experienced in my life. I thought that that's what Vietnam is
6 going to be like. I thought, "I'm not going to make it through this. This is just not going
7 to happen." It was a very busy place. There was a lot going on. They gave us about—I'm
8 going to say two hours of layover there, but we were just stretching our legs in the
9 terminal. We didn't get to go walk around at all or see anything. It was just all at the
10 airbase. I remembered distinctly, I've always been an aviation fan and as we were taxied
11 out, we were taxied by an SR-71 which was still—I think it might have still been in the
12 black. I'm not sure if we knew about them because we were in the Intelligence Corps and
13 we knew about SR-71 imagery, but I'm not sure that the general public in 1969 was
14 completely aware that we had the SR-71 that was flying missions. It was cooling down at
15 the end of the runway. You could see that because it had come down, you know, and was
16 so hot, it was just sitting out there. You could see the heat radiating off the wings and I
17 thought to myself, "That is one sexy flying machine." It was so impressive. So then, off
18 we flew. I'm guessing there were probably a hundred and twenty, maybe a hundred and
19 thirty guys. Well, this was a Trans-World—no, it was a World Airway charter 707, I
20 think. They had just maximized the number of people they could put into the plane. There
21 were stewardesses on board. Others had gone over on C-141's and so to me as I looked
22 back on it, I was probably very lucky to get a semi-commercial kind of flight. We landed
23 at Tan Son Nhut Airbase. I want to make sure that's right. We might have landed at Bien
24 Hoa. Let me think for a second here. Yeah, I think we landed at Bien Hoa, Bien Hoa
25 Airbase. And then we went to the Army replacement station, I think it was the 93rd Army
26 Replacement Station. I remember—let me just tell you, when we landed, we all got off
27 the plane—first of all, the Air Force sergeant gets on the plane and says, "Gentleman, you
28 need to get off this plane as quickly as possible." I'm sitting three quarters of the way
29 back in the plane, by the window. I'm looking out the window and I'm seeing guys
30 getting off the plane and running for a ditch on the side of the apron of the runway and
31 taking cover. I'm thinking to myself, "What on earth is happening?" I'm looking up in

1 front of the plane and no more than a sixth to a quarter of the plane had deplaned and
2 nothing is happening. It's hopeless, I'm not going to get off this plane. I'm thinking the
3 plane is coming under attack. When you're a new guy and you don't know anything,
4 you're panic stricken about everything. I'm watching these guys just running for their
5 lives to jump into this ditch and I'm thinking, "Oh my god, I'm going to die right here on
6 the plane."

7 KC: You don't even get off the plane and you're dead.

8 MG: I'm thinking I don't know what it is, but it isn't good. The sergeant comes
9 back on the plane, and he says, "Gentleman, when someone tells you to move quickly in
10 Vietnam, I suggest you learn the lesson that you need to move quickly." He said, "We
11 just had a rocket alert, and you people would all be dead if one of those rockets hit this
12 plane. You guys have to learn to move quickly when someone gives you an order in this
13 country." That was a really sobering lesson. I can remember my heart racing and just
14 thinking to myself, "Oh man, I'm not going to make this. This isn't going to work." I get
15 off the plane and I was 6'4, and about a hundred and ninety pounds at that point. I'm kind
16 of standing around. I was never that athletic. I always looked fairly capable, but I never
17 was. So I don't know if it was an Air Force guy or who it was, but somebody ordered me
18 to join a group of other tall guys and we all were thrown on the plane unloading the
19 duffle bags for everybody else. It must be a hundred and twenty degrees on the tarmac.
20 You know, as the plane is sitting there. And I'm talking duffle bags out of the baggage
21 hold of this 707 and thinking to myself, "I'm just going to die. I have to get some water. I
22 can't even breathe here. I'm just dying." We finally got all the duffle bags unloaded into
23 the truck. I remember that they let us come into the terminal and I thought maybe because
24 we pulled the detail that maybe we'd get a little bit of privilege, which was foolish
25 thinking upon its face. I was dying for a drink of water. So I asked this Air Force—I think
26 he was like a corporal. I asked him, "Is there any water? Where can I get some water?"
27 And because I was a specialist, he called me sergeant, which I thought was really weird.
28 He said, "Serge, you can go around back and there's a lister bag out there." So I go
29 around the back of the building and there's this guy that looks like Ho Chi Minh sitting
30 there on a stool. I mean, he's got the little wispy beard and he's got the rice hat on and
31 he's kind of sitting there. I remember he's minding this lister bag. I don't know if you

1 know what a lister bag is, but it looks like a duffle bag with a spicket on the bottom of it.
2 It's made out of canvas and it's used to contain potable water. It's usually just purified
3 water, but not necessarily filtered water. There'd be gunk and crap in it and sometimes
4 it'd look kind of green. At least we were led to believe that it was drinkable. A couple of
5 guys were drinking water out of this and, "I can't drink this." I looked at this stuff and I
6 said, "Geez, I don't know. This doesn't look drinkable." Just as I'm kind of
7 contemplating whether I should drink this water or not, this papa san kind of decides that
8 it's time to blow his nose. So he covers one nostril and lets fire from the other one right
9 out onto the ground and then repeats the process with the other nostril. I'm like, "This is
10 one hell of a country. I'm not sure I can take this." Anyway, they collected us up on
11 Army busses that had grenade screens on the windows. I remember that we drove
12 through Bien Hoa, the city, and it looked like it had been ravaged. I mean, there were
13 burned out trees and rubble buildings, buildings that had been rendered to rubble. I think
14 that had all happened in Tet '68, but it was definitely an introduction to the fact that this
15 was a warzone. I mean, it didn't look civilized at all. I remember thinking to myself that
16 this was very serious. I'm going to have to pay real close attention because I might not be
17 able to survive this. So we were the 91st Replacement Depo in Long Binh that we arrived
18 at. My recollection was that it was that night and they had us in a formation. It was
19 almost like a PT stand out in front. Some permanent party cadre who had starched
20 fatigues and looked pretty civilized, giving us directions on what we had to do. What was
21 notable was they said, "Gentleman, this is Ho Chi Minh's birthday and we're expecting
22 action tonight. So for the most part we're just going to ask you to stay in your bunks. We
23 will protect you, you will be protected. But don't go running around because you're
24 likely to run into the Viet Cong rather than run away from them. You folks will not have
25 weapons issued, so therefor it's important that you stay together where we can protect
26 you." I was like, "Oh my god. Just my luck, I have to arrive on Ho Chi Minh's birthday,
27 and this is his birthday party." So I remember they put us into this long open-sided
28 building that was a typical Vietnam hooch. At the time it was the first time I'd seen
29 something like it, and it looked a lot like the first barracks that I was ever in in basic
30 training. Where it was open construction with no interior finish whatsoever. Kind of like
31 a garage that was unfinished. And then these dangling lights like you see in prisoner of

1 war movies. I mean, the prevailing feeling was it felt like a prisoner of war camp as
2 you'd seen in the movies. I was like, "Man, this is very dismal." So they gave us
3 instructions of where we were going to sleep that night and we were all let off the
4 hooches. My recollection was that the bunks were three high, not two high. So I was
5 lying in my bunk, I left my boots on. I never took my boots off that night because I
6 figured if I had to run, I didn't want to be impeded by not having any footwear. I really
7 didn't sleep. It was a fickle resting and alert the whole time and scared out of my mind. I
8 was just thinking, "I'm not going to make it here. This is too crazy. This is beyond my
9 capability. There's no chance that I'll survive this thing." So it was pretty spooky. When
10 the dawn came, it all looked a lot more civilized, and I could kind of get a sense of the lay
11 of the land. That was the case in all of that replacement situation. It was always just
12 sitting around waiting for them to figure out where they were going to send you and what
13 was supposed to happen to you. I remember they called us in and our whole Fort
14 Holabird class was pretty much there. They called us in, and they gave us reconfigured
15 orders. I had orders for 1st MIBARS. I remember just thinking to myself, "Thank god."
16 Because we had heard about MIBARS in intelligence school. Everybody said, "You want
17 MIBARS, it's going to be good."

18 KC: Why was MIBARS supposed to be superior?

19 MG: Well, because it was a core level function and so we were in liaison with the
20 Air Force. We liaised from the imagery from the airports in I Corps where I was, also
21 from the Marine Corps. We took their imagery and turned it into usable tactical
22 intelligence for the commanders on the ground. Our mission and our role required us to
23 be near the Air Force and not really near the Army so much. Therefore, we ended up
24 living in nicer arrangements, for the most part, around Vietnam. You know, I was just
25 thrilled. The other thing was they told us that the imagery or the quality of the imagery
26 that we got at MIBARS would be better and more interesting than the imagery that you
27 would get in MID, an MI detachment that was detached to a division. They flew organic
28 aircraft which was the Mohawk. You know, so the imagery just wasn't as formidable. So
29 from a professional point of view, to the extent that a nineteen year old imagery
30 interpreter could be a professional, I was enthusiastic about it. Also, from a safety point
31 of view I thought I was going to be in a much better situation. So then it was just a matter

1 of finding the USO (United Service Organizations) and being able to eat hamburgers as
2 opposed to all of the garbage food that they were preparing for us in the placement
3 station. I was thinking it looked like prison gruel and I wasn't going to eat it. Someone
4 figured out where the USO— I guess it was the PX (Post Exchange) was. They had good
5 cheeseburgers. So we ended up eating all our meals at the PX while we were at the
6 placement station. And then, in about a day or two they said that there were jeeps that
7 were here from Saigon ready to take us back to MIBARS headquarters and that we
8 needed to head up. I remember pulling my stuff together and still looking rank and green,
9 but thinking to myself, "Boy, thank god I'm going to this place and I'm not going off into
10 the boondocks with those guys." You'd see these deuce and a half's takes loads of
11 infantry guys off to the various infantry headquarters. Thinking to myself, "Half of those
12 guys aren't going to make it and I've got a good chance of making it. Just keep your wits
13 about you boy, you're going to be all right." So they took us to Headquarters Company in
14 downtown Saigon. I don't know exactly where that was. I never got that clear after I went
15 through it on my way to Da Nang, except to go out process. I never thought twice the
16 whole time I was there, and I never did get to go out into the city itself. I'm not sure if
17 they didn't give us a pass, or I was just afraid to go. We were there for about two days
18 and they had an enlisted man's club up on the roof of headquarters. I'm not sure what
19 kind of a building this was either. I mean, it had a central courtyard where it would have
20 formations. I think we did have formations. Those guys at Headquarters Company, they
21 were real soldiers. They had spit shine boots and starched fatigues, but they had
22 (unintelligible) to do that. They had inspections and they'd have to clean their rifles. It
23 was like being stateside in a typical—it was just all kinds of chicken shit down there. I
24 couldn't imagine being a—anyway, they had this enlisted man's club up on the roof of
25 this place. So my friend Paul Benoit and I, we both had orders for detachment B. We had
26 no idea what that meant, but we had orders to report to Detachment B. We were sitting up
27 there having a beer and this guy who was coming through on his way to go on R&R (Rest
28 and Recuperation), his name was Stone. He was from Michigan, I remember. He was
29 heading out on R&R, and he was from Detachment B. So he had valuable intelligence as
30 to what was going to happen to us. So we sat him down and we bought him a beer and he
31 started telling us, "My advisor's all right and Det B is great." He said, "For the most part

1 it's fine, especially if you can get on nights." He said, "Because they make you pull the
2 details during the day. If you can get on nights, you'll be fine. He said, "The only thing
3 wrong with nights is that usually Nell Glenn, who is the CWO, the Chief Warrant Officer
4 and the II section team leader, you know, he can be a pain in the ass. You'll have to deal
5 with him and everybody hated him. If you can figure out how to get along with Nell
6 Glenn and work on nights and just play the game, you'll do fine. The more you play the
7 game, the more you'll get promoted. If you resist, they won't promote." So I remember
8 thinking to myself, "Well, I can play the game. I'm a second tier anyway and I don't
9 mind polishing my brass and polishing my boots and being soldierly. So I can do that,
10 that doesn't bother me. And I don't mind pulling details all that much. So I figured I was
11 going to be in pretty good shape. I remember that Stone was the funniest guy because
12 he's like, "Just play the game, just play the game. That's all you got to do, just play the
13 game. Make sure you play the game." (Chuckles) So anyway, that was it. We stayed in
14 Saigon for about—well, I'm estimating two days, but it might not have even been that
15 long. I forgot to say that I remember when I got picked up by the guys from MIBARS,
16 that I remember thinking to myself, "This was salvation." That I was being taken from
17 the grasp in the Army and brought into the breast of the intelligence corps again. It was
18 true. I mean, intelligence even at Headquarters Company was much more civilized than
19 the regular Army. You just didn't have the pressure of the big, green machine working on
20 you all the time. I remember thinking that these guys were nice and the guys that were
21 driving the jeep were really being nice to us and accommodating and showing us sights
22 and treating us like human beings. I just remember thinking that that was such a treat to
23 be in this part of the Army. I was so lucky that I made the decision that I made, that
24 allowed me to be in the Intelligence Corps and to have this great adventure, but to have it
25 in this fairly civilized way. You know, that really was pretty accurate. I mean, we were so
26 lucky all the way through. Anyway, I felt very relieved to make to MIBARS. So then, the
27 next thing we had to do was make our way up to Da Nang. They gave us orders and
28 Benoit and I were sent to Detachment B. We had no knowledge of where to go or what to
29 do. They told us that we would be met at the plane in Da Nang and that we should just
30 get on the C-130 and then we had the ticket that was internal Air Vietnam flight. You
31 know, "You guys get on the plane and there will be some MIBARS guys there to meet

1 you at the plane.” Okay, we’ll do whatever they tell us, right? So we jump on the plane at
2 Tan Son Nhut and that was pretty exciting. You heard so much about Tan Son Nhut Air
3 Base and to be there was something special, I think.

4 KC: Okay.

5 MG: I remember that when we got on the C-130 they had the back ramp open,
6 and we boarded through the back ramp. As we were taxiing, we left the ramp open. I
7 couldn’t believe that we were going to leave this ramp open. I’m thinking to myself,
8 “Wow, this is really like being in the Army.” They had canvas seats inside. Actually, they
9 were nylon canvas seats and it was almost like being in a truck. Not like being in an
10 airplane. They were for paratroopers obviously, so they were laterally arranged in the
11 airplane, and you were sitting facing someone across the way from you. The guy that was
12 across the way from me was this Vietnamese guy with a Ho Chi Minh beard. I’m
13 thinking to myself, “What if this guy’s VC (Viet Cong)? Why are they allowing him on
14 this plane?” You just don’t know what’s going on. They closed up the back and there was
15 some air conditioning in the plane, or it may be that we just got to altitude, and it was
16 cold enough. I remember that there were lots and lots of—the water was condensing and
17 dripping on us the whole flight. I remember thinking to myself that that couldn’t be good.
18 Ultimately that’s going to deteriorate the airplane and I wonder if they maintain these
19 things. It’s some Spec 4 in the air force responsible for being the crew chief of this plane
20 and if they’re going to make it. It was a whole different way of experiencing flight. I
21 remember—I don’t know how long it took to fly up there, but I remember that all of a
22 sudden there was this really loud, loud noise and I thought for sure we’d been hit. It was
23 right below us. You could hear this grinding sound. I must have looked like I jumped
24 out of my skin. I turned and looked at the noise, and his eyes were as big as saucers, and
25 we were both freaked out looking at each other. All of a sudden, the pilot puts the plane
26 in what I thought was a very steep dive for a four-engine aircraft. This plane, to me, felt
27 like it was going straight down. I thought, “Oh, we’re done. We’re crashing for sure.” I
28 looked across the way and this Ho Chi Minh guy is very calm. He’s serene, really. I’m
29 thinking to myself, “Well, maybe he knows something I don’t know. Just as I’m waiting
30 for the final impact, the plane pulls out and kind of levels out. The next thing you know,
31 you can hear the plane just kind of touch down, almost like a feather. A perfect, light

1 landing. Land right down there and pace the plane on the runway. I'm thinking to myself,
2 "Oh, that must have been a ground avoidance thing." You know, where they didn't want
3 to take any small arms fire on a long approach, so they just came in very steeply and then
4 leveled out and landed. Which was exactly the case. I had no way of knowing that
5 because they had no windows, and you couldn't see what was going on. They opened up
6 the back ramp and here I was in Da Nang. We got off the plane and went into this
7 terminal and looked around and there was nobody there. Absolutely no one. All the other
8 people who'd been on the plane, they've gone onto ground transportation of some sort
9 and were gone in about three or four minutes. Now, Benoit and I are the only two guys
10 standing around with our duffle bags. Benoit turns to me and says, "What do we do
11 now?" And I said, "Why are you asking me? I don't know." I said, "Well, there's an
12 information thing over there." There was an information booth and there was this Navy
13 guy. I said, "I'm Specialist Garemko and this is Specialist Benoit and we are here on
14 orders to 1st Military Intelligence Battalion, Aerial Reconnaissance Support. Do you
15 know where they are headquartered or where they are located? Can you communicate
16 with them?" And he said, "I've never heard of them, son." I'm like, "Well, I know
17 they're up here. They sent us up here. Here's my orders." He said, "Well, is someone
18 supposed to come and get you?" I said, "Yeah, there was supposed to be someone here to
19 meet us, but as you can see, no one is here." He said, "I don't know, let me ask around a
20 bit." So he goes away for about ten or fifteen minutes. He comes back and says, "Here's
21 an old Marine Serge, he says these guys are located on I Corps headquarters for the
22 Vietnamese. Does that sound right?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well look, here's
23 what we're going to do. We're going to put you on one of these navy taxis and we'll take
24 you around and give it a try to see what happens, okay?" I said, "Well, I guess that
25 works." So these are like pickup trucks, gray painted pick-up trucks with wire cages on
26 the back and you get in the back and they drive. They drive, I guess a fairly—I guess it's
27 not a route, but they had like a service where you could call these taxis and they could
28 take you from one installation to another in Dan Nang, because Da Nang had an awful lot
29 of military at that point. We're in the back of this truck, and I remember Benoit's just
30 sitting next to me. We went around the corner of Da Nang main airbase to the end of the
31 runway. Da Nang was just two, straight five thousand-foot runways that were—maybe

1 ten thousand foot runways. I think they were two miles long. They were—the whole time
2 we were there you could hear Air Force phantoms taking off the full afterburner. You
3 know, just ear-splitting, chest rumbling take offs and just thinking to yourself, “Wow,
4 this is really the war, man.” So we go around the end of the runway and there’s an Army
5 mortuary there. They have caskets stacked up, aluminum caskets stacked up outside the
6 mortuary waiting to have occupants. I remember Benoit turned to me and says, “Boy, I
7 sure hope I don’t end up in one of them.” I looked at him and I said, “Yeah, I know.” So I
8 went around and turned the corner and there was like a dump. There were two, burned
9 out holds of phantom jets sitting there and they looked like phantom ghosts almost. I
10 remember looking at them and I’d never seen anything like that before, either. I just
11 thought to myself, “Wow, guys are actually taking fire here.” So it was kind of a sobering
12 introduction to Vietnam. You know, we came around and they eventually brought us to I
13 Corps headquarters for the Vietnamese. Those were the headquarters of General Giap—
14 No, not Giap, Lan. He had taken over—it looked like it might have been built by the
15 French because it was a very substantial headquarters and it had very nice military billets
16 in it. They were all ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) soldiers all over the place
17 and captured NVA (North Vietnamese Army) artillery and tanks on display in the parade
18 ground. Because we had Soviet ID tools coming out of our ears in intelligence school, it
19 wasn’t the first time we saw these pieces and we were all over them looking at them. We
20 had recognized them and identified them because we knew what they were from our
21 Soviet identification training. Suddenly, we went into this headquarters and tried to
22 communicate with somebody. No one could speak English, so we were just kind of
23 standing around and finally somebody came up to us, a sergeant, an ARVN sergeant. He
24 said—asked if he could help us. We said that we were looking for MIBARS, do they
25 know where it was? And he said, “Yeah, it’s at the far corner of the post.” He said, “You
26 could walk there. You probably should just go ahead and walk down there.” So we
27 grabbed our duffle bags and started hiking toward the corner of the post. I remember
28 walking down there and we had a bunker, Det B had a bunker there. Out in front of the
29 bunker there was a MIBARS sign. I remember seeing the sign and saying to myself, “Oh
30 my god, I’m home.” And then Benoit and I were both just so glad to see something that
31 was American. For it to my MIBARS was just magical for us. We felt safe finally. We

1 walked into the headquarters of this compound, and I remember this guy stands up and he
2 says, "Oh, you guys must be the new guys." I said, "Yeah, I'm Specialist Garemko." He
3 said, "Well, I'm Spiro Agnew." I said, "Well, if you're Agnew, I'm Richard Nixon."
4 Turns out that this guy is Ken Fuksman who was our—I'm really not sure what his MOS
5 is, but he transcribed all of our intelligence reports and put him into usable format. I think
6 his MOS was teletype operator, but he didn't use that. He just typed up all our work. He
7 had a master's degree from Albany and was one of the smartest guys in the unit, and we
8 immediately liked each other. It was just, you know, I could tell he just had a great sense
9 of humor. So he was really great to us. It was like, "We're glad that you are here and
10 welcome aboard. We'll get you settled here and sorry we missed you." I said, "Well, no
11 one ever came to pick us up." He said, "We thought you were coming much later." He
12 said, "We're surprised you arrived when you did." So anyway, they settled us in. They
13 brought us over to the II shack and there were three vans backed up into a makeshift
14 shack. So it became like a suite of interpretation facilities. We actually had a tactical
15 infantry interpretation facility which, you know, must have been some defense
16 boondoggle, defense contractor boondoggle. I mean, the thing never worked. We used to
17 say that the beauty of the TIIF (Tactical Infantry Interpretation Facility) was that it would
18 sleep very comfortably. It was supposed to have an advanced plotting capability so you
19 could plot missions more quickly in a tactical environment. I mean, no one could ever get
20 the computer to work right. It was a very primitive computer anyway. It had orange
21 diodes to print out the data and so to give you coordinates. I think it was an adaptive fire
22 control computer. It needed an airconditioned environment to work and so that gave us
23 air conditioning as well. So our shack was air conditioned with portable air conditioners,
24 but that was a real luxury in Vietnam. We got to work in the air conditioning that could
25 keep the thing down at around eighty degrees inside. Even that seemed cool, given the
26 overall temperatures outside and how hot it really was. We always worked in t-shirts
27 because it was so hot in there. You'd start sweating on the imagery if you weren't careful.
28 You had to have a handkerchief handy and mop the soot of your ground. It was
29 interesting. Anyway, so that's my arrival. I got there and I remember this one guy, the
30 standard trick when a new II would come, would be—remember, it's Howie Armor. He
31 said, "Hey, will you guys just go on over to the reproduction section and ask them for a

1 bottle of cloud eradicator because we've got this mission with a whole bunch of clouds
2 on it. We've got to get those clouds out of there."

3 KC: And you bought it?

4 MG: No, I did not. I did not, but Benoit did. I went over there with him, and I was
5 kind of watching Benoit. He literally goes in there and says, "Hey, have you got any
6 cloud eradicator?" And someone took him a bottle of one of their chemicals, I don't
7 know what it was. He comes walking back in and I'm a step and a half behind him and
8 I'm smiling from ear to ear cause I knew they were jerking us off. And he walks in and
9 he kind of plants it down on the thing and he says, "Here's your eradicator. What do you
10 got next?" And everybody just breaks out laughing. So it's like, you know, this is a
11 standard joke and he fell for it. Anyway, they started showing us what they were doing
12 right away, which was fascinating. They had great imagery and they were looking for
13 items. I think that very first day they got to plot a couple of missions—rough plot them
14 and we were able to do that. I think we got there about noon and worked till about seven
15 o'clock. They put this on the truck and then we headed back to the hotel and everybody's
16 telling us about the hotel. We lived in a hotel and everyone was saying that Da Nang was
17 fine. The only thing wrong is that we do get hit by rockets a lot. You know, occasionally
18 by mortars out here in the compound. It's like a thunderstorm. If you get hit by lighting,
19 then you're dead. If you're not, it's kind of fun, you get to see the big booms. And so,
20 they said that at one point during—when was it? I think it was during Tet of '68, the Viet
21 Cong actually did get inside the wire. We were in the compound, and they said they were
22 repulsed, but that was a little frightening. I said, "Do we pull any kind of perimeter
23 guard?" "No, we didn't do that, the ARVN's were all responsible for that." So we
24 basically were at the ARVN's mercy in this location and the really bad thing was we
25 were close to the bridge that connected the Han River. They were constantly trying to hit
26 the bridge. That would seriously disrupt the chance for supplies to the 1st Marine Division
27 Headquarters on the other side of the river and the 95th Evac was over there. A bunch of
28 other emplacements were up and down that peninsula. If that bridge was out, it would be
29 very difficult to supply those operations because all the supplies came in through Da
30 Nang Air Base and through the bay. That was all on the side that we were on. The Viet
31 Cong and NVA were attempting to lob rockets at that bridge and if they missed, they hit

1 us. So that was a real detriment to our location. We had to endure being too close to a
2 lucrative target. I guess before I got there, they had a lucky shot in an LST (Landing Ship
3 Tank) that was stopped right by the bridge, and it blew up massively. It must have had
4 ammunition on it and a lot of shrapnel arrived in our area and penetrated the TIIF. There
5 were stories from the old guys that this wasn't as safe as you would have liked it to be if
6 it were a perfect world. Everyone was pretty sanguine and said it was pretty safe. And
7 that if you kept your wits about you, you'd get home, everybody got home from
8 MIBARS. That's all I needed to know. I felt safe and that I was going to be okay. I was
9 always weary, and I always felt like something could happen and I needed to be prepared
10 for when it did. So that's kind of how I entered Vietnam.

