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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARVIN APSEL

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an interview with Marvin Apsel on December 18, 2018, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The interviewer is Kate Rizzi. Also, present is …

Gail Apsel: Gail Apsel, his wife.

KR: Thank you so much for coming in to do this second session.

Marv Apsel: You're very welcome. Thank you for doing this project.

KR: I would like to start with a few follow-up questions from our first session, asking about your family history. You mentioned that your mother's mother was from Europe, and I am wondering what you know about her history, going back in Europe.

MA: My mother's mother's name was Elsie Marder. That was her maiden name. When she married her husband Sam, her name became Marcus, M-A-R-C-U-S. She was a woman who was born in Poland and came to this country early on. I'd have to check to find the exact years. She was not a formally-educated person. Her husband was a shoemaker. While she bore four children including my mother, there was the responsibility, fostered by logistics, that my grandmother, Elsie Marder, would live in close proximity to my mother. That is because her other daughter, Marlene, a little older than my mother, moved to California with her husband to establish their life out there. The two sons, the older one, Isadore, was a pretty rakish individual and did not have an established sense of responsibility with regard to his children or his family. Then, there was the younger son that she had, Morris, who I think I spoke about previously but who lived in close proximity to us.

My grandmother, Elsie, lived in a four-story building that my parents had purchased, and she lived on the ground floor. She would sit by the window in a rocking chair and watch the world go by. I had this impression as a young boy that she was very old, but in retrospect, she actually passed on when I was about eleven or twelve years of age from complications of diabetes and she actually was only in her early sixties. Today, that seems quite young, but from the eyes of an eleven-year-old, she looked much older. Her hair was gray. She dressed very prudently, in just a house dress. Maybe she had two or three housedresses in her entire wardrobe. She was a very superstitious lady. She was a lady who basically ran a household under the dominance of her husband Sam.

As I said, Elsie was married to a man, who, while I have never met him, I've gained the impression from conversations with my aunts and uncles and my mother that he was somewhat of an intolerant person who may have been involved in some level of abuse. I know for a fact that there was some abuse, talking to the older of the four children, Isadore. He received the brunt of all punishments from this man's hand, my grandfather's hand. He was a shoemaker, I believe I mentioned that, who decided to mete out his punishments or discipline utilizing what is known as a cat and nine tails, a leather strap that had nine pieces of leather emanating out from one end. He used that to ensure discipline in his household. While Izzy, Isadore, the oldest, bore the brunt of that discipline, I believe much less was directed to the girls, Marlene and my mother Frances. Obviously, I think Morris, being the youngest child, may have been spared a lot of that violence that appeared to have gone on in the family. The relationship to their parents, the

children, my mother and her siblings, probably had their personalities affected going forward. I'm sure, it did to the oldest one, who, while he's been highly criticized throughout his life, may have been in a situation where he bore most of the physical abuse and possibly adapted to it, unfortunately, using verbal and physical abuse with his own family.

Elsie, to get back to the question, was a lady who was, you might say, docile, and some of that may have been related to her relationship to her husband. It may have been out of fear to express herself or to being demonstrative, but, nevertheless, she was a very loving lady. As I said, when we were growing up, we lived in a four-story house at 1458 42nd Street [in Borough Park, Brooklyn] that my mom and dad had purchased, and my grandmother had one of the apartments downstairs. Strangely enough, when I found myself in some trouble or difficulties, having probably done something that caused a response by my parents, usually warranting punishment or discipline, I would run downstairs to my grandmother's house seeking protection, which she would often give. She was a very loving person but very superstitious. When watching TV programs, *Guiding Light* or *Search for Tomorrow*, all those early shows that went on in the '50s, she would see actors engaged in violence and people being killed. I think she actually thought that this was being done. I don't think she was able to perceive that they were acting and that these people were there to live another day. She was a kind lady.