11 KC: How would you keep yourself prepared just in case something did happen?

12 MG: Well—again, you've got to remember I'm a chicken. I was issued an Army
13 survival knife when I was flying missions. I would sleep with my survival knife under my
14 pillow. I had my M14s. We had M14's, that's how much of rear echelon guys we were.
15 They didn't even give us M16s.

16 KC: Now, you had qualified with the M16 prior to this though, right?

17 MG: That's right, I felt like I could make this thing work, but I didn't know it
18 very well. I didn't really understand how to clean it. I didn't know anything about the
19 manual of arms. That was a little bit uncomfortable. It was also heavy. I mean, it was like
20 a blunderbuss. Everyone said it was a better rifle.

21 KC: Right.

22 MG: Everyone said it was a much better weapon. Mine had an automatic selector
23 switch on it so it was semi-automatic which was kind of nice. I would keep that M14 next
24 to me at my bed and I had the magazine in the rifle with no round chambers, but I was
25 ready. My thought was that in this hotel that we lived in, it would be very easy for
26 Vietnamese people to sneak in at night and just go from room to room slitting throats and
27 no one would ever even wake up. We were very vulnerable. I expressed this to our
28 officers. I thought that they were very blasé about it and they did a very bad job of
29 protecting us, but I'll get into that later. So whenever I was on the truck going from the
30 compound or going to dinner, you know, I was always alert, always thinking that a hand
31 grenade was going to be tossed into the truck and what was I going to do. I tended to sit

1 at the end of the truck so I could jump off. I mean, I just tried to pre-plan everything and
2 what would go wrong and if it did go wrong, what would I do? Not that that made me
3 anymore survivable than anybody else, but I think it was a good exercise. By thinking
4 like that, I think I always kept myself alert and sharp and that was a good thing to do.

5 KC: Alright, here you are. You're trying to get accustomed to Da Nang, trying to
6 get accustomed to Vietnam, trying to get accustomed to the war. You're feeling a little bit
7 better about things because here you are in MIBARS, everybody's reassuring you it's a
8 safe place, just don't be caught outside during a rocket attack or something like that and
9 you should be okay. So take me through your mission there with MIBARS. What was
10 your job, what were you to do on a day to day basis? Take me through all the steps there.

11 MG: Okay, well we worked seven days a week, twelve-hour shifts from 7 A.M to
12 7 P.M. You could either be on the days or the nights. If you were on the days, all the
13 lifers were around, and they tended to do the details during the daytime. So you might be
14 asked to sweep the company parking area which was pierced steel plank or you might be
15 required to build the bunker, or you might be required to do preventative maintenance on
16 the five or so vehicles that we had operational. So all of those kinds of details were
17 accomplished, for the most part, during the day. When you were new, you weren't a very
18 effective imagery interpreter. So you tended to be on days in the first three or four
19 months of your tour. Your ambition was always to get noticed as a good photo interpreter
20 so that you became more indispensable and then they would transfer you to the night
21 shift. If you were on night, you basically were just reading out photo missions from all
22 seven to seven. That was a much more civilized thing to do. So everybody's ambition
23 was to get distinguished as a photo interpreter, with some exceptions which I'll clarify in
24 a second. My initial—you know, I followed the pattern of everyone else. I was a Spec IV
25 and I think I was a pretty good photo interpreter. I mean, it's hard to say. I know I was
26 slower than a lot of the other guys, but I think I was more thorough. There was always
27 my stock and trade that I would give a very detailed read out and I would ponder the
28 things that I would find. Other guys would kind of just reel through the stuff and get the
29 missions done. I think that was the desirable behavior. We were providing the second
30 read out of aerial photo missions that were flown in the five northern provinces of
31 Vietnam. The first read out was called an IPIR, immediate photo interpretation report.

1 The IPIR was produced—I don't know these numbers off the top of my head, but I'm
2 going to say within the first three hours of time over target. So the planes would come
3 down, they'd unload the film, they'd develop it. Photo interpreters would rapidly plot it
4 on a one to two hundred and fifty thousand map, so that they knew what the flight lines
5 were. Then they would reel through it to see if anything jumped out at them. You know,
6 something that was a major troop movement that was very visible or something like that.
7 And they would notice that, and which frames they thought they saw some of that
8 activity. Then, those missions usually were coming to us from Tan Son Nhut in Saigon
9 because they were flown out of Saigon. They would come in an Air Force courier plane,
10 and we would get there within eight hours of time over target. We had—I think this is
11 correct, but it's been thirty some odd years. We had—I think we had about four hours to
12 turn these missions around. Our job was to give them the first detailed read out. So the
13 expectation was we would put an eyeball on every frame and we would examine those
14 frames for any items of interest or change from the last prior coverage that we had and
15 report those items of interest or change to the commanders in the form of a written report.
16 So we were under the gun. We had to get these missions read out and we had to get them
17 done fast. Sometimes they'd come out fast and furious. There were nights when we
18 would come in and we would have sixty missions to read out. We'd have maybe five
19 photo interpreters on duty that night. So you'd have to really scramble to get through
20 these missions and give them a decent read out. Basically, we would have to plot them on
21 one to fifty thousand Army maps. The maps were never that good. I mean, they were fine
22 in the lowlands, but when you got out into the jungle, there just wasn't good map
23 information. You'd have photo data that would be far more complete than whatever the
24 sketchy data was out on the maps. So plotting them and giving exact coordinates for the
25 beginning and end of the runs was always a dicey business. There was a certain amount
26 of judgment that you had to execute in order to keep moving and get the missions done. I
27 was pretty good at plotting. I developed the skill of being able to see stereo without a
28 stereoscope. By kind of crossing your eyes—I don't know if you've ever had the
29 opportunity to see these pictures. If you stare at them, three dimensional images will pop
30 out of them. Well, that's really the same faculty that you need to have in order to see
31 stereo without a stereoscope. Everyone told us that we shouldn't do that because it would

1 cause your eyes to go cross-eyed later on in life, but so far so good. (Chuckles) It was just
2 a much easier way to plot because you weren't looking in a very finite way, you were
3 looking in a more comprehensive way of what was going on. So first of all, you'd have to
4 get the mission plotted. You'd identify where the first frame on the run was and where
5 the last frame on that run was. Then you would interpolate where additional frames
6 between it ran and you could then determine what the flight line was and then you'd have
7 to—by the size of the presentation of the frame on the ground, you could determine the
8 scale off the photograph that you were looking at. One you had the scale of the
9 photograph, then that was a useful item of information for you as you interpreted things.
10 If you found a truck, for example, you could measure the truck. If you measured the
11 truck, you could then use the dichotomous key to determine what type of the truck it was.
12 If you couldn't visually see the whole truck because it's camouflaged, then you
13 understand it's part of the Viet Cong or the NVA. So it was important to try and establish
14 what that scale was. You'd know the focal length of the camera that was used and you
15 would know the reported altitude that the pilot gave you. So having the focal length and
16 the altitude and then knowing distances on the ground, you could easily calculate the
17 scale of the photograph and also have a good understanding of what the ground cover
18 was. And then you would be able to make some decisions on what you were seeing down
19 there. If it was out over the jungle, the truth of the matter was that you'd see nothing but
20 trees. It was nothing but canopy. You might be able to distinguish a stream running down
21 in it. You could plot it by understanding the topography of the land. That's why it was
22 important to be able to see stereo without the stereoscope because you could then look at
23 a whole frame of imagery and kind of get a lay of what the topography would look like.
24 You could get that topography to match up to a contour map and then you could get a
25 good chance of where that was. If it had a really steep incline on one end of the photo and
26 a stream running in the other corner of the frame, then you could say, "Well, this frame
27 and this cliff line really relates to this photography out here in the vicinity where the 1 to
28 250 plot said these flight lines were. So this is probably where we're starting." And then
29 you'd kind of work from there. It was a lot of brain work in this stuff. You had to figure it
30 out. Here you are, nineteen years old, Spec IV, and you're responsible for finding
31 anything that's on this imagery that is important to a commander who might be engaged

1 at the time that this aircraft is over target. If you could find something that was important
2 enough to help him, you might save some lives. That was always uppermost in my
3 thinking. I did the best I could, always. I never shook, I never eased up. For me it was
4 important to be effective. I got noticed fairly quickly, I was a good soldier, but I also
5 think I was a pretty good II. So I made it out the night fairly early. I think I was in within
6 two and a half or three months. Once I got on nights, I really felt great. I mean, the guys
7 were smarter on nights, and we had more fun and it was kind of an elite cluster and all of
8 that just felt like a lot more fun. The only thing was that you were out at the compound
9 near the bridge ramp, and you were always worried that something might happen.
10 Whereas, in the hotel, you were in the city, and you were—I don't know, somehow you
11 felt a little bit safer and less likely to be attacked. I always felt that it was better to be
12 awake at night than it was to be asleep because Charlie was going to come calling at
13 night, he wasn't going to come calling in the daytime. You could sleep in the daytime,
14 and you'd be ready at night. I was really happy to get on nights and the more that I was
15 on nights, the better I liked them. Later on, when they got shorter, I figured out how I
16 could hitch a ride over to China Beach and spend the day sleeping on the beach and then
17 make it back to work in time for the seven o'clock shift change. I really enjoyed it. I'm
18 sure I'm romanticizing it in my own mind now. I mean, there was plenty to not like, but it
19 felt like I was doing important work and that—I became, I think, reasonably competent at
20 it. I didn't feel like I was not doing a good job and so it seemed like a good thing. I liked
21 it.

22 KC: Take me through or describe for me the types of equipment that you worked
23 with. What sort of technology was available? What do you think its capacity was, do you
24 think it was adequate? What technology did you use as a photo interpreter?

25 MG: I really think most of what we had was pretty much a refinement of
26 whatever was available in World War II. When we were in photo interpretation school,
27 they issued us a photo interpretation kit, an II kit. It had a little—almost like a jeweler's
28 eye piece of a magnifying glass. There was like 2X, 6X, and 8X versions of this thing.
29 They were just magnifying glasses, really. You'd put them down on the film and you'd
30 get a more advanced look at it. We had stereoscopic microscopes that we had that were—
31 let me just take a step back and say that all of our missions came to us in the form of—

1 they were usually positive images printed on translucent film so that you could put them
2 on a light table, and you could illuminate them and see them better. We never saw hard
3 photographs. Like in the sense that you've got a stack of twenty pictures. We also, would
4 on occasion, read out negative film and the positive film was just a positive version of the
5 negative film. Both are films, right? Everyone's seen a negative. Like when you're
6 developing 35-millimeter photographs. That's a negative film. When you have slides,
7 those are positives. 35-millimeter slides are positive developments of that same kind of
8 film. So that's essentially what we had. We had different formats or four by fours. There
9 were four by eights, there were eight and a half by eleven, which were big ones. Those
10 are split verticals, which means you had a left and a right camera taking imagery at the
11 exact same time and there was overlap left to right as well as the ground being forward.
12 So the whole frame was in stereo. So with these different formats, depending on the
13 altitude that was being thrown, it'd be covering more or less ground on the ground and in
14 more or less detail. The lower the mission, the clearer the image that was on the ground
15 and the easier it was to interpret. The higher the altitude, the more items and stuff that
16 was on that single frame, the more murky the resolution was because there was less
17 definition as you pulled up to a higher altitude. So that's where the interpretation comes
18 into it. You might see something that would peak your interest and you would look at it
19 and stare at it a little bit and say, "Now, is that an anti-aircraft gun emplacement or is that
20 a (unintelligible)." You'd have to really be careful about it because if you called it an
21 anti-aircraft gun emplacement, that was going to draw attention to the commanders on the
22 ground. They'd have to go and find out about it. If this guy from intelligence says that
23 there's an anti-aircraft weapon in this location, it would be nice if we took that thing out.
24 If you were going to say something like that, you have to be careful about it. We were
25 very careful about it. Back to the technology. So we did have these stereoscopic
26 microscopes that would allow us to really bore in on this. But for the most part, those
27 were useful in a European setting where if you had a mission and they overflew an
28 airbase and there were fifty aircraft out on a flight line, you could use that kind of a
29 microscope to identify the various kinds of aircraft and the models and whatever kind of
30 weaponry is attached to them and things like that. It would be very useful in that
31 environment, but in a counter insurgency war, there just wasn't that kind of items of

1 interest on the ground. I mean, you'd be lucky if you found an anti-aircraft replacement
2 or a mechanized weapons cache or something like that. You'd have to interpret it to call
3 it that. And then, when you did, you always had a certain amount of doubt as to whether
4 or not you were right. So we were checked by even more experience photo interpreters
5 and then the II section chief would sign off on the interpretations that we made. So it
6 wasn't as if we were flying alone, but there was a lot of our time in what we were doing.
7 We had a lot of control over what you saw. Often times, you would have to argue your
8 case. "This is what I'm seeing it. Here's how I see it, what do you see?" We'd get two or
9 three of us and we'd kind of chin scratch together and finally we'd all arrive at an
10 opinion, and we'd report it as a combined opinion because it was that important. As I
11 said, there was the tactical infantry interpretation facility that was one of the three vans
12 that was located in our operation shack. I would love to see one of these things today. It
13 must have been someone selling a contract to the government because it really was a
14 stupid thing. It had a couple of light tables in it and then it had that computer for plotting
15 imagery. You were supposed to do drafting in it, and it was all mounted on a five-ton
16 truck inside an expansible van. This thing was supposed to be able to ride out into the
17 tactical environment with—I'm sure it was meant to be with those MID's that I talked
18 about, like the 9th Infantry MID (Military Information Division). You were supposed to—
19 it was going to be a facility that was parked by the side of the air strip where the
20 Mohawks would come down and bring the infantry down, you'd be able to read out the
21 imagery and get it in the hands of the commander for a split second. None of that was
22 going on in our environment. I mean, we never really used that TIIF at all. I think it did
23 have the teletype in it. So that was the one thing—we'd get teletype communications
24 from Saigon from the TIIF, but there really wasn't much there. Otherwise, it was pretty
25 primitive, like basic drafting tools. You know, drafting triangles and we had a plotting
26 template. Just a bunch of pre-rudimentary drafting tools and some measuring devices so
27 you could measure things on the film and do your calculations. I think we had a slip stick,
28 just a slide rule with different calculations possible on that. I never got to fly to—I could
29 never make that thing work. That was about it. It wasn't anywhere near as sophisticated
30 as you might have thought it would have been.

1 KC: A moment ago, you were talking about your work being checked by someone
2 else more experienced than you. Were you ever overruled? Did you ever say, "I think
3 we've got something here." Say, it's an anti-aircraft or gun replacement or something
4 else and then it goes up to the next level and someone else says, "Nope, that's not it." Did
5 that ever happen to you?

6 MG: Well, I'm sure it did in the early going. I mean, that's part of the learning
7 process. I'm sure that—and part of this thing is that when you come out of intelligence
8 school, you are full of Soviet ID and you've been seeing this very well, luscious imagery
9 in school. Stuff that is flown in the communist block. And so, you're not really attuned to
10 counter insurgency kind of environment. You're more of a NATO photo interpreter than
11 you are a Vietnam photo interpreter. You know, the experienced hands would double
12 check you and keep you under control, so you weren't—and this actually tragically, I
13 think, actually happened. I was fairly along by the time of this anecdote, but I'd been in
14 country for a long while and part of our area of responsibility was the A Shau Valley. For
15 really, I think maybe every two weeks there was a continuing wrecking mission that
16 would just fly right up the valley and image the valley. We'd had it—around the time I
17 got there we occupied the valley and Hamburger Hill, which was at the bottom at the
18 southern end of the valley, had been a huge battle. We won the battle and then vacated
19 the hill almost immediately and the Viet Cong repopulated itself. I don't know, I don't
20 know what sense that made. But the valley kind of was Indian territory. It never really
21 was firmly under anyone's control, but there had been firebases out there around '68 and
22 so there were these firebase emplacements, and you could see, scattered about, there were
23 crates for shelves. And the crates looked very much like rocket launchers. If you were a
24 new guy coming out of intelligence school you would think, "Well, this is a Soviet rocket
25 launcher." First of all, if you've been in-country for a while, you knew that they never
26 launched using a full-blown rocket launcher gizmo. They would always prop them up on
27 sticks and fire them off one by one. They didn't have a whole bunch of them they they'd
28 dispose of. So you never would see a rocket launcher and you wouldn't be looking for it.
29 You'd know that if you'd been around for a while. We'll, we had a captain come from
30 intelligence school and he was convinced that he had spotted a Katyusha rocket launcher
31 and we were all laughing at him. "No sir, that's just a crate for ammunition." He was

1 adamant about it, and he ended up having the Marines go and check it out. I think a
2 couple of guys got killed in that patrol. I remember thinking just how stupid he was
3 overriding it. That was the case of rank. He was just pulling rank to kind of save his own
4 face. I think we all—I know I, in a lot of ways was never able to get past that with him. I
5 always felt he was an asshole for doing that and if he'd just listened to us, he would not
6 have cost those guys their lives. Anyway, to answer your question directly, yes. I do think
7 that I was supervised like anybody else and I'm sure that I had new guy mistakes like that
8 and they were corrected thankfully. The quality of intelligence was improved.

9 KC: You're talking about this lieutenant and you also mentioned some of the
10 other people that you were there with. Tell me about the people that you served with
11 there in Det B. You don't have to mention names, or feel free to if you'd like, but tell me
12 about the type of people, the relationship, the comradery that existed. Tell me about the
13 individuals with whom you served.

14 MG: Okay, Detachment B had a photo interpretation section and a reproduction
15 section, and an aviation section. The photo interpretation section is obviously where the
16 interpreters were. The reproduction section was a group of guys who were in support of
17 photo interpretation, and they did the developing of film and any film that we took on
18 handheld photo missions out over the jungle. The aviation section was our liaison section.
19 They flew missions to Detachment E up in Phu Bai and also provided a liaison with our
20 Saigon headquarters. So they had a Beaver, I think it was an O-10 Beaver. I'm not exactly
21 sure—or a U10 Beaver, which is a very nice radio-engine, high-wing model plane. Just a
22 really cool plane. So three different kinds of guys. The enlisted men lived in a hotel and
23 the officers lived in a villa. The hotel was located on the bank of the Song Ha River about
24 halfway through the city of Da Nang, as Song Ha makes its way to Da Nang Bay. So it
25 was a really nice location. We were right on the river and I'm sure it was a pretty nice
26 hotel back in the day. Kind of like an art deco, stucco hotel that was probably built in the
27 twenties I'd estimate. Maybe the forties, I don't know. At two guys to a room, it had a
28 private bath or shower and we had hot and cold running water in the hotel, but the water
29 was no potable, you couldn't even brush your teeth in it. It was great to have the luxury
30 of having a warm shower whenever you wanted one. We had overhead ceiling fans in the
31 rooms, cross ventilation, so they were fairly habitable rooms. By Vietnam standards for

1 enlisted men, we were living like kings. I mean, there were plenty of officers who didn't
2 live anywhere near as nicely as we did. So we had kind of the three tribes of the
3 organization. There was a repro guys, there was the II, and then there was the aviation
4 guys. We kind of typically broke it up that way, too. I think because of the demand of the
5 MOS as imagery interpreter, you tended to get some bright guys in that MOS. So most of
6 my friends were photo interpreters with the exception of Kent Fuksman, who I mentioned
7 earlier was our reports clerk. He was a brilliant guy. He was the most anti-war guy in the
8 unit. You know, I think I was kind of captured in his orbit. He was so eloquent and
9 intelligent about his opposition to the war that I found him very persuasive. He helped
10 kind of turn my thinking from kind of being Kennedyesque and "Bear any burden, fight
11 any battle" to "What the hell are we doing here and what sense does this make? What's
12 our exit strategy and how the hell are we going to get out of here?" So Ken, who is a
13 good friend of mine and—great sense of humor, great to be around, and just a sensitive
14 guy who understood things very intuitively. Just a really sweet friend and I honestly
15 loved him. Just a great guy. Then, the other person that had tremendous influence—and
16 both these guys were—Ken had his masters already from, I think Albany. This other guy,
17 Ron Barryman was also what I would characterize as my best friend. He was a forester
18 from McCloud, California. He was twenty-four years old at that point, so he seemed like
19 an old guy to me. He was a college graduate, and he just had this attitude like, you know,
20 "I'll be as professional and competent photo interpreter as there is, but I don't like this
21 army shit." It's true. (Chuckles) Because he was a forester, he had a lot of
22 photogrammetry and photo competent before he ever joined the Army, so it was like
23 second nature. He was a superb photo interpreter. He was on nights the whole time I was
24 there. Then there was this other guy, Norman Carrass, he was a sergeant. He was also—
25 he graduated from West Virginia, and he was older. He must have been like twenty-six or
26 twenty-seven at the time. He was just, you know, brilliant. He knew everything about
27 photo trimming. They would give him missions and it would take him three weeks to
28 read them out after we had all passed them on under the time constraint. He'd get time to
29 give them a super detailed read out. That gave him, you know, just a tremendous amount
30 of knowledge about what was going on in the area. So he was always our resort. If you
31 needed somebody to confirm an opinion or help you understand something, he would go

1 to Norm and he would have the answer. He was very didactic in the way that he would
2 teach to you. He would ask you questions and make you expose your ignorance.
3 (Chuckles) And then, he would correct you and teach you in that process, but always with
4 kind of a sense that you're a fool and I know more than you. He would spar with you, but
5 I think it was always through the effort of trying to make you smarter and better. So
6 anyway, I enjoyed Norm a tremendous amount. Then there were other guys, and I won't
7 name this guy's name, but he was from Illinois, and he was a great guy. He always
8 wanted me to play chess with him and I wouldn't play chess with him. I'd play this game
9 TwixT that I was absolutely expert at. I told him when he beat me at TwixT, I would let
10 him teach me to play chess with him and he never beat me. (Chuckles) The whole tour I
11 had him frustrated and then he never got a chance to beat me. I whipped him every day in
12 this other game. He was interesting because he was one of the few people who would
13 sneak out of the hotel and go out on the economy and actually seek out some of the
14 prostitutes who were available in Da Nang. He was constantly doing this. I said, "You
15 can't do this. You're going to mess up your plumbing." He did it the whole time, but the
16 thing that he was famous for was that the night before he left, he also went out on the
17 economy. I couldn't believe it. It was like, if you mess this up, you're not going to go
18 home. But he was out there the night before he left, which I guess he is pretty impressive.
19 So there were those guys. That was the photo interpretation section. I think the repro
20 section was a little more—they were rougher and tougher and more Army than we were.
21 So it was kind of interesting to have them around since they would challenge us in
22 basketball. We had a courtyard in the middle of our hotel, and it had a basketball hoop.
23 So we played some basketball out there. They were always better than we were. We were
24 kind of egg-headed and they were athletic. When we'd go to the beach to play touch
25 football, they would always cream us. They were just a little bit tougher. I guess some
26 II's roomed with repro guys, but for the most part, the repro guys were together in their
27 rooms and the II's were in their rooms. My roommate was a fellow named Roger Dirt,
28 and he was—I'm really not sure where he was from, I think he was from Missouri. He
29 ended up being on days most of the time and I was on nights most of the time, so we
30 didn't cross paths all that often. Which was kind of nice because you had a private room
31 in a sense. He was a good guy. I really liked him. He had a stereo and a refrigerator

1 which really made him very lucrative. You know, we always had sodas on board, and he
2 had a good stereo, so we'd get music from the PX and it was kind of nice. We had a nice
3 room. Our room looked good. We painted it up kind of cool. All in all, it was kind of like
4 being in college. There were just good guys around and you'd find ping pong tables to
5 play ping pong sometimes and play some basketball. Then we'd find other ways to get
6 into mischief. I remember one time we had these foam mattresses that were the original
7 mattresses of the hotel. They had cells in the bottom of them to allow the air. The cells
8 were getting sealed up with mold and mildew and stuff, so I guess the Army would get
9 real Army mattresses for us. So all of a sudden the mattresses came and we had to get all
10 these foam rubber mattresses out of our rooms. So we stacked them up in the courtyard
11 and as we stacked them up we realized, "Hey, you know, we can jump into these things
12 and we wouldn't get hurt. It would be kind of fun." It would be like jumping into a pole
13 vault. So we stacked them up two mattresses by two mattresses by two mattresses kind of
14 going and basket weaving them as we stacked them up. We made this pad that was two
15 mattresses wide and maybe, I don't know, twenty mattresses high. You know, like chest
16 high. Then we got up on the third floor and got on the rail and jumped off into this thing.
17 Let me tell you something, that was the scariest thing. Standing on the rail, looking down
18 three floors, and trying to hit the two mattress by two mattress square and knowing that if
19 you missed, you're going to be paralyzed for life. It was kind of a challenge, but we
20 occupied ourselves for hours with that. That was a great, great evening when we had
21 those mattresses out there. So everybody—music was a big thing, you know. We'd listen
22 to music and we had a beer ration. I think we got a case of beer a month or something
23 like that. I'm not sure what it was. I wasn't much of a drinker, so it didn't make that
24 much difference to me. I think that you could even get some hard liquor if you had the
25 ration coupons for it. I would give my ration coupons away to my buddies who, you
26 know, were more interested in having more of a stock on hand. I really didn't need any of
27 that stuff to get along. I was pretty satisfied with Coca Cola and Wyler's Lemonade and
28 things like that.

29 KC: All right. Now, in addition to all this you've taken me through a typical day
30 at the office as it were and you talked about some of the individuals. What sort of things

- 1 would you do in your own time? You mentioned not being a big drinker and that sort of
- 2 things, but on the twelve hours that you weren't working, what would you do?
- 3 MG: Well— (Audio cuts)

Interview with Michael Garemko

Session [3] of [5]

Date 8 October 2010

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History interview with Mr.
2 Mike Garemko. Today is 8 October 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University and Mr. Garemko is joining me by phone from Bufort, Georgia.
4 Mr. Garemko, when we ended earlier this week, you were discussing some things that
5 you might do on a typical day. You were working twelve on, twelve off and we had you
6 on the night shift. You were talking about some of the things you might do to pass the
7 time, some of the people who were involved. So what other sort of things come to mind
8 when you think about the off time, your off duty time, your down time there at Da Nang?

9 Michael Garemko: It was interesting, we did work twelve hours. So we went off
10 duty and our chow truck came to pick us up at seven o'clock when they brought in the
11 night team or the day team, whichever shift you were on. You really had more to do after
12 that because you had to then go back to the mess hall, and we ate at the Da Nang Hotel
13 and I think it was a MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) mess hall. The food
14 was excellent, they had really great food. There aren't too many people who can say that
15 about their military dining, but we really had very good food. It wasn't uncommon to
16 have cheeseburgers or in the mornings we would have omelets and made to order
17 whatever you wanted in them. It was just delicious, so that was great. So you're off work
18 at seven o'clock, you go to the mess hall, you spend maybe another hour getting chow
19 and herd up everybody after they eat and then get them all back on the truck. And so now
20 it's about eight o'clock at night and you're back to your room. We were restricted, we
21 were not allowed to go out into the city. Earlier, the Marines had, I guess kind of ravaged
22 the city and the whole city was put off limits to American personnel. There were Armed
23 Forces police loosely patrolling because by that time, there wasn't much American
24 presence actually in the City of Da Nang. Around the city there were plenty of troops, but
25 in the city, there were only a number of intelligence operations and the CIA and
26 American aid organizations and things like that. They were all occupying hotels around
27 the city. There was some Armed Forces police patrolling so you could get picked up if
28 you were to go out. I think there were guys who would go out from time to time and do a

1 little sightseeing and sample the economy to a certain extent. I never did, I thought it was
2 too dangerous. Someone had—rumor was that the Viet Cong has a bounty on anyone in
3 intelligence, especially aerial intelligence and if they caught you, they would mutilate
4 you. I don't know if that was true or not, but it was true enough to scare a nineteen year
5 old, so I decided that I would follow the rules. I guess I thought that if I got caught out
6 there that it would only mean trouble and frankly it seemed a little dangerous to me, so I
7 didn't do it. I always said we lived in the nicest hotel in hell. I mean, we were literally
8 prisoners. There was a gate at the front of the hotel and the gate was slammed shut and
9 you were in there for the night. We had a little guard out front who was a Vietnamese
10 national and we paid him, apparently. He would fall asleep routinely and he had a little
11 carbine rifle. One time, Ron Berryman snuck up on him and had his survival knife to his
12 neck and told him if he ever caught him sleeping again, he'd slit his throat. You know,
13 we really were poorly protected. Anyway, so we would go back to the hotel. I think I
14 mentioned that we had a basketball hoop in the middle of the courtyard of the hotel. It
15 was a range with a central courtyard and the rooms would open to that courtyard. Almost
16 like courtyard suites here in the US, except there was no atrium roof over the top of it. So
17 it was three stories high and toward the back of the hotel most of the lower ranking
18 enlisted men were located in the back of the hotel. Toward the front of the hotel, the lifers
19 had the bigger rooms and the more established rooms. That was fine with us. They were
20 up front, we were in the back. It was great, we didn't see them all night. So we would
21 play some basketball. We'd play ping pong, we had a ping pong table. I would spend
22 most of my off hours writing letters or making tapes to send home. You know, so I'd
23 send tapes to my mother and sister and to my girlfriend. I bought my girlfriend a tape
24 recorder and sent it back to her. She was going to school in Massachusetts at Wheaton
25 College and she's now my wife. So I sent her the tape recorder and nothing was more
26 cherished than getting a tape from her in the mail and hearing her voice and just being
27 able to kind of relate to what was going on back in the world. My theory was the more I
28 wrote, the more they feel guilty and the more they write back. I did the best I could. I've
29 seen some of those letters pretty recently and they're pretty embarrassing. I mean,
30 begging for mail. You tend to think of yourself as a reasonably sophisticated adult at that
31 point in your life and you really weren't. You were just a whiny little kid on boy scout

1 camp wanting to go home. So anyway, I would spend a lot of time writing letters and
2 then I had—I think I may have mentioned this earlier, but a good friend of mine, Peter
3 Martin, who was in my AIT class, advanced training class—he had introduced our whole
4 class to this game called TwixT. 3M was making bookshelf games at that point and this
5 was one of their bookshelf games. It's sort of like Chinese Checkers. It's kind of an
6 interesting strategic game because you go onto defense and offense almost
7 instantaneously. You're not really sure at times whether you're being offensive, or you're
8 being defended against. Peter was really good at this game and we all tried to beat him.
9 He could beat us even when—he would get us to the point of almost being defeated and
10 then he'd say, "I'll take over your side." And then he would take over our side and win.
11 We would have like two or three guys trying to beat him and he was just incredibly good
12 at it. That's a challenge. I had to figure out how to do this. The more I played, the better
13 I'd gotten and pretty soon I got to the point where I could play pretty invincibly myself.
14 By that time, I'd moved away from Peter, so I never got to challenge him. This other guy,
15 Donny McDowell, who loved to play chess, wanted to play chess with me and I said, "I'll
16 play chess with you as soon as you beat me in TwixT." For the whole time we were
17 together he was never able to beat me in TwixT, so I never had to play chess. It was so
18 frustrating because I know he would have clobbered me in chess, but he never got a
19 chance to play me because I had that prerequisite, you had to be able to beat me. I'd say
20 to him, "If you can't even beat me in TwixT, what makes you think you'll be able to beat
21 me in chess." It was just ridiculous. Anyway, so I'd play that a little bit. Listening to
22 music and sitting around and drinking a beer or two along the way, I think that was an
23 important recreational activity. Now, when I got on nights, as I got more experienced and
24 better aware of how things were working there, I realized that China Beach was across
25 the bridge in the peninsula between the bridge ramp and the ocean—or South China Sea.
26 I've always enjoyed going to the beach and it was right there. It was accessible. I think
27 the USO ran an in-country R&R center there. So on nights, after a while, you could
28 hitchhike your way over to China Beach just anywhere along the beaten paths of
29 resupply. Guys would stop and pick up a GI and give them a ride. So it wasn't too hard to
30 hitch a ride over to that side of the world in Da Nang. You'd go over to the beach and I'd
31 go over and spend some hours on the beach, just kind of lying there. Especially when I

1 was short term, trying to get a tan and thinking it would be cool to go home really tanned
2 up. Remember the vision that I had of getting off the plane.

3 KC: Right.

4 MG: (Laughs) So all of that made going over to China Beach kind of an
5 interesting—I would do that maybe once or twice a week just for recreational purposes. It
6 was interesting, the beach was gorgeous. I don't think I've ever seen a nicer beach—
7 maybe some of the gulf shore beaches in Florida. Just this azure water, a modest surf, an
8 active surf and sugary white sand. Just beautiful, beautiful beaches. The trouble was that
9 it was a very broad and plainer beach. It took a long time to get to the water and the sand
10 was so hot that you would burn your feet. It was just painful to walk across the sand
11 because it was so hot in the tropical climate. Also, they had boats that would patrol the
12 swimming area and drop grenades, concussion grenades to try to scare the sharks away.
13 So that always kind of worried me a little bit. Not much body surfing there because I
14 didn't want to get out very far. So I'd go to China Beach and I thought that was a fun
15 release. We had a PX. Actually, I think we had access to three PX's. There was an Air
16 Force PX, a Marine PX. And so whenever we'd get a PX, that was always fun. You'd be
17 able to buy camera equipment and film and mailers to get your film developed and you'd
18 get your beer rationed. We'd buy cases of soda and Wyler's Lemonade and things like
19 that so we could have things to drink. It was always fun to go to the PX. There was
20 always stuff you could buy, and it seemed like it gave you a release from being
21 imprisoned. It was mostly just go to work, come home, try and relax. As I said, you'd get
22 off and get back to the hotel around seven, seven thirty. Then, by ten o'clock you were
23 tired and so you would kind of hit the rack and go to bed. Some guys would go to the
24 club. At the hotel where we took our chow, there was an NCO (Non-Commissioned
25 Officer) club. It was a pretty sophisticated night club kind of place. They would have
26 bands from the Philippines and Taiwan and things like that. They would come through
27 and I don't know, I wasn't enough of a music purist, so it was not interesting to me in the
28 least. You know, I guess it was okay. I had some friends who spent a fair amount getting
29 pretty pie-eyed in the club. They would arrive at the hotel even later at night, like maybe
30 one or two o'clock in the morning and they'd be well oiled. So you'd have to kind of
31 settle them down and make sure everything was okay. Generally speaking, it was a very

1 boring existence. You didn't have a lot of recreational outlets and you couldn't go run
2 somewhere. I don't know that we were really inclined to run back in those days, but I
3 would have loved to have walked up the riverbank. It was kind of like a Parisian
4 riverbank the way it was engineered. There were a lot of colonial buildings along the
5 river. I had an interest in them and we would drive by every day on the way to the mess
6 hall. I thought that they—I mean, I was just impressed with the character of the
7 architecture, and I would have liked to have known more about it, but there was no
8 internet and there was no way to really know about those things back then. No one knew.
9 It was just there; we were just there. It seemed wrong—it would have been nice to have
10 somebody come around and say, "Welcome to Da Nang. Here's some of the things you'll
11 see around the city. This is what they are and here's some of the history of this place." It
12 all was passed around by word of mouth. In the Army, word of mouth is pretty
13 unreliable. I tell people these things and I look at my slides. It's all the injector of the
14 stuff that I heard when I was there, and I have no way of knowing if it was true or false.
15 It's kind of frustrating. I'm the kind of guy that would have liked to know more about the
16 place. That's kind of it. There wasn't a heck of a lot to do.

17 KC: You mentioned a few things I want to go back and touch on briefly. One of
18 the things you said you liked to do was listen to music. Obviously, when the Americans
19 think of the Vietnam War there's a certain soundtrack. Whatever songs that generally
20 crop up in people's minds when they think of the Vietnam War. What was your
21 soundtrack in the Vietnam War? What songs did you like to listen to? What groups were
22 your favorites?

23 MG: I was just talking to my son about this last night. I was saying that it was so
24 much different back then. You talk about the soundtrack of your life and because we had
25 radio as our primary method of music dissemination, everybody kind of shared the same
26 cultural awareness. I was born in 1949 and so I was a freshman in high school when The
27 Beatles impacted the American music scene. Then the Beatles kind of grew me up in high
28 school and got me to college. I'll never forget their song, "Get Back" came out the week I
29 was going to Vietnam. So that song obviously had a lot of resonance to me, "Get back to
30 where you once belonged". And then, "Honky-Tonk Woman" came out by The Stones
31 and I thought that it was really cool because there were two ASBN radio outlets that I

1 knew of. One was in Saigon and one was in Da Nang. The Da Nang number one song for
2 1969 was “Honky-Tonk Woman.” The number one song in Saigon was “Sugar, Sugar”
3 by The Archies.

4 KC: Something significantly different between those two.

5 MG: We thought that that kind of set it off. (Laughs) You know, by the time we
6 got to Nam, you know, you were listening to Armed Forces Radio and a lot of the stuff
7 that was on there—they tried to vary the play sheet to meet their total audience. So there
8 were country hours and there were variety hours, there were rock hours. There were some
9 talk hours and things like that. There was an effort to be a richer broadcasting outlet for a
10 lot of tastes and interest. So it was kind of harder to take from the radio, but one of the
11 things that was available at the PX were cheap albums. We would eagerly await the
12 music when it came into the PX and buy albums and try to be connected via the music
13 that was coming out. Our friends back home would be writing to us, and Santana came
14 out when I was in ‘Nam. I had never heard of them and my wife sent me a tape recording
15 saying, “Mike, these guys are really great, you’re going to love these guys when you get
16 back.” I remember feeling that she never turned me onto any new music. I was always
17 months ahead of her and knowing what was out there, it really killed me to know this
18 really great guy turned up and I knew nothing about him. Chicago came out in ’69 and I
19 landed in ’69. I always had kind of the eclectic taste. You know, big Stones fan, loved the
20 Animals, loved Jimmy Hendrix. The Who, I loved The Who. You know, all of those kind
21 of standard Blues-based British groups. I loved Eric Clapton and Cream. I loved The
22 Byrd’s, too. There was just a lot of good music out at that time. All of those songs—
23 “Sympathy for the Devil” though, I think was like an iconic song of that time. I can
24 remember for hours just kind of unpacking that song and listening to it and thinking,
25 “This could be the perfect rock song.” It was just an impressive accomplishment and
26 those of us who were there loved it. Of course, “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin'-to-Die Rag” was
27 also Country Joe and the Fish. That was obviously an icon from Vietnam. You have to
28 say, as much as you hate to, “Are You Going to San Francisco?”, that song was played
29 everywhere. I mean, I hated it. What’s his name—I can’t remember, but I hated that song.
30 It was like constantly on the radio and every Filipino band that played there had this

1 rendition of “Are you going to San Francisco?” Be sure to have flowers in your hair, you
2 know. Anyway, that’s kind of the music that I recall.

3 KC: That’s a pretty darn good survey of it all I would say. Another thing you
4 mentioned a little bit ago, I know you mentioned in our previous session as well, you
5 used the term “lifer”. We know who the lifers are. I want your description of your
6 relationship between people like you, kind of caught up in the thing—drafter, volunteer
7 type, enlisted, and those who chose to make the Army, in this case, their life. What was
8 the relationship like between people like you and people like so-called lifers?

9 MG: You know, I think there was one word for it, it was disdain. We literally
10 disdained them. We had one staff sergeant, his name was Donny Crockter and he had
11 been a ranger in a recondo, and he looked tough as nails. He was the one sergeant that we
12 had there that I had more than passing respect for. I mean, if we had ever had a problem,
13 if we had been attacked, I would have run and got as close to him as I possibly would
14 have gotten because I knew he knew what to do. I didn’t think anyone else in our
15 leadership had a clue on how to protect us, how to fight the war, or how to do anything
16 other than assign details. I literally had no—I avoided conversations with them. I avoided
17 their purview; I didn’t want them to know I existed. I tried not to get in their way, and I
18 knew that they didn’t share my beliefs about the war. I just disdained them. I thought,
19 “Anyone who would want to stay in this stupid Army for any more than what they make
20 you stay in it for, has got to be some sort of a sick personality.” I really had no respect for
21 them. I think that was kind of funny because the officers broke down the same way we
22 did. The company-grade officers tended to be approachable and kind of in it with us. The
23 field-grade officers tended to be lifers and trying to make grade. I think that we had no
24 trouble with the lieutenants and captains. They were all pretty smart guys and they were
25 there just to get their obligation taken care of. They’d go into OCS or into ROTC
26 (Reserve Officer Training Corps) and they had their thoughts and dreams and ambitions,
27 and they were going to get out of the Army when they were done with that crap. They
28 respected us because they knew that we weren’t fools. You know, we were intelligent. So
29 the company-grade officers I had not trouble with. The field-grade officers tended to be a
30 little bit more scary. They had the power to snuff you out like a cigarette bud, but they
31 also were more committed to whatever the parting line was. So we would sit around for

1 hours at night. There were a few missions on a particular night, and we were waiting for
2 work to do—particularly during the monsoon in the I Corps, there was a lot of clouds. So
3 you don't get the imagery and there's just nothing to do.

4 KC: A lot less flying too, I would think.

5 MG: That's right, that's right. So for about six months it just rained solid in I
6 Corps. The monsoon in the north in the country is different than the monsoon in the
7 south. In the north the rain would come and then kind of rain for six months. For another
8 six months it's just hot and humid, uninterrupted blue sky. Down south, the monsoon's
9 more like rained every day at three o'clock and then it's gone. During the monsoon, we
10 didn't have a lot of work, so sitting around—I can remember these discussions with this
11 chief warrant officer that we had, his name was Mel Glenn. He was just rabidly pro-
12 Vietnam and he wanted to bomb them back to the Stone Age and, you know. We would
13 argue with him incisively, it would get heated. It would be like Meathead and Archie
14 arguing, you know, in *All in the Family*. Nobody ever was productively convincing
15 anybody of anything, but just testing our thoughts with each other. It just made you
16 distain them even more. At some point he would get to the point where he would pull
17 rank and say, "All right, this conversation is over gentlemen." And that was the end of it.
18 It was like, "Okay, you're an asshole." We would just move on. I don't know, just
19 generally speaking if I had a word for it. You know, the biggest insult you can give to
20 somebody was to call them a lifer. "I think you're going to be a lifer." "Oh yeah, right.
21 Thanks a lot, buddy." Or we would always talk about lifer tendencies, saying if you
22 shined your boots or you shined your buckle it would be, "Oh, that serious lifer tendency,
23 Garemko. I can see it taking a burst to six, there's no question about it in my mind." So it
24 was a definite hard line. You know, most of us got to E5 very quickly, but to get to E6
25 you pretty much had to reenlist. You know, that was the dividing line. If you were E5 or
26 below, you were an okay guy. If you were E6 or above, you were a moron. Pretty much
27 that.

28 KC: Well, a couple things that come to mind here, and you're talking about if you
29 shine your shoes and your belt buckle is looking just right, that you got these so-called
30 serious lifer tendencies. You mentioned earlier in our discussions that you tried to be a
31 good soldier, you wanted to do what was right.

1 MG: I had lifer tendencies; I did. You know, I liked having starched fatigues and I
2 liked having shiny boots and shiny buckle. Extensively, there were things about me that
3 made me appear like I would pick an Army life. My soul was clearly out of the Army
4 from the moment I got in. I always kind of viewed myself as being a short timer. It was
5 like my defense mechanism. When I got there, I put my number up on the board. We had
6 a short-timer's black board and people would keep their score up on the blackboard and
7 day by day change the number. I put my 360 whatever it was, 358 or something like that
8 and I put it up on the board. "Oh my god, I'd kill myself if I had 358 days to go." I did, I
9 mean the whole way through I counted my days up on the board as if I was a short timer.
10 I'd be saying, "330 short." And they'd say, "Oh, Garemmo, you are so fucked up. You are
11 a long, long time." I mean, I couldn't wait to get home. If I could've figure out a way to
12 get out of the Army faster, I would have. With this exception—the way that it worked
13 was if you DEROS within six months of your ETS (Expiration Term of Service), it would
14 drop you. And so guys were extending in Vietnam to get to that point, so they could get
15 right out of the Army when they came back from Vietnam. If you were say, a photo
16 interpreter, you would have burned out six months in training on your way to Vietnam.
17 And then if you did a year, you'd have eighteen months in. And so, if you extended for
18 six months and you were a draftee, you could then go home, you'd be out. If you had
19 taken—there was an advanced II course that you could take at Holabird, if you lined up
20 right. That would put another three months into it. A lot of guys would end up extending
21 in order to get the early out. But for me, I had a three year enlistment like a number of
22 guys and so there was no hope, you had to go. There was no way I was going to extend
23 and contribute to the statistics that said that the American—they were using that statistic,
24 I remember, saying the American forces are reupping their enlistment in Vietnam and
25 showing their support of their effort in the war. That was never the case. Most of those
26 guys were just trying to get the hell out of the army. You know, I would have gladly done
27 that if I thought I could get away with it. The thought of going home on leave and then
28 having to return, I think would have been daunting. I don't know if I could have done it
29 even if I wanted to. I never had that option, a live option, so I didn't do it.
30 KC: What do you think the lifer's opinion of you were?

1 MG: Well, as I said, I tried to avoid them as much as I could. I think that—me
2 personally or people like me?

3 KC: Both.

4 MG: I think that's two separate things. I tried to present a face to them that was
5 acceptable, or more than acceptable, exemplary. I wanted them to think I was a great
6 soldier and that I was of their kind and I had the potential to someday be like them. And
7 so that was my strategy and it worked very, very well. I got promoted very quickly. They
8 put me up for an early promotion board. I made E5 in eleven months in the time I joined
9 the army. So I got paid for two years for E5 and instead of being paid at E4. So it was a
10 good thing. That was a smart thing to do. It wasn't hard and I kind of liked military
11 things, it's not hard for me to accept that. I don't know what it is, the boy scout in me or
12 just my reverence for my father's activities when I was a young guy, but it never was
13 hard for me to do that. I could have gone to military school and it wouldn't have been a
14 problem. I mean, I liked it. From that perspective, extensively I looked like a great
15 soldier. I think, inside my heart I hated the Army and I hated the way that the Army
16 treated people and I hated being forced to get a haircut and I hated being denigrated and
17 treated like a second-class citizen and no—having no personal freedom and them being
18 able to tell me that I couldn't leave that hotel. I mean, all of those things just seemed to
19 me to be un-American. You couldn't voice your opinion freely, all of that just seemed
20 totally foreign. I couldn't imagine being in the Army for a long period of time, unless I
21 was able to do it as an officer. If I had found the pathway to OCS that had been
22 reasonably attainable without huge commitment, I might've considered it. I felt a sense of
23 (unintelligible). I mean, I felt pride in the Intelligence Corps, I felt pride in MIBARS, and
24 I felt that we did a good job and a good service. There were lifer tendencies to me, I don't
25 deny it. I believed in some of the mission, I really did. There was a lot going on in my
26 psychology. In a more global sense, I think the lifers, they viewed—the right term is for
27 the lower-ranking enlisted men, but let's say E-5 and below. The men were somewhat of
28 a threat. I think there was always the chance that we were going to mutiny somehow. I
29 think that, you know, this is something—somewhere along the line we were going to get
30 into this, but I was there from '69 to '70 and that's when the drug problems really started
31 to surface significantly. The fragging incidence were happening in the infantry divisions

1 and things like that. Morale was deteriorating. At least, according to the reports, it was
2 deteriorating in the military. In our unit, I never saw any of that. There were people that
3 were jerks and, you know, made bad calls, and forced you to do bad details and punished
4 you for doing different things. For the most part, it was reasonably civilized. I knew of no
5 one who was stealing any drugs. Now, I may have been naïve, and I admit that I wasn't
6 seeking any of that, but I knew of no drug activity in our hotel. I mean, I know I never
7 saw any use of marijuana or any other kinds of drugs the whole time I was there. When I
8 went to the first MIBARS reunion, I made that observation to George Tobias, who was
9 our CO (Commanding Officer) when I was there. He said that was his impression as well.
10 He would go down to Saigon and meet with the other commanders of the other
11 detachments when they would have commanders call and they'd be talking about all
12 these problems they had in Can Tho and Saigon, Nha Trang, and the other detachments.
13 He said, "I'd have to say, I don't think I have a problem." And they said, "Well, you're
14 not looking hard enough." I said, "You know, George, I got to tell you, I honestly don't
15 think that there was a problem there." I talked to a number of guys that I knew, and they
16 all agree with me. There really was no problem, nobody was doing that. And so, I think
17 we were a little bit atypical. I don't know if it was because we just didn't know how to
18 score it or just—for my part, I wouldn't have done it because I was always afraid if I got
19 caught doing something I wasn't supposed to do, they'd throw me in the infantry. As far
20 as I was concerned, I was living good and I wasn't doing anything to screw that up. You
21 know, I figured I was safe, I figured I would get through this thing, and I didn't want to
22 bugger up my chances of completing my tour right there and getting home and being
23 safe.

24 KC: While you were in Da Nang, you have China Beach that close. You
25 obviously took advantage of that at every opportunity I guess, later in your tour. What
26 about any other R&R? Did you go for any out of country R&R while you were there?

27 MG: You know, it's interesting. My plan was—the way R&R worked was that
28 you had more opportunity to go on R&R the later you were in your tour. I think you
29 could start taking R&R either your third or fourth month and you could take it right up to
30 the very end. And so my theory was that I wanted to be able to bump generals. When it
31 came time for me to go, I wanted them to say, "Oh, this guy has got nine months in

1 country, ten months in country, he gets to go on this flight. Captain, I'm sorry, but you're
2 going to have to wait for the next plane." So that was part of my—I was nineteen years
3 old, this is how a nineteen year old brain works. (Chuckles) It was kind of consistent with
4 my last answer, it was my chance to get power, and you know what I mean? In some
5 ways, there's some regulation that says you have a chance to have some control in your
6 life. That was my theory. I wanted to go on R&R on my eleventh month. I wanted to
7 spend the week in Australia, and I wanted to come back clear post, get on my freedom
8 bird, and fly home. I thought that Australia was great because it would give me a chance
9 to kind of decompress from the whole Asian experience and I'd be in an English-
10 speaking place. I always had an interest in Australia so that was my hope. I was executing
11 the plan. We had access to additional R&R time. I don't know how that worked, but I had
12 friends who took two or three R&R's because they knew somebody who could make it
13 happen. You know, so I could have done it. I knew of ways to do it, I just didn't. My goal
14 was to go to Australia, I really wanted to go to Sydney. I had intended to go into the
15 outback, and this was something I really wanted to see. I was kind of hoping, in a way, I
16 thought about even going to college in Australia after the war. Take my GI bill and go to
17 Australia. I was thinking that could be something I could learn about by just going there
18 on R&R. So then, Nixon announced Stage 3 troop withdrawals when I was in my
19 eleventh month, and I was included in those troop withdrawals. My DEROS, instead of
20 being May 15th, was dropped to April 15th, which was passed the time that I registered for
21 R&R. So I got dropped past R&R and I ended up losing the chance to go to Australia. I
22 always held that against them personally.