However, the violence that was present in my maternal grandparents' household among my mother and her siblings did affect them in the future. My mother sometimes used what you would regard as corporal punishment to discipline me, my younger sister and my younger brother. Being the oldest child, I received more of that discipline than the others. It would be something like, remember that little paddle with the ball on it that you slap against the paddle. My mother took that paddle, ripped the ball off, and put the paddle under the couch pillow that we had in our house, and whenever we needed to be disciplined, the words, "Go get the paddle" meant that you were going to get it. We would get it. This corporeal punishment might have been caused by shirking some responsibility that we had. In one instance, she was trying to teach me a skill of taking a hat that had a strap on it and buttoning the hat. I had some difficulty with the dexterity involved in doing that as a young five or six-year-old child. I was told, "You'll do that ten times in a row before this lesson ends." I would do it, one, two, three, maybe four times and falter, and my punishment was to get a whack from the paddle. Eventually, I learned to get all ten snaps. That paddle was sort of an incentive. Some people would not describe her as a pedagogical engineer, but that was the way that some people directed the activities in their family. I do not want to couch Mom as a picture of intolerance; she was a very loving lady. She loved her children very much and was very generous to others, not only in the family but in the neighborhood. I think I may have told stories about the feedback that I got back from neighbors when she had passed. It was an interesting time for me, living, like I said, in close proximity to my maternal relatives.

My father's relatives lived maybe forty-five minutes away in a place called East New York, Brooklyn, and we would see them on Sundays. The dichotomy is that on my father's side, there was a much more civil approach towards life. First of all, they were a religious family. My grandfather attended *shul*, or synagogue, on a daily basis. They honored education. They basically honored each other, and violence was not any part of their rearing practice. I attribute that reference to having an awareness and of being more aware with regard to feelings and

respect for each individual in the family, whereas on my mother's side, there was a different approach. They weren't as educated. They were maybe high school graduates. I don't believe my grandparents had any formal education, probably my grandfather, on my maternal side, just had trade training. I feel that situation was very telling.

Sometimes, I wonder--I actually wonder and my own siblings wonder, too--how my father ever [laughter] came to meet my mother. It seemed like they came from two different worlds. My father went on to become a college graduate and a lawyer, and my mother was a high school graduate. They raised a family. Each of their kids has done well with regard to how people discern wellness and success in society. They all went to college and were college graduates, and they have been raising their families with a little luck. When we look at the entirety of our family, things have worked out well for us, the immediate children, myself, my brother, and my sister.

KR: What do you know about your grandmother Elsie's life in Poland?

MA: I do not know very much of her life in Poland, and I do not know the situation in which she was introduced or came to know my grandfather on my maternal side. She was, you would say today, a simple lady performing what we would term domestic skills within the house, keeping a household together. In retrospect, sometimes living in a situation like that, you've got to give much more credit to that individual for even being able to survive and raise four children. Four children. Gail and I have two children, and we're amazed how we did that. [laughter] Four children, with the myriad of problems that present themselves, it must've been very daunting at times.

KR: I am wondering if you know what area of Poland her family came from.

MA: I probably could look it up. I probably know a little bit more about my wife's family that came from Poland. [laughter]

GA: We've been doing genealogy, so we are back to the 1700s.

MA: Yes.

GA: Well, you don't know her parents. Do you know who her parents were?

MA: No.

GA: You said you didn't even know your grandfather, Sam.

MA: No, he had already passed when I was born.

GA: Didn't she have somebody else that she lived with, Braff?

MA: Yes, okay. That's true. In the later years, after my mother and father bought this house, four-family house, and my grandmother Elsie occupied one of the apartments on the ground

floor, and years after her husband had passed, she was in a relationship with another person by the name of Braff. They were married in some type of religious ceremony ...

GA: Well, what happened to your grandfather?

MA: I don't know. I don't know how he died. When I would go to their apartment, Braff seemed to be more of a boarder than a husband. Obviously, they were in advanced age and they had physical limitations. He had a bedroom, a small bedroom, off to one side, and my grandmother had another bedroom. He lived there. We did not have a strong relationship. One was never fostered. I believe he was somewhat of a religious person. When she passed, I believe he left, and any ties to him were severed. Nobody pursued any type of ongoing relationship with Braff.

KR: You had said you had never known your grandfather on your mother's side.

MA: Right. I had never known my grandfather on my mother's side, and so any depictions that I represent here are from stories my mother or aunts or uncles would've told me. That's not the case on my father's side. Like I said, they lived about forty-five minutes away from where we lived in Brooklyn and we traveled out there on Sundays, I had an opportunity to be in the home of my paternal grandfather and grandmother. It was a much different atmosphere. Like I said, he was a religious man who went to services every day. They honored the book, whether it was a religious book, spiritual book or books. They came to this country not able to speak English. They were taught English. They took special honor in knowing that they were able to learn English and go to school, go to night school, to learn the language. Their children all became very successful.