23 KC: You mean, you didn't stay and fight, and want to spend another six months
24 to get that trip to Australia? (Chuckles)

25 MG: I guess so, I didn't. I said, "No, that's okay. I'll be leaving on a jet plane." I
26 felt bad, I really did. It's just a regret that I still have. I have never been able to get to
27 Australia. My son did a research—he had a research grant from Emory University when
28 he was going to school there and ended up spending a summer, which was winter, in
29 Australia between his junior and senior years as he was writing his master's thesis. You
30 know, I always envied him with stories and always told him that it just isn't fair that he
31 has the right to do things that I never got a chance to do. I was always very proud of him.

1 KC: You mentioned a little bit ago, you were talking about some of the things you
2 would do in your off hours. One of the things was to write letters over or to send audio
3 tapes over to your family and to your girlfriend. What sort of things would they send
4 back to you? What sort of things would they tell you when they talk about developments
5 in the US or politics in the US or views of the war or society? What sorts of things would
6 they write back?

7 MG: Well, I'd like to say that we were that high minded, but I think most of my
8 letters were around the topic of, "Why don't you write me more?" (Chuckles) Their
9 letters were—this is mostly to my wife, my girlfriend. "I've got to tell you how important
10 it is to get these letters, why don't you write more?" And she would say, "I'm really busy
11 and school is going along. I think of you all the time, but I can't really get the time to
12 write." So it was this constant struggle to solicit more letters. There was a period where
13 she really didn't write me very much at all and I was really crestfallen during that period.
14 So there was a lot of—it's hard to imagine, but we were really banished. When you went
15 off to Vietnam, you were gone for a year. You were literally dead. I mean, I used to say
16 you were a note of reality that was gone. So all of your friends continued to interact and
17 have lives and mature in the culture. Short of *TIME* magazine and *Newsweek* and some of
18 that, you really didn't know what was going on. I barely knew about what happened at
19 Woodstock. Now, I would have been at Woodstock for sure. I mean, that's just the kind
20 of guy I was. I couldn't believe that this thing happened when I was in 'Nam. I went to
21 school at Syracuse, you know, upstate New York was nothing to me. I would have
22 definitely gone to Woodstock. You know, I missed it because I was in 'Nam. The anti-
23 war protests were developing and Emily, my wife, went to the mobilizations on the mall.
24 There was an October '69 mobilization and a November '69 mobilization on the mall,
25 she went to both of those. I would have seen those and definitely gone to those. You
26 know, she would write back and say, "I'm going to try to get you out of there Mike.
27 Don't worry about it, they're going to stop the war." So my circle of friends was very
28 much opposed to the war and very much wanted to stop it and kind of viewed me as a
29 prisoner, a prisoner of war and someone that had been captured by the machine—were
30 interested in trying to help me get free. So that was going on with my buddy. Then with
31 my family, of course, they were just constantly concerned about my safety. I spent half of

1 a letter explaining to them that when you hear that rockets landed five miles north of Da
2 Nang, don't worry about that because they use Da Nang to reference everything in I
3 Corps. It was heavy fighting twenty-five miles north of Da Nang, it doesn't mean it was
4 any real threat to us. We really were pretty much sealed off from any kind of fear. So that
5 kind of a conversation was constantly in my writings and in the tapes. It was hard to
6 come up with—I didn't want to tell them about flying in Bird Dogs because I knew that
7 that would scare them. So I didn't talk about that. Everything else was so mundane and so
8 routine, that once she said it once, there was nothing else to say about it. I didn't have
9 news to give them. I wasn't going to tell them that one of our friends got killed or
10 anything. So you just had to kind of go up a tape with nothing and it was kind of hard. I
11 didn't like it. Plus, you're listening to your own voice, and I dread the idea of listening to
12 what I'm saying now. So it was the only way you had to communicate. There was no
13 telephone, no internet, there was no way to really connect up with people. Those are the
14 only vehicles you had, and they were very feeble, and you really did feel alone. You
15 know, I often think of a friend of mine in advanced training. Bill Hensling had his wife
16 with him at Fort Holabird. He and she got pregnant—they were married, they got
17 pregnant when they were at Fort Holabird. So his son was born nine months into his tour.
18 He didn't even know she was pregnant when he went off. When he came home, he had a
19 three month old son. You know, what an awful thing. He ended up missing that most
20 important moment in his life. We were together in Germany afterwards and I went to his
21 son's first birthday party. I remember how cool that was. We just loved having this little
22 guy around because he was representative of that year that we were in 'Nam. You know,
23 now he's forty-some odd years old, I can't believe that. Well-established man at this
24 point.

25 KC: You've talked about or mentioned other people's views on the war. The lifers
26 and field grade officers and friends back home. What was your view of the war when you
27 were over there in 1969-1970? I know it might be difficult to try to separate it from what
28 you've thought about over the last forty-some odd years or what you went into the war
29 thinking it was going to be about. What were your views of the war while you were
30 there?

1 MG: Yeah, it was an evolving viewpoint, I think. When I first got there, I did feel
2 like we were on a mission and that we had an obligation to help these people and that it
3 was our job to help and that we were also ambassadors. We had to behave with a sense of
4 decency or respect for the people that we were attempting to help. You know, we were in
5 the city, so we got to see people in their normal daily lives in a kind of an urban
6 environment which was kind of nice. So when I first got there, I was kind of
7 Kennedyesque. You know, “Bare any burden in the cause of liberty” kind of thing. I
8 think running into Ken Fuksman, who was a lot more radical than I was, you know, he
9 was subscribing to radical literature and having it sent to him. Make sure making a point
10 to call it out at mail call. “Here’s the radical for Ken Fuksman.” “Here’s the latest copy of
11 the *Village Voice* for Ken Fuksman.” (Laughs) My aunt sent a subscription to *Reader’s*
12 *Digest* and he was. “Oh, here’s Garemko’s *Reader’s Digest*.”

13 KC: You do have lifer tendencies, Garemko.

14 MG: It was pretty funny. This is a casual side and I’ll return to the point, but Ken
15 and a guy named Scott Weed—we all decided we were going to write to our
16 congressman and senators routinely, just so we could get the envelope from their offices.
17 So the lifers would think we were communicating with the armed services committee and
18 making them aware of things that were wrong. My congresswoman was (unintelligible)
19 at the time, and she was on the Veteran’s Affairs committee and so particularly valuable.
20 So we’d just write off to our congressmen, “We’re here in Vietnam having a good time.”
21 And then we get back the letter, “Congressman (unintelligible) reports the American
22 policy in Vietnam.” At mail call Ken would say, “Oh, here comes another letter from
23 Senator Symington for whomever. Here’s a letter—oh, look at this, here’s one from
24 Barry Goldwater, I wonder what Scott Weed’s communicating to Barry Goldwater these
25 days?” It was great. Anyway, what was the question again?

26 KC: I was asking you about your views as a result.

27 MG: So running into Ken, I think he was a very smart and thoughtful anti-war
28 advocate. He kind of schooled me and brought me up the learning curve a little bit. I got
29 to read an Army—it was like a background intelligence summary on American
30 involvement in Vietnam, which was in our operation shack. We were supposed to read it.
31 I wasn’t sneaking it, but it was to give us an understanding of how we got involved in

1 Vietnam. It was pretty frank. I suspect that it was done by the RAND Corporation or
2 something like that. It was top secret. I remember reading it and kind of learning that
3 American involvement went all the way back into the Truman administration and that
4 there was a lot of information in there I was surprised that the Army had and was willing
5 to at least make known to people of my level of the organization. That helped me to kind
6 of get a better picture of the context of why we were there. I kind of put that together with
7 the changing zeitgeist that had occurred to the U.S as a result of the Tet Offensive and the
8 growing impatience with the student mobilizations and things like that. You know, a
9 realization that this thing is not going to come out good. You know, personally I could
10 see how industrious the Viet Cong and the NVA were and how futile our attempts were at
11 trying to port them. We were throwing as much ordinance at them as we possibly could,
12 and they were able to withstand every blow that we would throw their way and still
13 soldier on. I remember thinking to myself, "All they have to do is just outlast this." We
14 can't kill them all, that's not possible. So at the end of the day, I don't think we can win
15 this, I just don't think it's possible to win it. So if we can't win it, we're just wasting
16 guy's lives. When I first got there, Hamburger Hill was occurring. I remember that it was
17 just a horrendous blood bath. I kept on wondering, "Why are we doing this? We're going
18 to give that right back in two months." We're charging up this hill, trying to take it like
19 it's Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima and at the end of the day we're just going to give it
20 back, we're not holding any territory. I mean, this is stupid. So the more I saw that, the
21 more I kind of saw the change in the feelings in the country, or at least as much as I could
22 see them in the news media. And talking with Ken, by about the fourth or fifth month, I
23 was done. I just thought it was wrong. I thought we were in the wrong place, doing the
24 wrong thing. Then, Paul Benoit got killed in November. When he was killed, it caused
25 me to reexamine everything. The whole thing just seemed—it seemed like, this is nuts,
26 this is absolutely nuts. He doesn't get to live a life because of this? What are we doing?
27 This doesn't make any sense. There's no rhyme or reason, there's no strategy, we have no
28 plan to win this thing and yet, the meat grinder just keeps up chewing on guys' lives.
29 When I went over, I think we were at about—I think we were at about forty-thousand
30 dead. By the time the war ended, another twenty thousand guys were killed. You know, it
31 just seemed to me that we knew when Nixon started withdrawing troops that we weren't

1 going to win that thing. Yet we kept on sending people into the meat grinder and killing
2 Vietnamese unnecessarily. By the time I came home, I was firmly an anti-war kind of
3 guy, but I didn't realize how far all my friends had gone in college by that time. To the
4 point where I might have drifted center-left, they were radical-left. You know, Kent State
5 happened right when I got home. That just cemented whatever thinking I had and it just
6 baked it all in and hardwired me in. Changed my thoughts about the Army, changed my
7 thoughts about the military, changed my thoughts about institutions. It all crumbled down
8 and put me into a much more skeptical mode, and I think threw me off. I was like most
9 Americans. I believe that my leaders knew more about what was going on in foreign
10 policy than I did. It was a shock when I realized that they didn't, that they were fooling
11 us. That they were cheating us, and they were hurting us and wasting treasury. It just
12 seemed to me that it was all about fueling the military industrial machine. And I resented
13 it, I hated it. From that time on, I tried to do whatever I could to stop it.

14 KC: You talked about your views and how they became more mature and how
15 they evolved. You talked about the role of other people who were more deeply involved
16 than you, Kent Fuksman obviously being one. How would you rate the level of the U.S
17 military personnel? Of course, this is subjective in what you saw, and the opinion of what
18 you saw. How would you rate the overall level of anti-war sentiment among the service
19 personnel that you saw during your one-year tour?

20 MG: Well, you know, it's funny. If you would have asked me this three years ago,
21 four years ago, I would have said, "Everybody fought like I did." That was the mean that
22 I had in my own mind. I guess it's kind of normal for someone to think that they're really
23 in the mainstream but going to the MIBARS reunion and talking with some of my
24 friends, I realize that I was really not necessarily represented in the way that others fought
25 at the time. I can remember during the October and November mobilizations on the mall,
26 the guys wore black arm bands around their sleeves.

27 KC: In Vietnam?

28 MG: In Vietnam. It was kind of an important thing to do, but there was a huge
29 anti-war sentiment among guys you'd see in the PX. Not necessarily rear-echelon guys,
30 but guys who would come in from the field. Everybody had a peace sign on their helmet
31 or wore a peace medallion on their neck or their dog tag chains. You know, I don't know

1 if it was, “Peace to get me the hell out of here” or “Peace because I believe in peace”. I
2 think that there’s two interpretations of that peace sign. The anti-war movement was
3 fueled by personal motivations and not wanting to be involved with it. I think that
4 generally in my unit, there was a recognition of the futility of the thing and a desire to
5 disentangle. Maybe not always a sympathy for the enemy, that maybe their cause is right.
6 Although, I think that was a very commonly spoken sentiment by the enlisted man. I
7 think the lifers bought into the mission. I think they thought that they had a job to do and
8 they had to do it and they were going to participate with all of our mighty power. It’s like
9 American society at large—I think that there was a turning towards anti-war sentiment,
10 and I think there was a recognition of the futility of it and a recognition of the lying that
11 was going on about how we were somehow winning it when we all knew full well that
12 we weren’t.

13 KC: Now, to take the interview in a different direction here, let’s go back to some
14 of the events or some of the developments or some of the things that you remember
15 particularly about your time there in Da Nang. In addition to the rundown that you
16 provided last time of the ins and outs and how you’re looking at the photographs and
17 providing the interpretation and analysis and these kinds of things, what other sorts of
18 things stick out in your mind while you were there for your one year? I know you
19 mentioned one moment ago that you were flying with the 01 Bird Dog. Tell me about
20 that. Knowing you and what you’ve already alluded to, it must have scared the hell out of
21 you. How did that come about? What was your role? What was it like?

22 MG: Well, the 21st Reconnaissance Airplane Company was located over on
23 Marble Mountain. They flew the Bird Dogs, and I would say that their area of operations
24 were probably the lower three provinces of I Corps. I Corps was composed of five
25 provinces. The northern provinces had a separate rack company and I think the lower
26 three provinces were covered by the 21st RAC (Reconnaissance Airplane Company). We
27 had an agreement with them to provide aerial observers in the back seat of these Bird
28 Dogs. They liked having us around because we were pretty good land navigators and we
29 understood the overall area of operations. So if there were items that were noticed on the
30 imagery, the reconnaissance aircraft imagery that were of particular interest, often times
31 the commanders would ask for handheld photographic confirmation of those items of

1 interest. So since the 21st RAC was out there flying around and calling in artillery and
2 providing support to the commanders in the field. We would go up with them and this
3 eventually became more of a standardized operation. If you were a good II and you had
4 an interest in doing this, you could volunteer to do it. I've always loved flying and I've
5 always loved airplanes. So there was a side of me that wanted to try it. You could
6 actually earn an air medal doing this. I had some—couple of my buddies were doing this,
7 a guy named Gene Schwartz and Dave Thomson were flying a fair amount of missions.
8 Then, a couple of the warrant officers were doing it—from our section as well. So I
9 thought, “Well, I'd like to do this, I'd like to try this.” I made my intentions known and
10 they said, “Well, you can do it.” The way that it worked, we went out in two ship
11 elements. The high ship would fly at maybe three thousand, two thousand, or twenty-five
12 hundred feet or something like that. The low ship would fly literally at treetop level. We
13 had Pentax cameras; they were more rugged than the Nikons. We started out with
14 Nikons, but they were too delicate, and Pentax could take the pounding. We put two-
15 hundred-millimeter lenses on them, and I think we put two extra extenders on them so
16 they were really four hundred millimeter lenses. We had some very fast black and white
17 thirty-five millimeter film. When I say very fast, I think it was like two thousand AF-A,
18 so it was really, really fast stuff. That meant that it was very grainy because its film speed
19 was so fast. Our reproduction guys just pushed that film when they were developing it.
20 So the imagery wasn't great when we got it back, but it was good. We would go out and
21 look at things like bunkers or sand pans that we would notice along rivers. You know, if
22 we thought that there was a cache kind of hidden under the canopy, weapons caches or
23 possibly truck parts or things of that nature, we'd go out looking for them. Often times
24 when you got down at the treetop level, you dropped fire because Charlie knew that if
25 Bird Dogs were around, there was a good chance that the air strike was coming after it or
26 an artillery strike. So they were intent on shooting down Bird Dogs whenever they saw
27 them. So it was a pretty risky thing to do. You know, everyone had kind of different
28 motivations for it. I flew two missions, one in a high ship and one in a low ship. I wrote
29 home to my dad who was a top tier gunner on a B-17 in World War II. I told him what I
30 was doing, and he wrote back, and he said, “You know, Mike, I don't think that's the
31 smartest thing in the world to do.” He didn't say it quite as—he just said he thought I was

1 stupid for doing it. So I have to say that one of my motivations was to get an air medal.
2 Then I did this—the first time we tried it I was in the high ship and it was fun. It was
3 absolutely great fun.

4 KC: What made it fun?

5 MG: Well, I'm flying an airplane and so you're in this little Bird Dog and the
6 windows are open, you're in the backseat. So the pilot sits a little higher in the Bird Dog
7 than the back seat observer does. You know, you do have a stick back there. The control
8 system, it can be a tandem control system. There is a separate throttle back there, so you
9 can actually stick in a throttle. There are some rudder pedals there as well, so that you can
10 actually fly from the back seat—see (unintelligible) from the back seat. That was kind of
11 exciting. You had headphones on and a helmet, and the radio. Now you're in
12 communication with another airplane and the pilot was communicating with other aircraft
13 in the area and you seemed like you knew everything there was to know about flying.
14 These planes were really—you think a Bird Dog isn't much of an airplane, but they were
15 like super charged Cessna 172s. They really were very fast little high wing airplanes. So
16 the windows are wide open and you're sitting in the back there, you know. You're flying
17 out in formation, and you've got six artillery spotter rockets on the wing. They're white
18 phosphorous rockets and they'd use those for identifying a target for airstrike. They'd
19 mark a location and then they'd have a reference point for the zoomies who were flying
20 overhead. They'd say, "300 yards north of my mark and here's my mark." And then
21 they'd shoot they'd rockets. And so, all of that was exciting. You're kind of a dumbo.
22 You're sitting in the back and you don't know anything about these procedures and all
23 you really do know is that you can kind of keep the maps, and you can look out the
24 window and see activity in the ground and make some sense of it. Experience is the
25 teacher in that thing. You know, Dave and Gene flew a lot of missions and they got really
26 good at it. They could communicate with the pilot more freely. They developed a rapport,
27 and they were actually desired. Guys wanted to take them out in the back seats because
28 they knew these guys were really good at seeing things and helping them and assisting.
29 You have to break into that like anything else. You're learning on the job, so when you
30 go out on your first mission you feel like a dope, you really do. And you're worried to
31 death that you're going to puke. You are flying in a way that you have never flown before

1 in your life. Just thinking the whole time, “I just don’t want to puke, I just don’t want to
2 puke.”

3 KC: What do you mean about—you said that it was flying like you’ve never
4 flown before. I know what the forward air controllers do. What was it about this kind of
5 flying in the Bird Dog that was something that you’d never done before?

6 MG: I mean, I’d only flown in a couple of airliners. I mean, that’s all I had ever
7 done before. Now I’m in a little light airplane, we’re flying at altitudes that make it very
8 susceptible to the vicissitudes of the super-heated jungle area. It’s all bumpy there.
9 You’re not flying in smooth air. You could drop a thousand feet in a heartbeat and the
10 bottom falls right out of the air. Then there are other times when you peel off to go down,
11 you’re doing an arch in the air. All of a sudden, you’re disoriented completely. You’re
12 upside down, you’re hanging on your straps and you’re wondering—it’s like being on a
13 carnival ride. You’re saying, “Oh my god.” Your whole world turns over upside down
14 and you can’t really—you’re not a trained pilot at that point. You haven’t done a lot of
15 flying. You’re being with the rounds in this little airplane and your stomach is up in your
16 throat and you just don’t know what’s happening. You have faith that others have done it
17 before you and so you say, “It can’t be all bad.” I remember, on my first mission and we
18 were on the high ship, and I was supposed to be keeping the maps. We were using 1 to
19 500,000 maps so they’re very high, undetailed maps. You were working—the dead
20 reckoning objective data that was out there on the ground, for you to make observations
21 on were basically just streams in the jungle. Those strings were covered over by canopies
22 intermittently. You couldn’t really relate what you were seeing on the map directly to the
23 ground that you were flying over as easily as you might think you could. So as you were
24 looking at this stuff, you could become lost pretty quickly. You say, “I can read the
25 contours and I think that hillside over there is over here.” All this is happening very
26 rapidly and you’re trying to make sure you know where you are because the whole reason
27 for the high ship is if the low ship gets shot down, you’ve got to be able to call out its
28 coordinates to get them relief immediately. So you have to know where you are. That’s
29 the only job you’ve got, to know where you are and be able to identify it to somebody as
30 a problem. So I was intent on doing that. When we peeled off, at one point the two pilots
31 had found a hooch out in Charlie—out in the free fire area. They decided they were going

1 to—because there was no other activity, they were going to use their white phosphorous
2 rockets to try and have a little target practice in the hooch. So this is going to be great fun
3 for them. I don't know if they were doing it just to show off for me or if they're trying to
4 break me or whatever. You know, he did a pretty violent lock burn, and it was cool to
5 watch this. You're sitting in the back seat and all of a sudden you can hear them ignite
6 and then the rockets went off just like you see in the movies. It's two rockets coming off
7 the sides of the planes and going down and hitting this route in front of you, and then it
8 blows up in this white phosphorous explosion. So you're like, "Wow, this is really cool."
9 You're sitting in the backseat, and you're totally disoriented. I'm watching all this
10 happen and I lost track of where we were. I didn't know where we were. Now, my one
11 obligation was to know where we were, and I was totally disoriented. The maps meant
12 nothing to me now. I said to the pilot that we had to get up high so I could see again
13 cause I couldn't see any land. We were flying up this stream valley that was going
14 through mountains that were up on either side of the plane. All of a sudden, we could
15 hear some rounds impacting the plane. And he said, "Guys are shooting at us, we've got
16 to get out of here." So he pointed out and we tried to get the altitude as quick as we
17 possibly could. When we got up like fifteen hundred feet, then I could start to see again
18 where we were, and I realized we were right near the A Shau Valley. I was like, "Oh
19 Christ, I've really screwed this up." Then we couldn't find the low ship anymore. We
20 were in radio contact with them, but we couldn't see them anymore. So it took us awhile
21 to rendezvous with them again. I kind of felt like a failure in the first mission. I didn't
22 think I really had done a good job. Again, I was just trying to keep the puke in my
23 stomach. I was really struggling. I was probably pretty green in the face. So I feel like I
24 wasn't really doing a good job. You know, the pilot, he said, "Well, you did a pretty good
25 job. We'd be happy to have you aboard again." I was like, "If I was doing a good job, I
26 don't know what a bad job would be." So I did that and then I had a second mission when
27 I was in the low ship. That was easier actually. You were supposed to be taking pictures.
28 We thought it was an offloading point down near the island, south of Da Nang. I guess
29 south of Tam Ky too. We went in really low. I can't even estimate the altitude, but you
30 felt like you could reach out and touch it. I'm looking through the camera and yeah, there
31 was a lot (unintelligible) for sure. It looked like they were piling up rice, bags of rice on

1 the side of the riverbank. I snapped some pretty good pictures of it. They went back and
2 they bombed the shit out of it and that was the end of that. After that, I got that letter from
3 my dad and said it was stupid. The more I thought about it, I thought, “I’m doing exactly
4 what I said I wouldn’t do, which is trying to get a medal and putting myself at risk for a
5 stupid medal.” I just said, “I’m not going to do this anymore. It just doesn’t make any
6 sense.”

7 KC: So it was just the two times then?

8 MG: Yeah, it was just the two times and I did it more for the experience of it than
9 anything else. You know, another thing was that—I had mentioned earlier that we had an
10 aviation company, an aviation section in our group. We got a Beaver, I think it was a
11 UH—I don’t recall what the designation of the plane is, but it’s a de Havilland Beaver.
12 That’s a big radial engine high wing airplane. We used it for communication with Det E,
13 which was in Phu Bai. We would get the missions up from Saigon as well and then the
14 Beaver would take them up to Phu Bai. So we had a pilot who was in MIBARS, who was
15 signed to MIBARS—this utility aircraft from Da Nang main out to Phu Bai every day.
16 And when you were at nights, you’d say, “Hey, can I come along with you, Captain?”
17 And he’d say, “Sure.” Or Mr. Matthews. We had a warrant officer pilot at one point, too.
18 They were happy to have you sit in the right seat and fly in this big old communication
19 plane and go up over the Hai Van Pass to the lowlands north of Da Nang, and fly into
20 Phu Ba and Hue City and see it all from low altitude. It was really great. So I did that
21 about three or four times. I loved taking those trips. That was about as much as I did with
22 the other kind of fun.

23 KC: Right. Why don’t we stop there for today, Mr. Garemkov?

Interview with Michael Garemko

Session [4] of [5]

Date 13 October 2010

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History interview with Mr.
2 Mike Garemko. Today is 13 October 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University and Mr. Garemko is joining me by telephone from Beauford,
4 Georgia. Okay, Mr. Garemko, we were talking off the record a moment ago about some
5 of the other general experiences or general impressions there while you're in MIBARS in
6 Da Nang. So why don't you pick up with some of the things you were talking about a
7 little bit ago?

8 Michael Garemko: Well, Kelly, one of the things that always kind of bothers me
9 of my Vietnam experience was that it was a very cloistered experience. Because Da Nang
10 was off limits to US Forces, we lived in a hotel in the city and we really had no access to
11 that city. We couldn't go out and sample the food or know the people. We were in the
12 nicest hotel, but I thought of it more as a prison. It just felt very, very aloof from the
13 experience. By contrast, the other detachments in MIBARS, down in (unintelligible) and
14 in Saigon and in the other locations around the country, they did have access to Vietnam.
15 Of course, that brought in drugs and it did change the experience for those guys, but we
16 were like a bunch of monks, really—largely kept away from the population in general. As
17 I said, you could find ways to hitch a ride and get over to China Beach. That was a good
18 thing. It gave you a chance to get on the river for one thing and to see a lot of the refugee
19 camps, of the people who had come in from the mountainous areas where we had created
20 free-fire zones. You know, these people had swelled the population of Da Nang. It was
21 roughly five hundred thousand before the war started and when I was there it was
22 estimated to be around two million people living in and around Da Nang. There was no
23 infrastructure to support that large of a population influx. So these people lived in shanty
24 towns, we used to call them “dog patches”. There'd be row upon row on these
25 resettlement camps with just little tin—or cobbled together with whatever building
26 material folks to find. If you've seen pictures of Haiti after the earthquake or Banda Aceh
27 through the tsunami, it's always the same kind of thing. These makeshift impromptu third
28 world kind systems that get carved out after the upheavals of nature or of war. You know,

1 I remember thinking to myself—there was one more in particular, where this just brilliant
2 orange dawn. I was riding in on a truck from spending the night on the night shift and I
3 had my radio with me. AFVN (American Forces Vietnam Network) was on and they
4 were playing “Good Morning Star Shine”, which was from the musical *Hair*. It’s kind of
5 a hokey song. You hear it and you think, “That’s not that cool of a song at all.” But at the
6 time it was very popular, and I remember thinking to myself, we went past this one
7 shanty town and I was looking down the roads of the village. I think there was water
8 supplies strategically placed throughout the resettlement area. People would go down to
9 the water supplies and it must have been about seven o’clock in the morning. So people
10 were waking up and joining their days. I remember thinking to myself, “If Jesus were
11 alive today, would he be with me on this truck, or would he be down there at that village
12 with those people?” I couldn’t come to any of the conclusions that he’d be with one of
13 those people and not with me. I knew I was like a Roman centurion doing the wrong
14 thing. So an important epiphany for me. And that kind of helped to reframe my thinking
15 about what I was doing on a personal level. Never mind the geopolitics of it all, but is
16 going to war and fighting a war a good thing to do? And are there reasons you should
17 participate in this kind of activity? Increasingly, I was becoming disenchanted. In
18 November—my friend, Paul Benoit and I had trained together at Fort Holabird, and we
19 arrived at MIBARS Det B together. I told the story about how we had to find our way to
20 the MIBARS location with no one knowing anything about it. Paul and I, we were
21 considered (unintelligible) because we came at the same time. He ended up—he was
22 actually shot and killed, murdered.

23 KC: What was that story?

24 MG: Pardon me?

25 KC: Tell me that story.

26 MG: This story is interesting because it’s personal to a number of MIBARS vets.
27 Since the reunion we’ve all kind of talked about this. We’ve seen it differently. All of us
28 somehow have found a way to take responsibility for it when I think almost any objective
29 observer would say that there was no responsibility. I was sitting—in the morning of
30 November 19th, I was sitting in one our vans, writing a letter. The duty officer starts and
31 he says, “Hey Garemko, why don’t you take the B7 over to the motor pool and get it

1 serviced?” And B7 was a jeep. I said, “Oh, come on serge, I’m writing a letter. Benoit’s
2 not doing anything, why don’t you let him go?” He said, “I’ll take it, I don’t care.” I think
3 I made a deal to take something later or either do it the next time or something like that,
4 but I remember I didn’t want to pull that duty anyway. So Mike ends up taking this jeep
5 and as I said, in Vietnam if you were hitchhiking somewhere, it was common courtesy to
6 stop and pick somebody up and give them a lift. Especially if you were driving a jeep.
7 You would stop and pick people up. So he got across the bridge ramp and was driving
8 down a road where 1st Logistics had a motor pool that serviced our vehicles. He was
9 heading down that road and apparently—I have some information on this because I did a
10 freedom of information requests. I know some of the facts that are associated with this,
11 but a Marine who had been on R&R had murdered his friend. Apparently, part of this was
12 complicated by drug use. He had murdered his friend up by the 95th Evacuation Hospital
13 and had made his way down this road that Benoit was traveling on. He motioned to
14 Benoit to stop, according to witnesses, and he stopped. (Audio cut)

15 KC: Okay, Mr. Garemko, before the technical difficulty there you were telling me
16 this story about your friend, Paul Benoit. It was obviously, like you said, a difficult point
17 and poor time for the phones to go out like they did, but can you pick up where we were
18 there? You had just said that this Marine—that Mr. Benoit had picked up this Marine and
19 you’d given some indication that this Marine had gotten himself in some trouble, drug
20 use, had murdered a friend, was down by the 95th Evac. So pick up the story there, please.

21 MG: So apparently what happened was that Paul stopped and this guy wanted to
22 take the jeep. There were some words exchanged and apparently Paul was resisted and he
23 leveled his M16 at him and just blew him away. He slumped over in his seat. Once he
24 had done that, the perpetrator ran off because there were Vietnamese witnesses and ran
25 into one of these settlement camps that was right adjacent to where the incident
26 happened. I mean, this Marine was a victim of the war just as much as Paul was a victim
27 of the war. He was obviously messed up. He’d been on R&R and had returned from R&R
28 and just didn’t want to go back. There were a lot of mitigating circumstances. According
29 to some of the freedom of information data that I was able to secure, he was never tried
30 for murder. He ended up being incarcerated—I think for life, as a result of mental
31 impairment. You know, it’s one of these really tragic stories that makes things very

1 senseless. There was no reason for anyone in my life to die. When Paul ended up being
2 killed. It landed on me pretty heavily. I always felt responsible because I always thought I
3 might not have stopped. If I kind of think about myself, if I had a duty to perform, I
4 would have probably not—I would have said that the next guy would pick him up. I
5 probably would have driven on, but I don't know that. I might have stopped. If he had
6 demanded the vehicle, I might've given it to him, and I might not have been as brave as
7 Paul to resist it. You know, I don't know how that all would have come out, but I always
8 felt the responsibility for it. Others have felt that responsibility for other people in the
9 unit. It's kind of funny, when we got older and ended up getting together, we all shared
10 some of those thoughts. I think it's just kind of an odd situation because you're living
11 with people and you end up forming relationships and everybody expected that we'd all
12 go home. That was a painful thing. What happened then—this was in November and the
13 monsoon starts right around that time. It was a particularly bad time for our unit because
14 missions stopped at I Corps. There was just too much cloud cover and it was just too hard
15 to get missions in between the weather. Where we would normally have fifteen or twenty
16 missions a night, we dwindled down to maybe one or two. Even those one or two were
17 hard to plot because there was too much cloud cover and it was always very difficult, and
18 you couldn't really see that much until you actually got them. It was a very down time for
19 us, and I was distraught. As a Catholic boy, at that point it would be a year and a half out
20 of Catholic high school. My faith was really shaken. I was wondering what it all meant
21 and why would this have happened. As said, I used to go over to China Beach when I
22 would get a chance. Of course, it wasn't much fun at that time, so I don't know if I—I
23 think I went over there just to be at the rec center. And so, I think I ran into somebody
24 who was working with an orphanage that was over there. The American Friends
25 Orphanage at China Beach. I remember just thinking to myself that maybe the thing to do
26 here is to try and set up some sort of civic action where we could help them. We had so
27 much down time, it would be a good thing for our unit, and it would also be a good thing
28 for the orphanage. I went over there and talked to the person running it and asked them if
29 there was any project that we could do to help them. As I recall, they had me reconstruct
30 their lunch—I want to call it a mess hall, but their lunch facility, I guess. We were able to
31 maybe get some wood for them and to help do some of that basic carpentry. Not that we

1 were skill carpenters at all, but I think there were enough of us that had built bunkers and
2 done stuff like that. We thought there were enough guys that knew how to swing a
3 hammer that we thought we could go over there and maybe build something for them.
4 We were all set to do that and then there was a directive from I think MACV or it was
5 probably civil affairs that we were not supposed to support orphanages because it was
6 encouraging the abandonment of children. That was the story and I found that kind of
7 hard to believe given the fact that I don't know too many parents that give up their
8 children just because it looks like it might be a nice orphanage. But anyway, so we were
9 unable to really go ahead and do that project, make it come to fruition. But we did get to
10 go over there several times and just play with the kids and enjoy the kids (Chuckles). It
11 really was a nice way to spend a couple of hours. We'd get a deuce and a half and maybe
12 ten or twenty of us would drive over there and we'd bring candy and give the kids candy
13 and just kind of spend time with them. I was gratified with that that because I remember
14 thinking to myself that hopefully these kids will grow up thinking—you know, it was
15 nice and everybody had a great time to be with the kids and play tag with them or play
16 red rover or any kind of a game like that. You know, it would give us a chance to really
17 be human beings for a while. I always felt that that was my little contribution in honor of
18 Paul. He inspired me to go over and talk to them and I was always hoping that those kids
19 would grow up and hopefully, their parents weren't killed by our bombs and hopefully
20 they will remember that some Americans were nice. That was really my goal and I think
21 maybe we did accomplish that. When we were there the kids were pretty excited to have
22 us around. The officials at the orphanage were always happy to have us come. I think that
23 we did a nice job.

24 KC: How many kids were at this orphanage?

25 MG: You know, I can't really say. I remember maybe about forty. I remember a
26 lot of them were handicapped. It didn't look like they were handicapped with wounds but
27 handicapped by disease or just a birth defect. It kind of looked like some of them were
28 abandoned. I didn't have good stories on any of them. You know, once I kind of made the
29 initial contact and I think the more important contacts were made by our officers. What I
30 did was I went back, and I said I had this idea and I didn't know how to do this and some
31 of that liaison was taken over by officers. So I didn't get a good read on what was going

1 on. It was a nice opportunity to get to know some people and to share our willingness to
2 be good GI's. It was nice to be with the kids, too. There was one kid, I called him
3 "Howling Allen", he was constantly screaming. We'd put him on a swing, and he's start
4 screaming and you'd take him and kind of play tag with him and he was screaming. So he
5 had the nickname of Howling Allen, but he was a sweet little kid. I kind of loved him, he
6 was just a nice little guy. I hope he's—he's got to be almost like fifty years old.

7 KC: It says something about you and the outfit that you turned this obvious
8 tragedy of Paul Benoit's death into something a little more positive working with the
9 orphanage. But then again, even this was taken away from you by MACV. This was
10 taken away from you by the war, again. What kind of effect does that have, to have this
11 positive thing and this negative thing? You make something positive out of it and then
12 that's taken away from you. What kind of effect does that have on you?

13 MG: Kelly, you're very perceptive to say that because that's exactly how—I felt
14 awful about that. I wanted to really leave something lasting for them and then it was like,
15 "Okay, you can't do that. You can't do that." And I remember saying to myself, "Who do
16 they know? How could they possibly know this situation?" It came from Saigon. I
17 remember thinking to myself, "We ought to just do it and the hell with them." But there
18 was no way that we had the ability to take a vehicle away and do that stuff without
19 having permission to do it. When the word came down, it was over. We couldn't do it. I
20 was resentful of it, I really was. I remember thinking to myself—and you're exactly right,
21 I thought that this was a nice way for us to emerge from this thing. We had downtime, we
22 weren't doing mission. Our mission had come to stand still. This is a good thing for
23 everyone to get involved in. I just didn't see how that—I didn't see how doing that could
24 be a wrong thing. I mean, maybe I'm wrong and maybe their lives are involved in all of
25 that, but I really honestly don't think that it was the right decision. I think that if we had
26 had a little more commitment to it, I think we might've been able to push it forward. I
27 don't know what it was, maybe we didn't have enough rebellion. I really wish that I had
28 more perseverance on that, but I was kind of likely to—if somebody told me I couldn't
29 do something, I was pretty compliant back in those days. It just seemed like that's that.
30 They said no, can't do it. I wish I'd been a little bit more—I think having grown up a
31 little bit I realized that I could have pushed back, if I pushed back more. I might have

1 been able to cut to the chase. So we missed that opportunity to a certain extent, but I think
2 we went over there two or three times and we did have a chance to play with the kids and
3 did give them candy. I'm sure that we did regular days a couple of times. There was some
4 good that came out of it, I just think it could've been more.

5 KC: Going back to the death of your friend, obviously this has a very real,
6 negative, difficult impact on you and the rest of the group there. What kind of things do
7 you do on a daily basis to deal with this kind of tragedy, having someone like this taken
8 away from you?

9 MG: You know, Kelly, I think that—I'm sure that you've seen the movie *Saving*
10 *Private Ryan*. Private Ryan, (unintelligible). Really, a day doesn't go by that I don't, in
11 some way, think about the opportunities that I've had that have allowed me to live a good
12 life and to have two sons. All of the life experiences that come with having lived through
13 my life and knowing that he got terminated at age nineteen or age twenty, about the same
14 age. He was just cut off. All of that never happened to him. Some of my friends on
15 MIBARS were thoughtful enough to reach out to his mother after they got back from
16 Vietnam and write her letters—at least initially and try to help her with this loss. She
17 eventually was non-responsive and so we lost track of Paul. You know, I bet there isn't a
18 day that goes by that I don't think about how lucky I was that I was writing that letter and
19 that I chose not to take that Jeep. You know, there's guilt in that too. You know, if I had
20 gone, would it have come out differently? Was Paul foolish to stop? Should he have
21 argued? Was it going to happen no matter what? You just play it over and over in your
22 mind and you never can resolve any of that. I don't feel responsible in a direct sort of
23 way, but I feel as though he should have never died. I have to say that it does affect the
24 way I think about the Marines. You know, their answers for things and violence the
25 Marine Corps tends to have in their troops. The overall violence of Vietnam and the
26 violence of the war and how futile and stupid it all is. I mean, this is such a small and
27 insignificant sacrifice in the scheme of the 60,000 names that are on that wall. But what is
28 interesting is when you go to Washington and look at that wall, Benoit is on the top of a
29 panel that is almost at the crease of the wall. So he died right at the height of the war,
30 which is consistent to everything that I've said. We went over on the night that they
31 announced the first troop withdrawals. And so, that was the absolute aptitude of the war.

1 So Paul, you know, his sacrifice came right at the height of our involvement and all of
2 those guys that were on that panel with him, most of them were combat vets obviously,
3 but there they all were. Then it tapers off as it goes back down towards the Washington
4 monument. It tapers down to whoever the last poor soul was taken by that war. You
5 know, it just kills me to think that that much more went on after we were there. I came
6 back after the war and was active in the peace movement and tried my damndest to try to
7 stop them. I think about how futile that was because that wall is a cold testimony to how
8 long it took it to wind down that stupid ignorant carnage. That's just our side. I mean,
9 when you think about how many Vietnamese must have been crushed in that whole
10 crucible, it breaks your heart—it absolutely breaks your heart.

11 KC: What other sort of things do you remember about your time there?

12 MG: You know, I think it was like going to boy scout camp in a way. You're
13 thrust into this living arrangement with a group of about—I don't know, I think about
14 thirty guys living in the hotel, maybe forty. That was a cluster of guys. Some were
15 coming, some were going, so you really had maybe eighty guys that you knew during
16 your tour and that you lived with during the tour or some portion of it. It was good to be
17 that close with a bunch of guys and to bond. I know that at the most recent reunion, I ran
18 into this guy, Scott Weed. We weren't the best of friends, but we were good friends when
19 we were together. He was a reservist in Arizona who got called up and he felt like he
20 never should have been there. You know, we both said that it was good to go to the
21 reunions and see how everyone's lives played out. Get a sense of what kind of guys
22 ended up doing what with their lives. A lot of it was pretty predictable. The guys that I
23 expected to do well, did do well and the guys that I would've thought might've had a
24 harder time, ended not showing for the most part. You know, the other experiences in
25 Vietnam were kind of limited because as I said, we were cloistered. I remember when we
26 went down to process out and we went back to Headquarters Company in Saigon. I had a
27 hard time kind of recalibrating to think that you can go off and walk around in Saigon. I
28 mean, I couldn't imagine that. I'd been so used to being confined that the thought that
29 you could get a pass at night and you can walk anywhere you wanted—I couldn't
30 imagine it. I was afraid of it, I didn't want to get lost or get caught or get bombed—any
31 of. I'd become kind of aloof really, and I couldn't imagine having that kind of freedom.

1 So I ended up staying in their facility the whole time I was there, which was only a day or
2 two. I never did go out into Saigon because I was afraid of it really, more than anything.
3 So I have a very unique and I think not very rich experience of Vietnam by comparison to
4 most of the guys that served there. I'm not—I mean, I was lucky because we lived so
5 well and had so many luxuries by comparison that it was a small price to pay. You know,
6 the relative safety of it all was very comforting. If you kind of put all that stuff together,
7 it's like you put it on the scale and there are things that were great and things that were
8 not so great and we were just lucky. I'm glad that I got to have the experiences that I did
9 have and have made it back safely. It was a great adventure and there were enough things
10 that happened that made me think the stakes were high enough that things could have
11 gone wrong and to have gotten through it was a great relief.

12 KC: Let me take you back here a little bit and just get your personal views of
13 what you remember about your time preparing to leave Vietnam. Here's an easy question
14 for you, what's it like to be short? You thought you were short when you had 358 days or
15 whatever, what's it like to be truly short?

16 MG: No, you're right. In my heart of hearts, I knew I wasn't short at 358. As I
17 said, you get good at your job, right? I always kind of, my characterization is for the first
18 three months you're kind of useless, the middle six months you're pretty effective, and
19 then the last three months you're kind of consumed with going home. So your
20 performance, I think there's a bell-shaped curve performance in terms of your
21 effectiveness. I felt that was true for me in my time. But you also were able to handle
22 things very smoothly by the time you'd been around for a while. As a short-timer, you
23 knew how to avoid details, you knew how to keep yourself out of the purview of people
24 that could cause you harm and difficulty. You also felt pretty entitled because there were
25 people around who were new and they were coming to you for advice. You were a
26 veteran by that time. You really had a good understanding of what the area looked like,
27 what kind of things had happened over the course of the last six to nine months. You
28 could make some calls that a new guy couldn't really figure out. You felt really much
29 more powerful and you gained a little rank. I was a spec 5 by November of my time in
30 country. As a spec 5 you got to avoid doing one thing or another and depict some
31 missions that you might not have gotten if you were a spec 4. So there were privileges

1 that came with the time and country. You'd settled in with your roommates and you had a
2 refrigerator, so the beer was always cold. You had your tunes you collected, your little
3 collection of albums there and favorite songs. It just got better and better because you
4 were more established. But then you're thinking, "This is coming to an end." The whole
5 time you got that— May 15th was my DEROS. That one date is burned into the back of
6 your eyelids when you close your eyes at night to go to sleep, all you could see is that
7 May 15th on there. You know, you had this burning desire to go home. You just wanted,
8 "Just take me home." You get tenser about everything. If you hear rumblings off in the
9 distance, you wonder if this is the beginning of the big offenses and are they going to
10 come our way. There were a couple of nights we saw a spooky gun ship south of the city,
11 probably south of Marble Mountain. You could see the tracer rounds going down to the
12 earth, thinking to yourself, "Are they coming up from the south?" That's a possibility,
13 coming up from the lowland. I was always worried and weary that our hotel was labeled,
14 and it was possible for somebody to come and attack us. I just got a lot more, I think,
15 logical that something could go wrong because it seemed like I was stretching my luck. I
16 remember—and Kelly, I tell this story fairly frequently, but I had this short-timers dream
17 and I was working at one of the vans in the street. One of the lifers came in and told me
18 to make coffee for the day shift at the end of the night and this is a typical thing you had
19 to do. We had a truck that had clean water, potable water that had been carefully prepared
20 for us because we had the photo re-pro section and they needed good water. So we had
21 this water truck and you'd go to the water truck to get to the coffee. It was across our
22 company street which was a dusty road. I was crossing this road and I looked up towards
23 where the headquarters of I Corps was located. I could see these guys with rice hats on
24 and I remembered thinking—I said, "Those are Viet Cong." I remember thinking to
25 myself in the street that all I have is this coffee and maybe the best thing to do is just to
26 make believe that I don't see them. So I continue walking over towards the truck. I got to
27 about the middle of the street and they saw me and I could see that they saw me. They
28 raised their AK's, and they were obviously AK-47's. They raised their AK-47s and they
29 shot and I spun around and fell into the dirt and I could taste the dirt in my mouth. I could
30 feel the blood coming out of my mouth. And thinking, "I fucked up. I should have
31 fucking done something. I can't believe I didn't do anything." I was lying there, and I

1 could feel the life going out of me. I was like, “Shit, I think I’m going to die. God
2 dammit, I’m going to die.” Then I died. It all went black, and I don’t know when, but I
3 woke up after that. I remembered thinking that I had read sometime that you’re not
4 supposed to die in dreams. This was such a vivid dream. I mean, I still remember it
5 vividly today. I was all sweaty when I woke up and just freaked out, honestly freaked out
6 about it. I don’t know, I probably have about fifteen or twenty days to go at that point. It
7 scared the hell out of me. And there were other things, too. I had a lot of dreams about the
8 plane crashing on the way home. I’d get close, but I wouldn’t make it. I remember
9 thinking that I would console myself in saying that I just had short-timers syndrome. That
10 longing to go home was so powerful. All you thought about was, “Get me the fuck out of
11 here. Let me go home.” You knew that your friends were back there and that they’d want
12 to hear what you’ve done, and you just wanted to get home and be able to touch base
13 with people that you love and care for. You knew very well that being short was an
14 agonizing time because you just wanted to get there. Agonizing. I think those days got
15 longer and longer. I don’t think they were twenty-four hours. I think they were like forty-
16 eight hours each day. As you got closer and closer, they lengthened out by an hour. It just
17 seemed like you couldn’t burn off that time. I’ll tell you what was interesting for me. As I
18 had said, I wanted to go on R&R and I wanted to go on my eleventh month. So I had
19 delayed that timing. Part of it was—I think I relented, and I was going to try to go around
20 the tenth month, but there was a postal strike in the United States. You had to have so
21 much money in your pocket and I had allocated all my money because there was no
22 reason for me to have money because I had no place to spend it. And so, my whole pay
23 was sent home to my bank account. I don’t know how it was arranged, but I never got
24 any pay when I was in Vietnam. So I had to write home to my mom to send me some
25 money, so that I could have the money that was required so you could go on R&R. Then
26 this postal strike comes up and she couldn’t send me any money. I think I had to stay—I
27 wasn’t able to go around the time that I thought I really should have gone. So now it was
28 like coming up on the eleventh month and I really wanted to go and get this in and get to
29 Sydney. I was actually kind of happy about it because I thought, “This will be great. I’ll
30 go on R&R and I’ll clear posts for a couple weeks and then I’ll be on my freedom for
31 going home. It’s great. It’ll be like a nice vacation.” I remember I was in bed and my

1 friend Ken Fuksman, I could hear him as he was coming through and into the courtyard,
2 “Hey, Garemko! Garemko! Garemko, you son of a bitch!” So I woke up and because I
3 was doing nights. It was about eleven or twelve in the daytime, and he comes up into my
4 room and says, “Hey, Garemko, I have here, in my hands, your orders. And guess what,
5 buddy? You’ve got a one month drop.” I said, “Son of a bitch, I can’t believe it. You’ve
6 got to be kidding me.” He says, “Yeah, no shit man.” I said, “Goddammit, I can’t believe
7 it. Just when I want to stay, I got to go.” He said, “Yeah, but look at the bright side.
8 You’re fucking going home, asshole.” I said, “Oh, yeah. Right, right.” Oh man, that was
9 such a good feeling. Now, all of a sudden, it was like, “What’s the deal? What am I going
10 to do?” He said, “You’re going to have to head up pretty quick.” It was pretty short
11 notice. So I remember—I didn’t have a lot of time to clear post. It wasn’t a very
12 complicated procedure because we didn’t have a lot of entanglements with other units. I
13 remember you had to go to the PX and get somebody to stamp a card. You had to go
14 down to 1st Logistics and get someone to stamp a card that you had all of your field gear.
15 I don’t remember what exactly it entailed, but you had to go around and it was like a
16 treasure hunt. You had to get various people to sign off that you were given back
17 everything that you were supposed to give back. So once you got all that stuff in, you
18 were ready to go. I mean, it was like a dream come true. All of a sudden you were going
19 to be released, “We’re going to let you go.” You know, it was sad because you were
20 going to leave guys behind, too. And you were never going to see them again. It was just
21 going to be over. So on the one hand you couldn’t wait to get the hell out of there, but on
22 the other hand, it was breaking your heart because you were leaving buddies behind that
23 you really did value.

24 KC: As it is, you are on your way. Tell me about the freedom bird, tell me about
25 getting on that plane. You’ve got all your stuff, all your gear, you out processed, and
26 you’re going home. Tell me about that trip.