I think I told you that my father, being the oldest in the family, went on to go to college. He went to St. John's University, an observant Jewish man going to St. John's University and after that to Fordham Law School, and he received a wonderful education from the Jesuit priests who basically performed the teaching functions at those places. His next brother, Max, went on to become a mathematician and was the head of the math department at Jefferson High School in Brooklyn. His sons and children went on to become actuaries, a physicist, and a teacher. Then, there was my uncle Abe, Abe Apsel, who had two daughters. His oldest daughter went on to become president of the ALS Society, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, in New York and has done very nice work with them for many years. Her sister, Linda, is a psychologist. As you could see, the others--the daughter in the Apsel family, Gertrude, was a housewife, her son, Martin Mendelsohn, went on to become a lawyer in Washington, who basically had as one of his main jobs the activity of identifying war criminals in the United States and having them extricated back to Europe, primarily to Germany. His sister, Diane, also became a health professional. You can see the breakdown on my father's side of the family was significant. By the way, Edward Mendelson, who was Gertrude's other son, was maybe a savant in respect to the world of education and history and works now in Washington, D.C. When bills are written, they need to be researched, and he does that research, if not writing most of those bills. He is somewhat reclusive but nevertheless a very intelligent individual and unfortunately stays secluded in his own little world in Washington with only rare appearances within the family. Once again, the

dichotomy here of two families which have much different approaches towards living life. Yet my father and my mother came together, and it worked. Somehow it worked. [laughter]

KR: You said on your father's side of the family that they came to America and did not know English. Where did they come from?

MA: They also came from Poland and from areas that were regarded as the Pale. In other words, the borders often changed so frequently from Western Russia and the Ukraine, that you might be part of that empire one day and part of Poland the next day. They came from that area of Europe and eventually immigrated to the United States. [Editor's Note: The Pale of Settlement was a region in the Russian Empire designated for Jewish settlement, according to restrictive statutes enacted in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of the land that formed the Pale is now parts of Poland and the Ukraine.]

KR: What did your mother do for work?

MA: My mother, what did she do for work? Now, as I said, my father was an attorney, and he also dabbled in private enterprise for some period of time, starting a dry-cleaning business. Remember, his family's occupation was that of tailors, and so all the children learned those skills. Even though he became an attorney working for the City of New York, he basically started an independent operation of having a dry cleaning and tailoring store. Unfortunately, that didn't work out and he went back to law full time.

Obviously, living in the area that we did, in Brooklyn, in Borough Park, my father earned a very nice salary. My mother probably did not have to work but chose to work because my mother liked to play cards, poker, Mahjong, Canasta, you name it, she would do it. There would be some wagering associated with that activity, and my father would say, "Frances, I'm not going to pay for your gambling debts. If you want to engage in that, fine. However, you will do it with your own money." My mother, never one to shun a challenge, basically picked up the gauntlet and took a job at a dry-cleaning store as a clerk, in a dry-cleaning store, New Boroughs Dry Cleaning on 13th Avenue and 39th Street in Brooklyn. She would do that. It had two advantages, one, in that she made some money that she could use for entertainment purposes, and, two, since she was an employee of that company, all our clothing was dry cleaned. [laughter] We just basically threw worn clothing into a pile for cleaning at the store.

GA: At least it got washed.

MA: Yes. [She would] take it over and basically have it laundered. She did that for a number of years, and eventually, after that, she actually took a government job and worked for Social Security in a place called the payment center on Queens Boulevard. She did that for a number of years and advanced to a level of supervisor in that job, actually liked it, because of the people that she met and for the benefits that she was able to earn from that work. That's what she did. Obviously, she dabbled at being a mother and maintaining the household, although, I must say, she was not like Gail's mother, who would make a four or five-course meal every day. My mother believed that TV dinners and pot pies were sufficient sustenance.

GA: And her daughter was put in charge of household functions.

MA: … She provided a wide variety of nutrition for the kids. [laughter]

KR: In our first session, we talked about your years at P.S. 164. I am wondering about your high school years and what high school was like.