27 MG: Here’s the thing—again, it was a tight knit group. So when anybody went
28 home, they would write back and tell you everything you needed to know so you
29 wouldn’t get screwed up on your way out. So a couple of things were true. I had a
30 survival knife that was issued to me. That was a couple missions of Bird Dog. We used to
31 sharpen those knives incisively, all of them. We got them to the point where they were

1 razor sharp. I used to use mine to cut cardboard. When we were doing presentation
2 photos and stuff like that, I would use my knife to make the cuts sharper than an Exacto
3 knife. I loved that knife, I thought that was the perfect souvenir and I wanted to take it
4 home. Technically, you really weren't supposed to take something like that home. So that
5 was always the big controversy, how do you smuggle something like that out? And I put
6 mine between the three legs on my tripod for my camera, in a case and then I stuffed it
7 into my duffle bag. It was pretty deep in the kit that I had to take out of country. We were
8 supposed to take all of our field gear down to Long Binh. Our field gear was like brand
9 new. I mean, our helmets looked the same the day that they were issued, and our canteens
10 had never been drunk out of. We were such pathetic soldiers. All of our web gear was
11 fresh and clean. We would have to have this stuff inspected for the IG inspections and
12 that was the only time we ever touched the stuff the whole time we were there. So the big
13 thing was, don't bring your stupid field gear down there because no one's ever going to
14 check on it. You might as well get rid of it up here. I was nervous about that. That just
15 didn't sound right. It sounded like the Army would want you to have all of this junk, you
16 know. It seemed like it was pretty expensive. Everyone assured me that I wouldn't need
17 this field gear, so they said, "Look, Garemkov, just put it on the PSP." Which was like the
18 parking area or our operations area. They said the ARVN would take it in about two
19 seconds. Which is exactly right. (Chuckles) I put my stuff out there and I swear to god in
20 like fifteen minutes it was all gone. The mess kit and all of that stuff just disappeared. So
21 I didn't have my field gear anymore. Which was good because you didn't have to schlep
22 it down there. You didn't have it, you didn't have it, right? Worst thing that could happen
23 would be you'd have to pay for it I thought. So okay, I'll figure that out. So we left the
24 field gear and got rid of that, and I had my duffle bag. I think I left on a Sunday morning.
25 It felt like a Sunday morning, but it wasn't a Sunday morning. Ron Barryman, my best
26 friend, and kind of mentor when I was there, volunteered to drive me over to Da Nang to
27 be depot—the terminal in Da Nang. I remember bugging them. He was the last guy I saw
28 from MIBARS. It was nice because—well, I felt bad. I kind of felt like he wasn't going
29 to make it. He had extended his tour to get out early and I had always felt that he
30 shouldn't have done that. I didn't want him to do it. I was afraid. I felt like this was a
31 spring that was coiling up and it was going to be some kind of big action. I felt like I was

1 getting out just in front of it, I really did. I felt like he was going to be in trouble because
2 he had committed the unpardonable sin of extending. I said to him, “I can’t believe that
3 I’ve got to leave you out there. Good luck, buddy. We’ll keep in touch.” Of all of the
4 people that I served with in MIBARS, he was the one guy that I did keep in touch with
5 throughout life. He was a forester from Northern California. He was about four or five
6 years older than me. You know, four to five years more competent. I just admired him a
7 lot. I remember one night we were in—this is kind of an interesting story. He and I were
8 in a bunker together. We ended up making a bet that—we bet a case of wine that one of
9 us would get married before the other. He had no girlfriend and living in McCloud,
10 California. I said, “Ron, there must be only three girls up there. There’s no way you can
11 get married ahead of me.” Because I had my wife, my now wife, to go home to. I said,
12 “This is the easiest bet I’ll ever make.” We’ll leave this and I’ll pick it up later on. We
13 had this bet that—I bet I would get married before he would, and he bet that he could get
14 married before I would. So anyway, I hugged him, and it was kind of like that scene from
15 *MASH* when Trapper John and Hawkeye end up leaving to go home. I just felt very
16 melancholy because I felt like I was leaving him behind, and he wasn’t going to make it.
17 He hopped in the jeep and took off. Then, I really missed Benoit. It was like, “Benoit
18 would have been with me.” And so I felt really guilty. I was standing there all by myself
19 and I thought, “Where’s that missing guy then, he should have been here.” Well, we got
20 down to Saigon and some of the other II’s, my class, were also down there because they
21 were on the same schedule I was. So that kind of smoothed things over. Of course,
22 everyone wanted to know what happened to Benoit. A lot of them didn’t know that he’d
23 been killed. So we ended up going through that. There were other guys from my class in
24 other detachments in MIBARS. We all compared stories about what the years were like.
25 Then they put us on a little truck and took us out to Long Binh and placement stations in
26 Long Binh. That was kind of like the reverse of coming in-country. You went from being
27 in MIBARS, where it was a fairly civilized world, to this unbelievable world of the Long
28 Binh Army post. Just mega military oppression. You know, guys who were all—I think
29 they were pretty nice to people who were departing by design. It was like, “You don’t
30 need to fuck with these guys too much anymore because they’ve been through a lot.” Not
31 me, but all those other guys in infantry and artillery. You know, being in E5, I had some

1 privileges. I remember—I had a nicer area to sleep in and I don’t know, I’ve been
2 thinking to myself, “How could you have spent a year here and still be a PFC?” It was
3 like, “Wow, they ought to make you a spec 4 just to be in here.” I mean, I couldn’t
4 believe that some of these infantry guys were PFC’s. You know, I’d made it—in eleven
5 months I’d been a spec 5. It was unbelievable. I can’t believe they could labor through all
6 of that and just never make rank. It’s just unbelievable. So I remember going to the pool
7 every day while we were waiting for our manifest. We were getting browner and browner
8 and browner. We’d spend hours at the pool getting tanned up. And this was April, so this
9 would have been about April 10th or so. You know, I’m thinking to myself, “This is going
10 to be awesome when I get home. I’m going to be all tanned up and I’ll be in Connecticut,
11 there won’t be a single person around who looks anything but pasty white. This is going
12 to be awesome.” We ended up eventually getting manifested with a stretch DCA and it
13 was a United charter. I remember when they finally called my name, they always had
14 trouble pronouncing it. I don’t know why, read the letters, it’s relatively easy to figure
15 out. GA-REM-KO. It’s three syllables, I don’t know how to mess it up. You can say
16 Garemko, it’s easy. But it was always—they’d start, “Ga, Ga, Ga, the alphabet.” So I’d
17 always have to listen more carefully than someone named Jones or Schultz or whatever.
18 Finally, they called my name on the manifest and so then you went into this processing
19 thing. They took you into a place called the Ok Corral. Some guy gets up and says,
20 “Gentleman, gentleman. Your Uncle Sam has a set of rules here and he does not want
21 you bringing drugs home. He does not want you bringing souvenirs home, he does not
22 want you to be doing a whole bunch of things that you guys all want to do. If you have
23 any intentions of making it through to that freedom bird, if you’ve got any of this stuff,
24 you can take it now and put it in the Ok Corral and not a word will be spoken. But once
25 we close the door on the Ok Corral, if you’re caught with this stuff, you are not going
26 home. You’re going to Long Binh jail. And if you go to Long Binh jail, that means
27 you’re going to have court proceedings and court-martials. It’s going to be a bad, bad
28 thing for you, and you may never get home gentleman, depending on what it is that you
29 have. So my advice to you—” I don’t remember what it was, “You’re going to have five
30 minutes to dig this shit out of your duffle bags, get back here, and get it into the Ok
31 Corral.” I knew, I knew that they weren’t going to check after this because our buddies

1 had written us back saying, “They don’t check after you go into the Ok Corral, so don’t
2 worry about it. Get through this.” I knew it, but the risk of spending another moment in
3 Vietnam over the cost of giving up that survival knife that I had so carefully purloined
4 and placed concealed in that tripod case, I finally just said, “It’s not worth it, Mike. Get it
5 out.” So I go digging through my duffel bag and I coughed it up. I remember thinking
6 that—so you go up to the Ok Corral and Kelly, you couldn’t believe the shit that was in
7 there. (Laughs)

8 KC: (Laughs) What was in there?

9 MG: There were guns, there were bags of marijuana. It was unbelievable all the
10 shit that the guys were tossing into this place. I tossed my survival knife in there and that
11 was the end of that. You know, I remembered thinking to myself, “What a chump.” I
12 knew better, but I was just so goddamn compliant. I just said, “Okay, I’m going to do it
13 because I just don’t want the downside risk of being taken away.”

14 KC: Did they check?

15 MG: No, never did. Never did, not a thing. You know, everybody was like, “Oh
16 fuck, I can’t believe I fell for that.” I mean it was unbelievable. Then, they asked you for
17 your field gear. So I’d given all my field gear to the ARVN and the ARVN stole it. They
18 said, “Oh okay, no problem.” So that was cool; that was good advice. I was happy I got
19 away with that. So anyway, then they put you on some trucks and they take you over to
20 Tan Son Nhut. I remember being in the terminal at Tan Son Nhut, the Air Force terminal.
21 I was waiting and there was a Vietnamese ARVN soldier standing there. His leg had been
22 amputated and his other leg was in a cast from really his brain all the way to his ankle, he
23 was on crutches. I remember thinking to myself that they still have a big price to pay in
24 this country. I felt sorry for him that he had to suffer so and that he wasn’t going to go
25 home to America, he was going to stay there. He was now maimed for life, it was going
26 to be a rough new life for him. I felt bad for him. I was sitting there, and this deuce and a
27 half pulls up and in the back are about twenty little Vietnamese boy scouts in their
28 uniforms. I remember thinking, “Jesus, they’re already building the next generation of
29 soldiers.” That really turned me away from the boy scouts for the rest of my life. I didn’t
30 let my sons become boy scouts because I don’t think it’s a good idea for boys to be taught
31 all this militarism this early in their lives. I remember thinking that that was pretty pitiful.

1 You know, these poor little boys, already they're being infiltrated and the militarism to be
2 part of their lives in the future. So then the plane pulls up and it's a real American
3 jetliner. It's cool, four engines and it just looked kind of official. It was like, "Wow, I'm
4 going home. I really am going home." We got on the plane and I got a window seat
5 which I was very happy about that because I wanted to take a look at the country on the
6 way out. I had my camera. The plane's full of serious veterans, guys who were soldiers.
7 Not the intelligence, I mean real guys. I remember thinking to myself just how great it
8 must be for them. It's one thing to be leaving your hotel and having spit-shine boots and
9 starched fatigues. I looked different; I was different than those guys. (Unintelligible) I
10 respected them, and I knew that they'd been through hell and back. I remember when we
11 were taxiing out, I was just looking so wistfully out at Tan Son Nhut and then the plane
12 pushed the throttles down and the plane starts to roll down the runway. You can feel that
13 moment of release where the plane takes off and this cheer goes out through the plane
14 and everybody's screaming at the top of their lungs. It was like, "Hell yes, we're leaving
15 this shithole." It just felt so good to be released from it and released from the clutches of
16 it. So then we take off and I'm looking down as we're gaining altitude. We're at ten
17 thousand feet maybe, and I don't know what the route was. I didn't have any maps really,
18 to tell me where we were flying. I could look out and I could see bomb craters and I was
19 picking out items of interest. As we were flying out, then there was some cloud cover. I
20 remember as the coast was coming up, the pilot got on the intercom and said, "I'd like to
21 thank you all for choosing United Airlines." (Laughs) He said, "I have some good news
22 for you, we are now coming up on the coast of South Vietnam and gentleman, you are
23 leaving Vietnam for the very last time." And again, another cheer goes through the whole
24 plane. The stewardesses are going up and down the aisles already bringing—I don't know
25 if they served liquor or not, I don't think they did. But serving drinks already, they started
26 right in. I don't know if they even brought carts back in the day. I think they might have
27 hand-carried drinks out one and another, back in '69 or '70. I don't think it was like
28 beverage service now. It was a great feeling, you just felt so excited. It was like you were
29 going away, you were just leaving it. So we flew from Tan Son Nhut to Wake Island and
30 from Wake Island to Honolulu and then from Honolulu to San Francisco and it was a
31 twenty hour flight—I think it was a twenty-two hour flight. Maybe it was twenty-two

1 hours when I added in the trip to Connecticut on top of it. It was a whole day. I remember
2 thinking to myself, “I’m going to lose a whole day in the air.” That counted the stops. It
3 was a major journey. I remember when we landed at Wake, it was just an atoll. It’s like
4 out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, all by itself. They had one, long jet runway. The
5 plane lands and they let us out of the plane. You could actually go down onto the beach
6 from the runway. So we all ended up going down to the beach and there was just a wealth
7 of shells and coral all over the beach. I had my jungle fatigues on, and I picked up a
8 whole bunch of shells, seashells, and different kinds of coral and put them in my pockets
9 on my legs—those big side pockets that you have. I thought they’d make a nice
10 souvenirs. So we get back on the plane and we take off and we’re flying along and all of
11 a sudden I was feeling this pinching in my leg. I’m like, “What the hell is that? That’s
12 weird.” So I reach down into my pockets and I noticed that I had these little conch shells
13 and there’s this little crab kind of sticking out with its little crab hands pinching at me.
14 I’m like, “Oh, you poor bastard. I didn’t know you were in there.” So I’m thinking to
15 myself, “Gee, I really fucked up his life.” So when we landed in Honolulu I took him and
16 I threw him into an aquarium that they had. I was worried about that because I thought
17 maybe I disrupted the ecosystem of Hawaii by introducing this killer crab that was going
18 to eventually throw all of the Hawaiian Islands out of balance. Anyway, I didn’t. So
19 Honolulu was exciting to me. It was the only time I’d ever been in Hawaii. You know, it
20 was just going in the terminal. When we were there, it was kind of nice because there
21 were Americans. It was the first time we’d seen American civilians. We’re all in jungle
22 fatigues. I don’t remember anyone being particularly nice to us, but I don’t remember
23 anyone being nasty to us. I just think that there’s plenty of military in Hawaii, so I don’t
24 think we were in a big deal to anybody. But it was just great to see American women and
25 cars. You know, all the kinds of ordinary things of life that we hadn’t seen for a whole
26 year. And money that made noise, that was another thing. To have real coins in your
27 pocket, it seemed strange. To be able to buy a newspaper that wasn’t the *Stars and*
28 *Stripes* and get *Newsweek* off the stands. All of that just seemed so rich, just really rich.
29 So from Honolulu it was off to San Francisco. And remember what I said earlier on, that
30 my whole dream was to be on that bus. We pulled up on the dock and had the sun faded
31 fatigues and be the veteran. I thought I looked the part. I looked pretty tanned and I had

1 the nice faded jungle fatigues on. I was ready for my big moment. We got there in the
2 middle of the night. It must have been around eleven or twelve o'clock at night. There
3 was no contingent that was going over because there was troop withdrawal. There was no
4 group that was getting up to go over and get ready to go overseas. We were just coming
5 home.

6 KC: So Garemko gets robbed again.

7 MG: Yeah, I was really sported in my big dream. It was like, "Wow." Here was
8 the big culmination of everything that I dreamed of for a whole year or eleven months,
9 and it wasn't meant to be. You know, what was interesting was that most of those
10 infantry kinds of guys were draftees and so most of them were ETS, not DEROS. Those
11 of us that were DEROS and didn't have further service were dealt with first. So they got
12 rid of us because it was less of a processing problem. They issued us new uniforms for
13 stateside wear. I think they gave me Class A's, but they might have been khakis. I'm not
14 sure, but I know I was in a Class A uniform of some sort. I remember they gave me my
15 new ribbons and I was real proud of the fact that—I was put in for an Army
16 Commendation Medal when I was in 'Nam, but it didn't get there in time because I had
17 that one month dropped. All I had was the three fire watch—the campaign ribbon and the
18 Vietnam Service Medal. It was nice to have three, you know. It looked a little bit official.
19 I was kind of proud of that, I guess. I remember kind of walking to get on the bus and
20 being amazed that I was in Oakland again. That just seemed strange to me. We went out
21 of the gate at about—I'm going to say two-two thirty in the morning. The thing that
22 really impressed me was there were protestors out at the gate at that hour of the morning
23 with signs and stuff. I remember thinking to myself, "I can't believe how cruel you are.
24 That you would stay through the night in the middle of nothing and continue to protest
25 (unintelligible)." I remember thinking, "Boy, that's dedication if I've ever seen it." I
26 think most people had the opposite opinion, "Oh, look at those fucking hippies." I was
27 like, "Look, they're working to try to keep their brothers from dying, I love it." I got to
28 San Francisco, and I had time to kill because whenever the flight was, it wasn't at two
29 o'clock in the morning. I remember going—I think it was the Golden Gate Bridge that I
30 went over, but I went over the Bay Bridge, Oakland Bay Bridge. Although the Golden
31 Gate is so iconic with that red color that I must've seen it, but I remember seeing Alcatraz

1 in the cab when we were going over to Oakland. Of course, it would have been from
2 Oakland to San Francisco, it would have been the Bay Bridge. I was impressed, here I
3 was in San Francisco, and I've always heard about it and it seemed kind of real to me.
4 Then, I went to San Francisco International Airport. I was walking through a terminal and
5 I turned a corner and there was a hippie girl. You know, Kelly, everybody talks about
6 this. It's big in the Vietnam War. She did spit at me. I remember thinking to myself,
7 "Hey, you got the wrong guy here, I'm on your side." I might have said something to that
8 affect to her. She said, "It doesn't matter, you're all baby killers." I remember thinking to
9 myself, "Wow, that's a cold blow." I didn't think much about it, but I remember thinking
10 that this is really cold. So ever since, I've kind of thought to myself that she did me a
11 pretty big favor. She kind of made it pretty clear to me that whatever I thought was
12 significant, there was a whole bunch of people who didn't think it was. I needed to kind
13 of simulate that into my thinking if I was going to be useful as I go forward. So, you
14 know, we get on the plane to fly back to Connecticut. I think I had a flight directly to
15 Connecticut, to Bradley—although maybe it was New York. As we're flying, it became
16 obvious that Apollo 13 was the big news of the day. The pilot was giving progress reports
17 of Apollo 13, impending flash down. I remember thinking how ironic it was that they
18 were on this journey back and I was as well. This is my redemption, and they were
19 seeking their redemption. Over Ohio, you know, the pilot got on and said they had
20 successfully splashed down. Everybody in the plane cheered again. I mean, I've never
21 been on so many planes when cheering was going on. You know, everybody was just so
22 excited that they had made it. I remember kind of just—I was so emotional at that point
23 that a tear kind of rolled down my cheek and I looked down and it fell down on my
24 service medals. I was thinking I was redeemed too. I was happy to be home, you know,
25 among other Americans that were cheering. I don't know why I'm so emotional about
26 this, I just felt so returned. That I had persevered in something I didn't want to do and
27 wasn't committed to it, but I went through it—it passed. We landed and I called my
28 mother and my sister from San Francisco, told them that I was half back and that I was
29 going to need a ride. I didn't want my mother to have a shock of me walking up the door
30 and I'd be there, and she'd have a heart attack. I wanted to give her a chance to kind of
31 compose herself and kind of think about it. So my sister and my mother were there when

1 the plane landed. I remember my sister Patty, it was a different time, but she could rush
2 past the doorway. I don't even think there were jet ways, I think we came downstairs. I
3 was walking back towards the terminal and she comes running out, she embraces me. I
4 remember thinking it was the first time that I had actually embraced another human being
5 in eleven months. I mean, it was just such a strange feeling. It was just great to hold her
6 and she's crying, and my mom was there, and I was hugging my mom and it was like a
7 redemption—being reborn, really. You know, you were back and safe. That's all we
8 could say, "I'm glad you're safe, I'm glad you're safe." "Yeah, me too, ma." I was really
9 tired, and they had planned for a party to welcome me home, but I was tired. So I kind of
10 went through that party thing. I got a chance—I remember almost sleeping twenty hours
11 when I finally got to fall asleep. It took a while to get passed the jet lag and then you're
12 back on the block.

13 KC: What did you want to do when you came home? You were thinking about
14 this, going back to the world. What did you want to do as an individual once you came
15 home?

16 MG: Well, the most important thing, get up to the college to see my girlfriend,
17 now wife, and reconnect with her. That was obviously difficult because my mother and
18 sister very much wanted me to be with them. I was gone for all that time and for me to
19 take off and head up to Massachusetts wasn't the coolest thing to do. I felt that tension,
20 but I had to go see her. I couldn't believe that I was home and that I was that close to her.
21 I remember borrowing my sisters car and driving up to Wheaton. I spent about four or
22 five days up there with Emily and some of her friends at school. I stayed at the—they had
23 a boarding house on campus that you could stay. So I stayed there and then I'd have
24 meals with the girls in the dining hall. I was the only guy around because it was the
25 middle of the week. I remember they had "Wheaton Night at the Pops" and Mason
26 Williams, you know, classical jazz, he was going to be at the Pops. So a bunch of Emily's
27 friends had tickets and there was an extra ticket for me. So I went with about eight girls
28 up to Boston to the Boston Pops. They gave me all their tickets. They all went through
29 the turnstile, and they were all pointing to the guy in the back, "He's got the tickets, he's
30 got the tickets." Finally, I got to the ticket taker. These are all nice-looking Wheaton
31 girls. I still had a military haircut. At that time, that was not very cool looking, but I show

1 up at the end with eight tickets and eight beautiful girls, one of them my wife. The guy
2 says, "I don't know what you've got going buddy, but whatever you've got going, it's
3 working." Because I had eight dates. So I spent some time at Wheaton and it wasn't
4 great. While I was gone, Emily had grown, and she changed and had become a lot more
5 anti-war and wasn't really all that interested in my story and was more interested in
6 stopping the war and protesting. I think that it was just a difficult time for us. She had
7 dated a couple of guys while I was gone and, you know, I think that she made it clear that
8 I wasn't exclusively her number one anymore. So this was a problem. I was kind of
9 shocked by it, but I knew it was going to happen because she had stopped writing while I
10 was in 'Nam. So I gathered there was going to be some difficulty when the full breadth of
11 the entanglement of this other guy was revealed to me. I realized that this probably was
12 not going to work, I'd lost everything. Then I had to go back home. I couldn't stay. So by
13 now this is April. I came home on April 15th, so this is probably coming up on May 1st,
14 1970. I don't remember the exact date of Kent State, but it was early May. So the kid got
15 killed at Kent State and American campuses went through revolution, really. Wheaton
16 went on strike. I'd gone home and then I went back to Massachusetts to be with Emily,
17 and we ended up going to the factories and doing leafleting at factory gates, trying to talk
18 workers into joining the protests. You know, she was on strike, they had a student strike.
19 They had immobilized teach-ins. Because I was a veteran, they wanted me to do a sit-in
20 on a panel and I did that. It was just an intense time. The reason for Kent State was that
21 Nixon had boarded the Cambodian incursion. What had happened was, MIBARS Det B, I
22 think half of the guys, the best II's were sent to Headquarters Company in Saigon to do
23 imagery interpretation for the incursion. So I just missed that. Barryman was telling me it
24 was the best time he ever had as a photo interpreter. There were identifiable Soviet
25 equipment out in the open. You could pick targets and they were real targets, lucrative
26 targets that were nothing like all those relatively mundane things that we were finding up
27 in I Corps. You know, there were troops in action, they were obviously front lines in the
28 incursion. It was the best photo interpretation experience you could ever have and I
29 missed it because of my drop. So I felt kind of on the one hand, as a soldier, I missed the
30 best part of it and then, as a emerging anti-war protestor, I was sickened by this widening
31 of the war.

1 KC: Very conflicting there, I would think.

2 MG: Yes, it was, Kelly. I was really messed up. You know, meanwhile my
3 girlfriend was seeing another guy and yet, I was fully in love with her and always loved
4 her. My world was in absolute utter turmoil. I remember, she finally got free of classes.
5 I'm going to say she was—I don't know if they had to take finals that year or not because
6 they were on strike. I remember taking her home or sometime after that. I was driving
7 down to Rhode Island and I got stopped by a state trooper because I was going too fast in
8 a construction zone. It was raining and I thought there was no construction going on, so I
9 didn't think the speed limits applied. This guy was a real jerk. He took me before a
10 magistrate and I had to pay a fine, which I didn't have. I didn't have much money on me.
11 I told him that I was on orders to go to Germany and that I wasn't going to be able to
12 make a court appearance. They said at the end of the day I had to write a check but
13 remembered thinking that this was unfair because I couldn't even take the case to court
14 because I was going to be out of the country on government business. It just seemed so
15 unfair that I didn't have a chance to protest what I thought was an unfair arrest. So that
16 was one more nail in my coffin. I got spit at in San Francisco, I found out my girlfriend
17 was dating another guy, found out that I missed the best part of my Vietnam tour by
18 being dropped, and missed my R&R. I just felt like everything was not working out very
19 well. I remember I had my warrant officer who had a lot of contacts at Fort Holabird, and
20 I expressed to him a desire to become an instructor at Fort Holabird. He had written to
21 some people in the Pentagon and was going to try to intercede on my behalf to become an
22 instructor, which I really wanted to do. I just thought that would be so cool and I loved
23 Fort Holabird. I was close enough on the East Coast that I thought it would be okay. As it
24 turned out, I kind of decided that I wasn't going to do that after all. I was just going to go
25 ahead and take my orders to Germany. Go to Germany and then get away. It was all so
26 much to take, and I felt so constrained by being in the Army and all I really wanted to do
27 was go back to school and join the protest movement. And yet, I had a year and a few
28 months to go—maybe 18 months to go before I would ETS. I was really in bad shape, I
29 didn't want to be a soldier anymore. I remember Woodstock was in the theaters, the
30 movie. I remember going to Woodstock when they did, "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die
31 Rag" with Country Joe and the Fish. The theater was into it and I remember thinking that

1 it was disrespectful. I felt uncomfortable. I felt like it wasn't paying proper respect to all
2 the guys that had been killed. That wasn't the right emotion. I think Joe McDonald was a
3 veteran as well, I think. He was taking that in the right point of view. It just seemed like
4 these kids didn't know jack shit about what was going on. I felt like, you know, on the
5 one hand it was okay to protest the war, but it's not okay to dishonor the guys that are
6 going in your place. I was conflicted. I had no touch stones. I was just completely
7 uncomfortable about everything. So I didn't really try to go to Fort Holabird. I just kind
8 of let the green machine kind of soak me up. I remember I was supposed to report on
9 May 30th, which was Memorial Day. There was a big picnic and I wanted to stay for the
10 picnic. But didn't, I really didn't. I was having to report to Fort Holabird right before
11 New Year's and realizing that nobody really gives a shit, it's around a holiday. I really
12 wanted to stay and just report a day late. Emily's—my wife's uncle was a Navy lifer and
13 I was at this picnic and he was saying things like, "I don't know why you would report
14 late. You've been ordered to report on time." I was like, "Nobody's going to give a
15 damn." He said, "Yeah, yeah they will." He said, "You're exposing yourself to punitive
16 action. You could lose a stripe." I said, "Well, who gives up fuck. If I lose a stripe, I lose
17 a stripe. I want to be here." I remember just being disrespectful and angry with him. It
18 was like, "Why are you doing this to me you little shithead? I don't need this from you.
19 Leave me alone." I remember getting that attitude. That was the first time I really started
20 to feel kind of rebellious about what I was doing in the Army. It felt like, "Goddamn,
21 lifer, leave me alone. I'd done it already, I'm done. You got your money's worth out of it,
22 you took a year of my life. You probably cost me the love of my life. All you guys want
23 is war. That's all you care about and I don't want it. I'm not in on it." It was a difficult
24 time for me. I finally ended up reporting a day late and nobody said jack shit about it. I
25 remember thinking to myself, "That's the last time I listen to an old lifer's advice." I did
26 what I wanted to do, and it ended up being okay. So at Fort Dix, (unintelligible) off to
27 Germany and a full second half of my military career. Nothing resolved, everything in
28 total turmoil. Not sure if I was a soldier, not sure if I was a protestor, not sure if I was still
29 in love with the love of my life. Just completely ungrounded and raw and upset and
30 confused and disconnected, really. I just felt alone and pain, just pain.

1 KC: How would you describe your relationship with society in general when you
2 got back? You've given me a good idea about what it was like individually with your
3 girlfriend, what it was like with your family, what it was like to run into your uncle, the
4 lifer. What kind of connection or lack of connection did you feel with America when you
5 got back? Had it changed, had you changed? You mentioned you had no touch stones.
6 Describe your relationship with the country that you came back to.

7 MG: Well, I hated Nixon. I absolutely hated him. I just felt like he was lying to us
8 and I felt like that whole administration was just corrupt. They were just bullshitting
9 everybody. I remember there was a definite disconnect between young people and old
10 people. The old people were all about take it easy, settle down, don't be crazy. Young
11 people were like, "Let's fucking do this. Whatever it is, let's do it. Because this is not
12 working. You people are trying to spend us, and we don't like it. If this is what it's going
13 to be, this is what it's going to be. Let's fight. Come on, let's do it." I remember just
14 being very impatient with older folks. Now, my mother was very indulgent. My father
15 was difficult. He was like, "You've got to respect your authorities, they know more than
16 you know." "Yeah, fuck that, that's not true. They don't know more. I saw it with my
17 own eyes." We're not winning that war, it's just bullshit. You can't go on like this. So
18 everywhere I turned the people that I had trusted as adults, seemed like they were lying to
19 me. I didn't like it. I was like, "Just tell me the truth, I can deal with the truth. Don't
20 bullshit me." It seemed like everywhere I went somebody was bullshitting me with some
21 kind of requirement. I had to do this, I had to pass through that, I had to do whatever they
22 told me to do. I was getting increasingly aggravated by that. It was like, "No, you guys
23 are all lying to me. I'm not going to do your bullshit. This doesn't compute, I don't care
24 about this." I felt like the country, just young people in general would feel like that. Kids
25 on college campuses were saying, "Fuck that, we're not going to classes. Guess what?
26 Your university, you can hold it if you want, but we're not going. You know, it doesn't
27 make any difference to us. Guess what? If we don't go and we don't pay, you don't have
28 a university anymore. You guys better wake up and stop lying to us too, because we're
29 depending on you to be truth tellers. You're supposed to be here in academia, and you're
30 supposed to have the answers and we don't hear any answers from you. So we'll have to
31 tell you about the answers and the answer is we don't want to be a part of your stinking

1 war.” It was vehement, it was really vehement, and people weren’t going to put up with
2 this anymore. Young people weren’t going to put up with it anymore. Some people
3 weren’t going to put up with it anymore and we kind of figured it out a year and a half
4 before the whole country had. All of a sudden, people started to realize that this is going
5 nowhere. This isn’t going to come out good. There’s no way we can keep on bombing
6 these people and blowing them up and expect that this is going to turn out good for us. It
7 just didn’t seem like there was—the whole cause had shifted from giving them freedom
8 and stopping the reds from advancing and the domino theory to “Peace with Honor”.
9 Now, it was like because we’ve had thirty thousand dead or forty thousand dead, we have
10 to continue to fight to honor their sacrifice. There was a side of me that felt that with my
11 soul because of the noise and because of the travail of going there. The other side of me
12 was saying, “We’ve got to get out of there. Guys are going to continue to be killed for
13 nothing. This doesn’t matter to us.” When I put that on the scales and try to figure out
14 which was the right way to go, it was pretty obvious to me that we had to stop the war.
15 We had to find a way to do it by any means. So I became increasingly impatient and
16 agitated. That’s when I kind of made my decision that I was going to go to Germany
17 because I felt that if I stayed in the US, I would end up doing things that would get me in
18 big trouble. That I would end up in prison. Because I was getting to the point where the
19 grip of institutional—the institutional grip was weakening. I felt urgent enough that we
20 stopped this thing, that there was a higher goal that required more sacrifices than simply
21 just staying in line and waiting to be free to do what you wanted to do. So I was at the
22 point where I think that if I stayed in the States, I would have joined—Jane Fonda had
23 come with Donald Southerland, (unintelligible) United States, anti-war protesting soldiers.
24 I probably would have gotten involved with something like that. I probably would’ve
25 ended up getting arrested for doing the wrong thing. I was done. It was hard for the Army
26 to keep a grip on me at that point. I was lucky that I ended up having those orders
27 fortunately and that I did take that plunge. There was too much infusion for me, and I
28 needed some time to decompress. I was lucky.

29 KC: I think that’s a good point to stop here for today, Mr. Garemko.

Interview with Michael Garemko

Session [5] of [5]

Date 15 October 2010

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History interview with Mr.
2 Mike Garemko. Today is 15 October 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University and Mr. Garemko is joining me by telephone from Buford,
4 Georgia. Alright, Mr. Garemko, as we were saying off the record a moment ago, when
5 we last left off you were talking about your time at home in the States and the difficulties
6 that you encountered when you came here. This somewhat appealing radicalism that
7 perhaps was developing in you. Pick it up there, please.

8 Michael Garemko: Well, you know, Kelly, I think that coming back when I did
9 was a particularly difficult moment to arrive back. Somehow it seemed like I was always
10 maybe fortunate to have been in the most intense moments of the things that were
11 happening around me. Because of the Kent State tragedy and because of the upheaval
12 that was going on in American youth at that point in time, in some ways, I was right in
13 the middle of it coming back from Vietnam and feeling like I've done what the Army
14 needed of me. I've given them eleven months and whatever was in front of me, I couldn't
15 imagine something that would be—it seemed like the whole reason they enlisted me was
16 for me to go to Vietnam and it was done. I wanted to be out of the army profoundly. I just
17 wanted to be free of it. You know, of course, I couldn't. I was signed up for three years. I
18 had eighteen months to go. It was about six months in training and I had about a year in
19 service, plus leaves and all that. I had about eighteen months to go. As I said the other
20 day, I had hoped when I was in Vietnam that I would get an assignment stateside. The
21 place that they typically sent II's was to Fort Bragg in North Carolina. That sounded like a
22 very undesirable opportunity. There other option was to go to Holabird and if you were
23 any good, to be an instructor. That sounded like a great option for me, to be involved
24 more. I always liked Fort Holabird. I thought it was a great place and the Army
25 Intelligence School was just a great assignment. I had a warrant officer that was going to
26 try to intercede on my behalf with the office of personnel administration in the Pentagon.
27 He had written a letter while I was still there. I was going to try and see what I could do
28 to make that happen. As I said, when I got back, my girlfriend had kind of changed our

1 relationship to a certain extent. Now my wife, so that does work out in the end. So I just
2 said, "I've got orders for Germany. I'm going to go. I'll never get to see Europe again
3 and this will be a great opportunity. I might as well just take advantage of it." So I did. I
4 reported at the end of May, and we took off from Travis Air Force Base and off to
5 Frankfurt, Germany. As you say, I think I really had turned a radical corner in that forty-
6 five days that I was a free man. I just felt like the Army didn't have the same grip on me
7 that it had for the first eighteen months in my service, and that I had a lot of other
8 opportunities. I could speak out more because I was, A, a veteran, and B, a veteran of
9 Vietnam, and C, I had a little bit of rank. That all worked to my benefit to a certain extent
10 and I just felt more experienced and more capable. It was actually, you know—I think on
11 a personal level, I was growing too. I was now twenty years old and I felt like I was
12 becoming a man. I felt like I had kind of put a lot of the insecurity of my college failure
13 behind me and I felt like I had achieved some things by being in Vietnam and serving
14 well. You know, all of that worked to my benefit because I felt like the things that I had
15 to say were more consequential now. I mean, I had some experience others didn't have
16 that would give me the opportunity to voice my opinion and have it listened too. Those
17 were all good things.

18 KC: Alright, you've got these orders for Germany. Did you have any reluctance
19 to leave the United States?

20 MG: Yeah. As you know, my whole story was I couldn't wait to get home. I felt
21 put upon that they would send me away again. Leaving my mother and sister and just
22 being aloof from friends for a long period of time was a torturous thing in a lot of
23 respects. I mean, by the time I was going to get back, every one of my friends would have
24 graduated from college. So I was missing it all. I mean, I had no chance to experience
25 that whole college experience with the people that I had great friendships with. I knew
26 that I was out of sight and out of mind. You know, because the communications were so
27 bad, the only thing that was different from being away in Germany and being away in
28 Vietnam was that no one was shooting at you, you were more safe. So that was the
29 compensation. Yeah, I didn't really want to go to Germany. I mean, I went there because
30 I was ordered to go there, and it was the path of least resistance in a lot of respects.

1 KC: Now, you talked earlier about how when you came back to the United States,
2 following your time in Vietnam, you were not allowed to—I believe the phrase you used
3 was, “To mature in the culture.” And this trip to Germany, for however long it’s going to
4 be, is going to continue that lack of maturation and the culture. Does that weigh on you as
5 well?

6 MG: Well, to a certain extent. But I also knew that Germany wasn’t Vietnam, it’s
7 Europe. And there were students in Europe and there was a music scene in Europe and
8 bands toured through cities in Germany. So there was a chance to continue on in
9 understanding. Somehow, the media was a little more accessible. I didn’t know that on
10 my way over there, but I just knew it was going to be better than going to Vietnam. I
11 knew I wasn’t going to be held prisoner for eleven months in a hotel. There would be
12 chances to see other things and do other things. You know, the adventure of it was
13 certainly fetching, I wanted to do that. Being away from Emily, that’s any young man’s
14 calculus, the number one thing. Being away from the person you’re madly in love with
15 was not a good thing. I kind of felt like that book had been closed. I didn’t think we were
16 going to make it through. I thought that she was probably going to find someone other
17 than me in the time that I was going to be away and that’s just the way it was. You know,
18 I guess I was resigned to that possibility, and I guess I just thought I had to go. It was my
19 duty and my responsibility, and I guess I had to go.

20 KC: What was the state of the US Army as you saw it in 1970? You’re getting
21 ready to go to Germany. Whether it’s state-side or in Germany, describe for me the state
22 of the US Army.

23 MG: Well, from my perspective—well, first of all, I probably did not have an
24 opinion of what the state of the Army was at that point. You know, I was in it, I was of it.
25 So it would have been a little bit difficult for me to imagine what it would have been like
26 if it was running more perfectly. I think the key thing—for me, I think the key thing was
27 that division between lifers and short timers. Those who were lifers seemed to be the
28 enemy to me. It just seemed like they were cut of an entirely different cloth and those
29 who were just in it until their time was up, just seemed like people who I could relate to. I
30 have pretty little contact with lifers after I left Vietnam. I’ll talk about this in a moment.
31 My assignment in Germany was great, I was very fortunate. The way it worked out, it left

1 me very independent and very—really unbothered by the military generally. I lived a
2 pretty good life for the next eighteen months and had lots of opportunities that I didn't
3 fully take advantage of but gave me some experiences. I think that the Army generally
4 was suffering from lack of discipline and that schism between short-timers and lifers, you
5 know, reached stable proportions in Vietnam around that time. That's when fragging was
6 really getting serious. The race relations were very touchy. I think that really, because the
7 Army was populated disproportionately with folks from the south. For whatever reason
8 it's a southern tradition to put more young men into the military service than there is in
9 the North. The northeast people avoided the military like the plague. I think in the south
10 there's still—even to this day, if you look at the Army, it tends to be a more attractive
11 alternative to southern whites than it does to northern whites. The problem with African
12 American people is the Army does present an opportunity, a financial opportunity, and a
13 pass out of a lot of the things that could be trapping and damaging to young African
14 Americans. So you put those two classes or two groups of people together in close
15 proximity and there's going to be friction, and there was. I didn't see a lot of that because
16 I was in the Intelligence Corps. Because of educational opportunities and things like that,
17 there was a natural selection that limited the opportunities for African Americans in the
18 Intelligence Corps. And so, I didn't have that much direct access to that, that kind of
19 strife because we were in a little bit of a unique military situation.

20 KC: Alright, you find yourself headed to Germany. Where are you going to be
21 stationed?

22 MG: Yeah, I don't remember what my orders were when I went over. I think it
23 was for some MID (Military Information Division) in Kaiserslautern, I think. The way
24 this worked was we flew into Frankfurt and then we went to a replacement station in
25 Frankfurt, which kind of looked like what I imagined the Nazi headquarters would have
26 looked like. I mean, the whole thing felt kind of Nazi-like when I first got there. I
27 couldn't get over the fact that it was in Germany and this is where my father had bombed
28 in World War II and I was just kind of full of preconception. We got to Frankfurt, and
29 they sent me to this MI (Military Information) group in Munich, Germany, and they put
30 us on a train. There's a group of us, imagery interpreters from Fort Holabird that all got
31 out of Vietnam at the same time, and we were reunited. It was about five or six guys who

1 were in my class and we were all headed down to the 66 MI group on a train.
2 (Unintelligible) and Jack Dockerty and guys that I had great relationships when I was in
3 Baltimore, reunited and now we're heading south to Munich. I remember we were on the
4 train and we were on one of those European car six-person kind of compartments on the
5 train. There was an older Germany national, and we were in our uniforms and he was
6 asking where we were going and we said Munich. He said, "Oh, Munich." And he tried
7 to teach us how to pronounce the umlaut. We couldn't quite say it to satisfy him. He
8 spent hours just to get us to get that umlaut pronunciation. He was a nice guy. We were
9 speaking in broken English, but it was nice. I realized, this is nice, these are nice people.
10 They are ordinary kinds of people. So we got to Munich and once again, no one's ever
11 heard of McGraw Kaserne. When we got to the (unintelligible) in Munich, we said we
12 had orders to go to the 66 MI and no one had ever heard of this place. Everybody else
13 was going to big US Military installations and McGraw Kaserne, nobody had ever heard
14 of it. Finally, somebody told us we had to take the tram and then we had to walk. We
15 finally found our way to McGraw and then we couldn't find the 66 MI group on the
16 kaserne. We're walking all over and dragging our duffle bags around, and we finally
17 found the Headquarters Company of the 66 MI group. They directed us to our company
18 area. We went in and reported. So this was on a Friday night and they said we weren't
19 going to have any processing until Monday. So our temporary casual quarters was in the
20 basement in one of the apartment buildings that we ended up leasing from the locals.
21 "You guys are free, you can go wherever you want. You're on path now. You can head
22 down into Munich and enjoy the city and we'll see you on Monday." So this group of six
23 guys—five, six or seven guys who had all been together in intelligence school and we all
24 took off to downtown Munich. None of us knowing a word of German, none of us
25 knowing anything about anything. We're on the tram trying to find our way downtown.
26 We get there and we make our way to Schwabing, which is kind of like the Greenwich
27 Village of Munich. There's lots of great discotheques and nightclubs, and music scene
28 was all over the place. It was awesome, it was literally awesome. I'd never seen anything
29 quite like this. I kept thinking to myself, "I only wish that Emily were here to experience
30 this with me." It was just cool beyond belief. I remember there was this one place we
31 went into, PM Hit Club. We were down in the basement of this club and it was kind of

1 like a cavern club, or at least what I imagine that looked like in Liverpool. A great band
2 playing really great songs. I was like, "This is unbelievable." I was smitten with the city
3 from that moment. We missed the last tram back to McGraw, so we ended up having to
4 walk back to the kaserne. We weren't really sure where we were going. We were
5 following the tram line and hoping that we were right. We arrived about 3:30 in the
6 morning and it was already becoming dawn. So we were sleeping in and then at about
7 8:30 in the morning, this Hillsborough beer wagon with Clydesdale horses in front of it
8 and kegs of beer comes through our company area. Everybody's running with
9 (unintelligible) to get cold beer off of this promotion. We're looking at each other, "Have
10 we died? Did we go to heaven?"

11 KC: Just like Vietnam.

12 JS: I thought, this is unbelievable. It was the only time it ever happened the whole
13 time I was there. I don't know what the promotion was, but these guys were going
14 through our area with a beer wagon. I just thought, "This is too good." What happened
15 when Monday came up, they told us to report to personnel and I sat down with this
16 lieutenant. He was going over my service record and he said, "Well Specialist, you
17 certainly have distinguished yourself in Vietnam. The reports here are you are a Class A
18 imagery interpreter and certainly your uncle would love to have you continue on that
19 MOS." Your Uncle Sam. He said, "The truth of the matter is, you're now in a NATO
20 environment and I'm going to tell you how it is for imagery interpreters. I can send you
21 in Kaiserslautern, you will compete with the other imagery interpreters who are down
22 there in Kaiserslautern. And when the one mission per month comes, you guys can
23 continue to fight for a chance to read out the imagery. Judging by what I see here on your
24 record, I don't think you're going to find that as a very interesting assignment." He said,
25 "But I can offer you something else." He said, "What I'm going to tell you is I would like
26 for you to stay here in Munich. We have a drafting department upstairs and it's run by the
27 Department of Army Civilians. What those folks do up there is they do illustrations for
28 our interrogation reports." He said, "You've got art talent." It holds in my record that I've
29 spent a year in the art school at Syracuse. He said, "I'm sure that Mr. Hungeyer would be
30 more than happy to take a look at your skill set and give you an opportunity. Maybe you
31 can stay here in Munich." He said, "Would you like to do that?" And I was like, "Geez,

1 this is unbelievable. I can't believe they're asking me about this." So I said, "Yeah, I'd
2 love to talk to him." So I ended up getting a pass and this is in (unintelligible) 136, I think
3 it was. This was the headquarters of military intelligence in Europe. You know, first of all
4 I was pleased to be in the building and walking around. There was nothing but brass
5 everywhere. Lieutenant colonels, colonels, and majors everywhere I looked. It just
6 seemed like a really nice place. So I go upstairs and there's this little old Department of
7 the Army Civilian and he's running a drafting section up in the attic of this building. I
8 think there were twenty-five guys up there. Two guys had been infantry combat artists.
9 One guy was SFC (Sergeant First Class), who I later learned had a bit of a drinking
10 problem and wanted to add one drafter, that was me. I got into this little section that was
11 like back water of the headquarters for the military intelligence effort in all of Europe.
12 What we did was, we ended up drafting up concern layouts for intelligence reports from
13 defectors. That's where there's buildings over here and buildings over there, and they'd
14 sketch them out on a napkin. We would get maps and kind of coordinate it with the lay of
15 the land and then get them drawn up into scale and then add them into the intelligence
16 reports. If they had some information on a (unintelligible) placement or something, we'd
17 have that kind of information, we'd get to add these things in. So we had a sense of what
18 was being pulled in the interrogation reports. And we also got a chance to do some
19 drawing and it was all very relaxed because it was run by the civilians with the
20 department of the Army. Honestly, I couldn't have asked for a better assignment. They
21 allowed us to grow our hair a lot longer and we lived in apartments. I was a squad leader,
22 so there was only three guys in the three bedroom apartment. I had my own room in the
23 apartment. I was responsible for another cluster of apartments with other enlisted men,
24 and I think they had two guys to a room for the most part. It was very civilized. You
25 know, all bright guys. For the most part, they were agents and interrogators and so they'd
26 come out of prestige schools and were all smart guys and were all available. I had a great
27 time. I just really couldn't have asked for a better experience. I don't know, maybe two or
28 three months into the assignment, I ran into this fellow who was wearing a Hamilton
29 College shirt. I gave him a ration for being from Syracuse. So we struck up a
30 conversation about upstate New York. One thing led to another and we became very
31 good friends. He was from Fulton, New York, and had been planning on going to

1 Syracuse Law School after his college, when he completed Hamilton, but decided not to
2 go—No, he didn't decide not to go, he got drafted. Under the pressure of the draft,
3 enlisted and had gone and become an agent. So he was stationed there and he turned out
4 to be a very great guy and we were great friends. He later became my brother-in-law. He
5 married my sister and he's like my brother. So the Army gave me one of my most
6 fortunate experiences of my life. This guy is just a really wonderful human being, and I
7 was lucky to run into him. He treated me as his peer and in some cases looked up to me
8 because I had a little bit of military experience. But he gave me great respect and made
9 me feel like I was a worthwhile person. It helped overcome my discomfort of having
10 failed at Syracuse. You know, he wrote letters of recommendation for me and tried to get
11 me—I think he ended up applying to Hamilton and may have, but my academics were so
12 poor that the only place I could go was back to Syracuse. What he did for me—he gave
13 me, you know, self-esteem and a chance to really believe in myself and that I could
14 reconstruct the things that I'd done wrong and did not have to take it upon myself. So as
15 it turned out, he and I had about the same ETS. I think we were off by about a month. He
16 took an early out and I did too to go back to school in the fall of '71. He went back to
17 Syracuse Law and I went back to a bachelor's program. It was funny, I went into a kind
18 of a dorm situation which was just not going to work out. He was living in like a
19 permanent stay hotel kind of a thing. We both decided, "This is crazy, we should just get
20 an apartment here." So we got an apartment and he would go around telling people in the
21 law school that he was rooming with a freshman. (Chuckles) I guess they all kind of
22 wondered why a law student was rooming with a freshman. He had some explaining to
23 do whenever he did that. That's when my sister used to come up to visit and they kind of
24 met and clicked and the rest is history.

25 KC: Let me ask you—

26 MG: It was good. What I wanted to tell you a little bit about, right after I got to
27 the 66th in my group, there's kind of two components to that. One was your day job and
28 then you have your responsibilities back in the company. In the company, I was like a
29 squad leader. That was where your military part of your existence existed. So somewhere
30 along the line I had to qualify on the M14 because my record had me qualified on the
31 M16, but I never had fired the M14. There were several of us that had not done this. So

1 they took us out to some rifle range. I think it was the Olympic rifle range as a matter of
2 fact, which was interesting. They took us out there to record fire. While we were out on
3 the range, this sergeant—I'll never forget him, his name is Sergeant Arsenov, and he'd
4 been around since Custard's last stand. He had us out there and we were supposed to fire
5 from a prone position, fire from a sitting position, and fire standing. There were
6 requirements for however you were going to do this. When I qualified in basic training
7 with the M16, we were firing at pop-up Pete's. So if you shot in the dirt at the pop-up
8 Pete, it would knock the target over and I knew that. So the way I fired, I fired for
9 maximum affect and I was just trying to knock over as many of the targets as I could. I
10 fired expert, but with the M14 and that situation that we were in, I was on this rifle range,
11 and they actually had targets and they had to be scored. So it was a lot harder. The M14
12 does have a kick to it and the M16 was like—you know, it doesn't bother you at all, fire
13 away with it. You know, I had some learning to do and I really didn't have much
14 familiarity with that weapon. So I was having a hard time with it anyway. So this guy, the
15 sergeant, he was admonishing us that we weren't firing very well, "What you guys have
16 to do is think of these kids as students at Kent State and try to knock them down. Then
17 you'll fire a little bit more accurately." That really pissed me off. I mean, that really
18 pissed me off. So I made some kind of a comment like, "That's uncalled for. What are
19 you talking about?" He got a little cross-lines with me and we got into it. I told him,
20 "Look, I'm not firing at anything until you clarify that statement." Of course, his hair was
21 up at that point. So we were at (unintelligible) head, glaring at each other and I remember
22 refusing to continue the exercise until he apologized for doing this. You know, it was
23 really kind of stupid. I mean, he had all the power. I think he was an SFC or he might
24 have been an E7. You know, he was not liking me being the insubordinate and I was just
25 kind of full of this state-side rebelliousness, I guess. Not really fully integrated back into
26 the Army. You know, we got at it and finally he ended up saying, "Okay, then don't fire
27 it. If you don't fire, when I take it back, I'm going to talk to the CO about it and I'm
28 going to tell him why you're not compliant." I said, "Well, you just go ahead and do
29 that." I refused to fire on this record fire thing. Then the CO calls me and was like,
30 "Garemkov, what's this I hear that you've got a problem with Sergeant Arsenov?" I was
31 like, "Yes, sir. That's true." I told him about the Kent State thing. I said, "It's something I

1 feel very strongly about.” He said, “Yes, I understand that, but when the sergeant tells
2 you to do something, you have to get it done.” I said, “I know, I was wrong.” He said,
3 “Look, your records very clean and I know you’re a good soldier, and I just want to let
4 you know that we’re not going to let you get away with crap like that. You need to
5 behave yourself.” So they let me go, but it was like, “Geez, where you getting this?” I
6 could have lost a stripe over it. I should have gotten an Article 15. You know, get tagged
7 in my pay or something.