MA: Let's see, high school. I went to New Utrecht High School. I graduated in June of 1965, so I believe I spent sophomore, junior, and senior three years there, because in those [days] high schools were the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade. The seventh, eighth and ninth grades were at a junior high school called Montauk Junior High School, situated only a block or two from my house. The high school required me to get up in the morning and walk the five or six blocks to a train station, get on a train, and take it to the Clover Line, take another train to the F Train, and take that train to 70th Street and 20th Avenue. So, it was a walk and two trains to get to high school. When I tell my kids and my grandkids that I had to take two trains and walk to high school by myself every morning, they're astounded. They're basically used to being driven to school or getting on a school bus.

High school was an interesting place. I don't believe I took full advantage of high school, and I was probably just an average student there. I worked for a couple of high school service organizations. I was in something called Agathon, which was the service society at that school. I actually worked for the principal every day. For forty-five minutes, I would go down to Mr. Hersch's office and perform whatever office functions they needed to have done by a sixteen-year-old.

I enjoyed sports at the school. I enjoyed the life of going to football games and having friends, but I learned a little bit about life in high school because in some respects growing up in Brooklyn, in that area of Brooklyn, the atmosphere was somewhat predatory. There were cliques and gangs, and you needed to know how to maneuver around and through those groups to maintain your own personal safety and dignity, so I learned to do that. I regret, obviously, that I did not spend more time involved in cultivating myself in high school. Like I said, I was an average student. I developed friendships in high school that lasted for a while but then lost a lot of friends during the years after, when people moved out of the Brooklyn area to pursue their education and careers. High school was good.

If you watched the show *Welcome Back, Kotter*, it was a sitcom from many, many years ago, it was filmed at New Utrecht High School. My wife, Gail, also went to New Utrecht High School, and that is where I met her. I met her there, after I had graduated in 1965. A year or so had passed, and I went back to a reunion at New Utrecht High School that was a reunion for past years' graduates. I sat at the table for my year of 1965. That event was hosted by the boosters and the cheerleaders of that present day. I saw this girl dressed in her booster uniform with a beautiful smile, and I said something like, "Coffee, tea or me," [laughter] which was one of the most unbelievable lines I have ever uttered. [laughter] It's funny how a line like that could result in a connection to my future wife.

GA: Lifetime.

MA: … Forty-six-year marriage and family. We started dating. It's interesting, when I look back--Gail has obviously been the most meaningful person in my life; I say that sincerely--it's interesting how you make a turn this way or a turn that way, you decide not to go with this group one day, and who knows what events will result from your decision. Maybe there was fate involved in that decision to go to that reunion that night. It was probably on a Friday or a Saturday night. Believe me, there were other things going on in the world. There were ballgames to attend and things that we could have done, other parties, but I did go to that event and it's probably one of the best decisions to do so in my life.

New Utrecht High School. I graduated New Utrecht High School in 1965, and Gail was very active in that school. In fact, I think a year or two or three later, Gail was asked to be one of the commissioners of Sing. Sing was a contest between the sophomore, junior and senior classes. Each class would put on a production, a musical production, a great effort, at that time. There was a panel of commissioners who were given the task of deciding who the winner would be, the winner of Sing. Gail was selected to be a commissioner of Sing, and I was her date. We went to the Sing, and we observed all three of the shows. Like I said before, Brooklyn was a predatory environment and could be violent at times. I looked at the reactions in the audience, and I said to her, "Gail, if you don't pick the seniors, I don't know if we're going to be able to get out of this building alive." Anyway, there was a lot of tension associated with making the decision, but Gail acted on her own sense of fairness and what she perceived as the better talent and made her decision. We left to live another day, thank goodness. [laughter]

We've had associations with New Utrecht--interestingly enough, a couple years ago, we went back to New Utrecht High School, it was to celebrate their 100th anniversary, and people from many different classes were there. It's strange that we did not recognize many of the people at that time. Obviously, people leave the stage as life goes on, and obviously, people do not look like they did when they were in high school. We did tour the building, and we did tour parts of the building that are no longer used, especially the swimming pool area and the locker rooms that would not obviously pass an inspection today. There were signs on the wall that said, "Remember, defecating or urinating in the pool is not looked upon with any glee." [laughter] You can imagine what went on in those areas fifty years ago.