8 KC: Right.

9 MG: That was my small act of rebellion. It wasn’t much, but what I said earlier, I
10 could have gotten captured by—I forgot what Jane Fonda and Donald Southerland had
11 going at that point, but they had a movement where they were trying to enlist troops at
12 Fort Bragg and Fort Hood and places like that to join the resistance. I think I would have
13 jumped into that hook line and sinker. I mean, I felt that pull very heavily when I was
14 stateside. If someone would come along and tried to talk me into that, I think it would
15 have gone very readily.

16 KC: Speaking of the war, while you’re in Germany, what was the opinion of other
17 American soldiers that you encountered about the war in Vietnam?

18 MG: Well, avoidance was the key thing. You know, there were a number of guys
19 who had gone right through intelligence school to Germany and my brother-in-law was
20 one of them. They spent their whole time in Germany and then DEROS from Germany.
21 You know, fortunately, that’s really a fortunate kind of a thing. But no one wanted to
22 defend Vietnam from Germany. I mean, there were some who had been to Vietnam and
23 showed up like me, but anyone who was in Germany was being very careful to do things,
24 to maintain a low profile, so that they would not be the ones that were picked if someone
25 made calls for additional troops. Because troop withdrawals were well underway at that
26 point, that was stage 3 troop withdrawals—so there was a diminishing call for people
27 who were already in service to have to go over and do a tour. So I think we were passed a
28 lot of that. You know, there was a need for fighters, I guess. So they were probably still
29 looking for infantry blood. You know, if you were in and established in an MOS and
30 working, I don’t think there was a lot of chance that you could get dragged out of
31 Germany and sent to Vietnam unless you fucked up. And so it got hard not to fuck up and

1 you didn't want to go. You did have some stature for being in Vietnam, you know, for
2 having been in Vietnam. I was an E5, and to be an E5 on the first enlistment with the
3 campaign ribbons. You know, you got respect for that, amazingly enough. You really
4 shouldn't have, but they were all wearing their fire watchers and that was all they had.
5 Whatever marksmanship badge they had and that's it. Basically, stripped down uniforms.
6 Because I'd been there, I had the standard ribbons. Then, about two months after I was
7 there—maybe more, maybe three months, my ARCOM (Army Commendation Medal)
8 finally caught up with me. I had a little bit of prestige and it was nice, it was kind of nice.

9 KC: What about the attitude of the Germans or any of the other Europeans you
10 may have encountered about the Americans and the American effort in Vietnam.

11 MG: Yeah, that was interesting. I think that—well, Munich was a university city.
12 So down in Schwabing, where we tended to gravitate, there was a lot of—if you were at
13 Oktoberfest or a beer hall and you struck up a conversation with the locals, the
14 conversation almost inevitably—because we were in the military, would turn to Vietnam.
15 And generally speaking, you know, if you're talking with young people, girls
16 especially—you know, the conversation would turn to Vietnam and how fucked up we
17 were for being there. You know, of course, I was sympathetic to that point of view. My
18 thinking was consistent with a lot of what I was hearing. They were surprised to hear that
19 because it was like they had a stereotype of what Americans military would be like and I
20 was not fitting their stereotype. They were intrigued to talk to me. I remember one time at
21 the Oktoberfest, we were sitting at a table with a bunch of South Africans, and we were
22 all over them about Apartheid. They were all over us about Vietnam. You know, for them
23 Apartheid was holding the line against Communism because they were convinced that the
24 Black majority was going to become communist and take over the country. So that was
25 their fear. They said it was the same thing as being involved with our efforts in trying to
26 stop Communism's advance to Southeast Asia. It was a spirited discussion well fueled by
27 Oktoberfest beer and I don't know exactly how it came out. It's safe to say we did not
28 solve any of the problems of Apartheid or the problem of the American involvement in
29 Southeast Asia that night, but it was kind of fun to debate it. But generally speaking, I
30 think that in Europe at that point, with the young people that I was coming into contact

1 with, they felt it was an atrocious involvement and I didn't disagree at that point. It made
2 it easy for me to kind of move around in those circles.

3 KC: Alright, you come back home. Where are you going to be stationed when you
4 get home? Are you out completely and immediately when you come home?

5 MG: Yeah, I got out. What was interesting was, it was at the time that Nixon had
6 announced the all-volunteer army. I still retained my photo interpretation MOS and that
7 MOS was in the highest variable reenlistment bonus category. So if I had reenlisted I
8 would have gotten I think a twenty thousand dollar reenlistment bonus to get me into the
9 volunteer army. There was a side of me that said, "Geez, twenty thousand dollars, you get
10 a nice car, you get a nice college fund set up." All of that seemed like a pretty attractive
11 offer. I was thinking about going to OCS (Officer Candidate School. But then I said,
12 "Come on, wake up. You can't do this." So I didn't give it more than a passing thought
13 and I always did want to go back to school. So I started applying to schools when I was in
14 Munich. I tried Boden and I tried Hamilton and a couple of others, but my record was so
15 bad that I was basically left with going back to Syracuse and virtually starting over again.
16 I talked to Syracuse and they accepted me, and I was able to get an early out. I was
17 supposed to get out in October, and I got out in late August. It was great, it was over. I
18 mean, I felt great and when I went to register at Syracuse, there was a VVAW (Vietnam
19 Veterans Against the War) table on the quad and a couple guys sitting there, saying,
20 "We've got this organization and we'd like you to join." I was like, "Yeah, I'm in. Count
21 me in." So I ended up, right from the moment I got back on campus, getting involved
22 with Vietnam Veterans Against the War and doing whatever we could to try and stop the
23 whole effort. By this time, this is '71. We're still in the war, it's going on. It was
24 frustrating for me to think that there were guys that were still going over there. I
25 remember when I was getting out of Fort Dix, I was pretty weary. Whenever you move
26 from one place to another in the Army, it just wears you down. I mean, it's not an easy
27 transition dragging your duffle bag out and people stealing shit from you. You know,
28 you're constantly watching your own crap and other people's crap because they're going
29 to go take a shower and they watch your shit. It's always a hassle. I remember we were
30 out processing, and we were walking down to the PX (Post Exchange). We'd been
31 around for a while now, a three year veteran. You know, we're all decked out. I

1 remember these young guys running across this parade field and they'd just gotten their
2 dress greens. You know, they're just so happy to be putting on their uniforms. I
3 remember thinking, "You stupid son of a bitches. Every one of you volunteered, you're
4 in volunteer army now. I have nothing but contempt for you. You know not what you
5 do." I was thinking of Ezra Pound's story of seeing them as you walk off the war, dog
6 streaming at the leash. At the end of the poem it's like, "See them return with their tails
7 between their legs." I felt like the dog with the tail between my legs and these young
8 bucks were still straining at the leash as they were heading off to their fate, whatever it
9 might be in the Army. I remember thinking, "This is not good for America." To have a
10 cadre of people this eager to be in the Army is not a good thing. We need draftees and
11 reluctant enlistees to keep our military in check and keep it honest. I remember thinking
12 to myself that this won't come to good. I think history has kind of proven that to be true.
13 Anyway, so back to Syracuse. I got involved with VVAW and started hanging out with a
14 bunch of vets who were combat vets for the most part. You know, we did a number of
15 protests. In the spring of '72, Nixon resumed the bombing in the north and the campuses
16 came alive again. The VVAW organized a march on the recruitment center in downtown
17 Syracuse from the campus. So we marched right down Salina Street, which is the main
18 street in Syracuse. I remember we led this march, about a thousand people right down the
19 center of Syracuse at lunch time and we had a parade for a minute, but we basically shut
20 down Syracuse in the middle of the day. Then we sat in at the recruitment center. A
21 number of guys got arrested, I chose not to be arrested because I was thinking about
22 going to law school and you don't want to have a hassle with that. I remember, you
23 know, we were going to this building that was under construction and at the front, guys in
24 hardhats jumped down off the (unintelligible) and joined the march. I remember thinking
25 that was so great. At the time it was, "My country, love it or leave it." You know, the
26 roots of polarization were well established at that point and yet, these guys jumped off
27 their jobs at lunch time and marched down the street with their hard hats on. I think
28 maybe they wanted to be with the chicks. Anyway, it was great. (Chuckles) I loved that
29 particular demonstration because it felt good to be in the front of the ranks to try to stop
30 the war. I remember one time disrupting the (unintelligible) speaking engagement at the
31 New York State Fair. It was right after he had issued—he had said that the college

1 protestors were nattering negativism. He started blowing the whistle on people who were
2 disrupting him. I remember ahead of time said, “Don’t blow the whistle, let me blow the
3 whistle on Vietnam.” The secret service took our signs away. I don’t know, it was all
4 pretty lame, but I never saw a demonstration and I wanted to be a part of it. It was an
5 interesting time.

6 KC: What do you think your involvement with the Vietnam Veterans Against the
7 War says about you personally?

8 MG: Well, to me it was like joining the American legion. I mean, this is a chance
9 to be with other veterans who shared my belief that the war was immoral and should be
10 stopped. Because I was three years older than everybody around me, it was good to have
11 some people that I could relate to and be friends with who had an interest that was similar
12 to mine. I remember one friend of mine in my freshman year, a guy named Jack Weeks.
13 He had been in infantry—I don’t remember what rank he actually was, but he had been in
14 the infantry and ended up serving over the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) for over a week in
15 an unsupplied situation. So had really been in the shits when he was in the Army. We
16 were walking back from class one day and some turkey had put a Viet Cong flag up in his
17 window in one of the dorms. Jack had spotted it and decided we were going to pay this
18 kid a visit. Then we both walked up to his room, knocked on the door, and told him to
19 take the fucking flag down or we’re going to break his goddamn head. It was like totally
20 atypical to everything else I was doing at the time. You know, I just didn’t like the idea of
21 some little twerp in the freshman dorm flying a Viet Cong flag in his window. “Well,
22 who the hell do you think you are, buddy? Jack has got friends who are dead because of
23 that flag.” So anyway, the conflict always was there, and I could never quite resolve the
24 difference between being a veteran and being a protestor. That still kind of tugs at me
25 sometimes. I mean, there’s a brotherhood that comes with being a Vietnam veteran that
26 puts me in juxtaposition with a lot who I don’t share political feelings with and yet, I’m
27 associating myself with them at all because it was that experience. That’s a real
28 experience. I’m happy to be a part of that. I think we all did our duty, and we did it to the
29 best of our ability. I mean, I think we took our logs for doing it too.

30 KC: That’s really interesting, the complexity of the existence that you have to
31 deal with there. Like you said, between being a Vietnam veteran, proud of his service,

1 proud of the people, proud of the experience, but yet opposed to the war. There was
2 obviously a sympathy in much of the anti-Vietnam War movement. Not all of it by any
3 means, but much of it. Sympathy for the other side, sympathy for the communists and for
4 the North Vietnamese and the glamorization of the communist cause and the NVA. All of
5 that. It sounds like that wasn't something that you or your friends bought into. Is that
6 accurate?

7 MG: That's right, that's completely right. You know, my opposition to the war
8 was more on more moral grounds. What right did we have to do what we were doing and
9 what sense did it make to do those kinds of things? What was it doing to our country and
10 why are we so involved in this? I remember once, we were getting ready to go on a
11 protest march and there was a—I don't know what we were talking about. We were
12 debating whether or not we were going to put VVAW in the middle of this protest
13 because we weren't (inaudible). This girl was there from the student mobilization or
14 whatever it was. She was trying to convince us that the march would be meaningless if
15 we didn't show up because we added moral credibility to the whole thing. I remember we
16 were all kind of hesitant because we didn't like the way we were framing it. It was
17 heading in the direction of the stuff that you were talking about where Ho Chi Minh was
18 a great leader and I think we were all feeling like, "No, we don't agree with that. That's
19 not where we're coming from in our protests. Our protests aren't about those kinds of
20 things." I remember she was going, "What about the baby? What about the babies that
21 are dying?" We were like, "Hey, listen sister, there's a lot of young guys that are dying
22 over there too. Shut the fuck up about the baby. We understand, we were there." So
23 you're right, there was a cluster of—the movement was multi-faceted, too, and some
24 people were more radical than others. We had a set of objectives and thoughts that we
25 wanted to proceed with. But as time went on, I got more involved with arguing for
26 increased veteran's benefits and veteran's rights and resisting the traditional veteran's
27 organizations and their super patriotism and things like that. Moved away from—the war
28 was winding down and by '75 had ended. So it was the character of my participation in
29 the veterans world changed over time from trying to stop the war to trying to increase
30 veterans benefits and be helpful at the veterans hospital that was right next to the campus
31 and things like that because I felt kinship with guys who had been abused. I felt like a lot

1 of people had been damaged. There wasn't a lot that was being done to help. So I did the
2 best that I could to help in those ways.

3 KC: What was your opinion of the Peace Accords of '73?

4 MG: Well, I thought that Nixon had lied his way his way into the presidency. I
5 don't think he would have gotten elected if he'd been honest with the American people
6 and said that he was going to continue to prosecute the war. The vote for Nixon contained
7 a big chunk of people who thought his secret plan to end the war was a realistic chance to
8 change the course of the war from the Johnson Administration and the fear that
9 Humphrey would just continue the Vietnam policy as it was established by Johnson. I felt
10 like Nixon had really cheated in that whole process. I didn't see where the
11 Vietnamization program was going to be successful. As I viewed the ARVN, they were
12 not engaged in their own war. So, you know, it seemed to me that it was just an artful
13 dodge and, you know, that we were wasting more lives as we walked out of the firefight.
14 That all those lives that had occurred on Nixon's watch, were unjustified because the
15 country had already come to the conclusion that it was time to stop. In a democracy as
16 large as ours, you're never going to have unanimity of opinion. Certainly, public opinion
17 had swung in the direction of ending the war, but the consequences of leaving were
18 always weighing heavily on policy makers, and I think on individuals as well. The whole
19 notion of "Was it worthwhile?", plays into that after a period of time. You're saying to
20 get out of the war, turn your back on the sacrifice of the thirty thousand or forty thousand
21 who had already died and to say that they died for nothing. I understand the difficulty of
22 extricating from that kind of a policy position. The important thing is not to get yourself
23 into that kind of a policy position, but when Nixon and Kissinger found themselves in
24 that position, their technique for getting out of it was to take their way out of it. Not come
25 clean to the American people and not make it clear that they're willing to accept terms of
26 withdrawal that turned the country over to the communists, but rather put up this fiction
27 that they were going to somehow Vietnamize and leave the fight to the Vietnamese.
28 Anyone who knew anything about, you know, the corruption that existed in the Saigon
29 regime knew that wasn't going to work. In effect, they were really (unintelligible).

30 KC: What do you remember about the POW's (Prisoner of War) coming home?

1 MG: Oh man. I wore a POW bracelet, and his name was North, Colonel North. I
2 felt for those guys from the bottom of my heart. I still do, actually. To get caught in that
3 mess and to be incarcerated by people who were that angry and I just felt like—I wanted
4 them to come home and I couldn't have been happier when they secured their reliefs and
5 they were set free. My heart just went out to them in every way possible. I felt so bad that
6 they had to suffer the way that they did. As I've gotten older and think more about how
7 terrible our reliance on air power is and what terrorism it creates on the ground. I have
8 somewhat different feelings about aviators who are involved in that kind of thing. That
9 includes my father who was a World War II bomber participant. I think that reigning
10 down terror from above, you know, sixty thousand feet is a very important thing. There
11 probably are (inaudible) that should be paid, you know, when your caught in that activity.
12 I, certainly even now, I respect the guys who sacrificed so much in that kind of a situation
13 and endured the torture for our country. You know, I have a lot of respect for people who
14 can persevere through that and put their lives back together again and do great things.
15 We've got lots of examples of people, you know, who've made their political careers out
16 of their experiences after the war.

17 KC: Alright, the follow up question obviously has to be the Fall of Saigon. What
18 were your thoughts on the Fall of Saigon in April of '75?

19 MG: Well, I mean I was sad. I was shocked by it really, that it crumbled so
20 quickly. You know, I remember watching the CBS news and watching the march. When
21 they went through Da Nang, I remember being very depressed. As they moved on
22 Saigon—of course the issue was, “Should we commit more support, mostly air support,
23 to try to save back this onslaught?” By this time, I've got a certain degree of
24 sophistication. I was a political science major and I started to think that that was part of
25 the fix. There was a deal that was probably cut, and an appropriate amount of time would
26 go by and then we wouldn't intervene in the takeover when it finally did come. I think
27 that probably is true to a certain extent. But I was saddened by it. When I saw those
28 pictures of the helicopter taking off from the embassy and pushing the planes of the
29 carriers. I remember one guy flew a Bird Dog out to a carrier and wondering if that was
30 one of the Bird Dogs that I'd been in. I don't know, it felt like the combination of the
31 futility of it all. It was finally over and I was glad it was over. I felt bad for my mama san,

1 who is probably going to pay some sort of a price for having been a collaborator with us.
2 And then thinking, you know, it was going to be a tough time for the people who had
3 been helpful to us when we were there. I don't know, I had a whole bunch of mixed
4 emotions, but mostly I was thankful and glad that it was over and that we weren't going
5 to have that drain on our society any longer. I think I felt like it was an indication that I
6 was right, that it was a stupid thing to be involved with. It was about nothing and we were
7 stupid to be told to it. Initially, it was a colonial war and I can't believe that we were
8 fighting on the side of colonial interests in the very beginning. It was a sad time.

9 KC: What did you learn about yourself as the result of your experiences in
10 Vietnam?

11 MG: Well, I think it was pivotal. I was adrift. I'd had that terrible experience in
12 college and finding out that I could be useful at a high level of performance with really
13 bright people helped me personally, to regain my composure and believe in myself. I was
14 pretty defeated coming out of Syracuse that first year and pretty upset with myself and
15 questioning whether or not I was going to make myself useful to anybody, including my
16 now wife of so many years. You know, I think Vietnam helped me to grow up and to be a
17 useful citizen, and to believe in some of the things that I've carried with me throughout
18 my adult life. I mean, more than college, more than any other experience, I think Vietnam
19 was that one great adventure that you have as a young man that allows you to really
20 define yourself a little bit. I mean, there's no courage involved in what I did. It was
21 always compliant more than courage. You know, the only possible exception would have
22 been volunteering to fly those couple missions in Bird Dog, but even that wasn't courage.
23 That was just kind of stupid. It wasn't about courage, but it was about perseverance and
24 knowing that I had the ability to suffer things that I didn't want to do and to get through
25 them and do them with honorable behavior. You know, all good things. I have no
26 complaints about my experiences in the Vietnam War at all. I think they were helpful and
27 useful and made me a better man. I'm an older guy now. I remember walking on China
28 Beach with Joe Busing and he was a geologist and was a photo interpreter in our group/
29 We were both walking down the beach. He'd been drafted and he said, "You know,
30 Mike, I swear to god, I wouldn't volunteer to come here and I'm sick to my stomach that
31 I have to be here, but I'll bet you any amount of money I'll be glad that I was here when

1 it's over." I remember saying, "Yeah, you're right. I'm glad I had the chance to be here
2 and I'm glad I had a chance to see it with my own eyes and to understand it from the
3 limited prospective that I have on it. So that whenever I read about it or know about it,
4 I'm going to have at least something more, because I will know of something." I feel that
5 way. For me, it was a good thing. I grew, I learned, I suffered the loss of a friend. You
6 know, it was a healthy thing and I'm (unintelligible).

7 KC: We often times hear people talk about the lessons of Vietnam. Where you
8 apply the lessons of Vietnam to this particular issue or this particular conflict or
9 whatever. What do you think the lessons of Vietnam are for the United States?

10 MG: I mean, it's such a hard question. First of all, I think that we, as a nation,
11 were like exuberant teenagers when we went into Vietnam, and we had that great
12 experience in World War II. You know, we kind of got our noses bashed in Korea, but as
13 we stumbled Vietnam, we felt like we had a tremendous amount of power. We were
14 always looking over our shoulder at the Soviets and the Chinese and potential
15 adversaries. We were restrained from doing the most overt kinds of things because to
16 broaden the war would be to incur a much bigger problem than just that Vietnam
17 problem. There was force in the world that kept us from doing things that might have
18 been even worse. Because of that, everything was incremental, it was iterative. We were
19 like a frog being boiled in a pot of water. If the temperature went up, we just kept on
20 adapting to it. I think that the lesson of Vietnam was that you don't allow yourself—as a
21 nation, you don't allow yourselves to be pulled into something incrementally. You have
22 to have a very clear picture of what your objectives are, your policy objectives are, and
23 what are the tactics and strategies that you intend to pursue in order to achieve that policy
24 objective. Then, once you have either achieved it or it becomes apparent that you're not
25 going to be able to achieve it, you have to be able to make a cold and calculated decision
26 as to whether you can continue to chase good dollars and good lives after that. I think that
27 those lessons are important lessons in Vietnam. The 1st Gulf War was proof of that, in
28 that we had superior force, we had a willingness to stop once we achieved that goal. So I
29 think that lesson was learned and then promptly forgotten. You know, we were assailed
30 by (unintelligible) and the 9/11 experience. I think we just lost all of our equilibrium and
31 stumbled into Afghanistan and here we are all over again doing counter insurgency

1 fighting in parts of the world that were unfamiliar with the political realities on the
2 ground. You know, trying to fight from the same perspective of the lessons that we've
3 learned in previous wars and not taking the war at hand for what it is. Tailoring our
4 tactics and our methodology from the experiences that we find on the ground there. The
5 lessons in Vietnam are very hard to apply to different places because the circumstances
6 are always different. The political realities that support our involvement in other places
7 are always different. You know, if you take anything away from it, don't do things
8 incrementally, and foolishly. I would say, don't listen to the freaking generals on the
9 ground. That's not where policies should be made. They should be made at the altitude of
10 civilian control. Unfortunately, all too often I think we tend to believe the generals and
11 they have a much different objective than most of our policy objectives.

12 KC: One last question for you. You just explained what you believed the lessons
13 of Vietnam were. What about Vietnam's legacy? If you have to pin it down, and again, as
14 broad or as narrow as you'd like, what do you think is the most, longest lasting legacy of
15 the Vietnam War?

16 MG: You know, I mean the tentacles are—you know, it ripples through our
17 society in so many awful ways that it's hard to just kind of pin it down. You know, if you
18 were to think about that very carefully, I think more than anything it was ripping open the
19 polarization that exists in this country. I mean, the seeds of what's wrong with our
20 politics right now really, I think emerged as a result of Vietnam and the Civil Rights
21 Movement. Those two things were kindred in that point in time. I think that some of the
22 difficulties that exist in America today has its root all the way back in the Vietnam era.
23 People who are setting priorities, national priorities had their opinions forged during the
24 struggle between hawks and doves. At the time, it was unclear, the ambiguity—in World
25 War II it was no question. We were fighting the fascists and we were fighting the
26 Japanese, and we were going to fight them until they were done fighting. Everybody was
27 on board. That was the American thing to do. Ever since then we've never had that kind
28 of clarity in what we've done. We haven't had declared wars, haven't really mobilized
29 the nation to meet the challenge that was there and it was never total war ever again.
30 That's a good thing because we don't have to suffer the consequences of total war. But
31 it's a bad thing from the point of view that we allow a small slice of our population to

1 fight these battles and we do these things very cynically. I think that those consequences
2 are among us and with us and coursing through us, all the time. You know, Vietnam is
3 going to resonate our national consciousness for a very long time. It's funny, in all
4 wars—Korea is the one exception. I really feel sorry for the folks that participated in that
5 war because they really just kind of got swallowed up into post-World War II, pre-
6 Vietnam kind of consciousness. You know, World War II had tremendous grabbing in
7 the way that we behaved, and Vietnam had tremendous gravity for the way we behaved. I
8 imagine that the Iraqi, Afghanistan travail is going to have an impact as we go forward.
9 These wars, they're in our national light and we really have to be better. I think we need
10 to be better about making decisions to get problems and these kinds of things. It's too
11 easy just to stumble into them and they end up being very costly to the direction of the
12 country. It's an unfortunate thing, to say the least. That sounds kind of stupid, but it's so
13 unfortunate that we spend so much national treasure and blood and effort on these kinds
14 of things instead of uplifting human and kinds of things. I just wish that we had our focus
15 a little bit different.

16 KC: Well, Mr. Garemko, is there anything else you would like to add before we
17 put an end to the interview?

18 MG: Well, first of all, I'd like to thank you and the veterans project for the
19 opportunity to tell my story. I had never spent this much time telling a story and I think
20 I've said almost all that I ever wanted to say about it. I mean, I really do.

21 KC: We drained you.

22 MG: Yeah. You know, it's such a privilege to be able to tell someone about this.
23 It's almost like—I imagine the same feeling that you get after writing your memoir. I
24 don't think that my participation was particularly noble or particularly courageous or
25 particularly typical for that matter. I do think that I represent a lot of things that were
26 happening right at that point in time. You know, I think I am typical in the sense that I
27 was one of the troubled ones that had to go and fight because I couldn't stay on track.
28 And so, you know, it falls on those that are not as privileged to do these things and those
29 of us who now have privilege should remember that we are crunching up people when we
30 do this stuff. It's important to remember that lives are being wasted, people are suffering
31 and dying and being maimed. That it will have consequences and they will go on and on

1 forever. I thank you guys for assembling this trove of information and I hope that
2 whoever stumbles across my story in the future will at least stop and consider that at least
3 one or two of us was looking at the war from a little bit different perspective than the
4 common wisdom of what a Vietnam veteran ought to be thinking about. I thank you for
5 the chance of telling my story, Kelly. It was really a pleasure.

6 KC: Well, it was certainly my honor and my pleasure.

7 (Interview audio ends)