We have, over the years, gone back to a couple of reunions, maybe at the twentieth year, maybe at the thirtieth year, and we did see people who we recognized. It was interesting to see how they made it out of the neighborhood, I'll say in some instances, survived the neighborhood. While we talk about the good old days, when you actually look at the good old days, the good old days had elements to them that were not desirable. I think I mentioned that before. Those were the days where physical discomforts abound. There was no air conditioning. You had to travel long distances to get someplace. Sometimes I'm amazed that kids today are driven to wherever they have to go. If I wanted to go to a party, I might have to take two or three buses to get to that location with a friend or two, and after eleven o'clock at night, buses only operated once every hour. So, if you missed a bus, you stood on the street corner or walked, and it was a much different world that we lived in. Sometimes, I chuckle when I hear "the good old days." Sometimes the good old days, while life was much slower then, was at times very difficult.

KR: You mentioned the service organizations that you participated in at New Utrecht. I am wondering what extracurricular activities, clubs, sports you did in high school.

MA: Okay, well, I mentioned Agathon as the service organization. Did I go to Arista? [laughter] No, I didn't make the honor society for my exemplary work accomplished there, no. No, that was Gail. That was Gail. [Editor's Note: Arista was the honor society of New York City public schools in the twentieth century.]

GA: No, I wasn't in Arista either.

MA: Like I said, neighborhoods, in those days, were very important, and most of my friends either lived in my immediate neighborhood or in adjacent neighborhoods, only a few blocks away. In high school, we forged relationships with people in our neighborhood or adjacent neighborhoods, and so it afforded us an opportunity to develop a social network that we used to do sports. We would call up a couple of friends and say, "I'll meet you on 41st Street in fifteen minutes," and basically, we would play street football or street punchball or we'd meet at the school yard and play tag football or handball or a myriad of other games. That was our social network. It was developed because of our experiences in high school. You talk about a melting pot; it certainly was a melting pot of kids from different socioeconomic backgrounds. While we had friends of every religious orientation, many of them came from Jewish families. It was a large Jewish neighborhood. Sometimes, you could compare households and use them to compare experiences of other families, because we went into each other's homes and you could say, "Gee, what they're doing in their home, dinner and celebration, is much different than what I have in my home." Those experiences were indelibly marked in our memories, and they have obviously affected us going forward.

I had a close boyhood friend during high school. His name was Fred W. He did not go into the service. I was drafted into the service, and Fred stayed home. When I talk about my friends feeling sorry for me going into the service, I think I alluded to the fact that while going into the service was difficult, it basically presented me with potential for growth. They helped me achieve furthering my education after leaving the service and other support functions. A guy like Fred, who stayed in the neighborhood, succumbed to the ills of the neighborhood. In the 1960s and early '70s, it was a time of great strife, civil unrest. The drug culture was gripping society at that time, and those guys, Fred included, got involved in drugs. When I came out of the service, I looked to see where Fred was, and he was fully entrenched in the negative downslide of the world of drugs, eventually found himself in a mental institution, and never achieved the relationships that others in the neighborhood may have found, certainly did not have the relationship I had with a woman who was loving. He was in a downward spiral and, like I said, was institutionalized on the West Coast and lost contact with everyone. Basically, I learned, later after trying to search for him for many years, that he had met his demise. He never married, never had a loving relationship, very, very sad.

KR: Describe a little bit more of the changes that took place in Brooklyn as the 1960s progressed.

MA: Okay, well, the 1960s, to talk about the 1960s, we have to talk about the 1950s. Here, I was born in 1948, and so in the '50s, I was an adolescent and activities and social mores were very, very rigid. Look at the way we dressed. Women would be dressed with their shirts buttoned up to their neck, very conservatively. Their dresses were worn below the knee. Guys would wear continental shirts and ties to school. The things we watched on TV were the conflicts between the Army and the Indian Nations. There was controlled tolerance with regard to relationships between the races. You never saw heroes from the black community or Asian community. There was an impression, because of that, that certain segments of the society were subjugated and lived on a different plane than we did.

That way of life, that strict type of adherence to a code that was soon to be thrown out, was the world that we were coming out of, and the '60s marked a very significant transition. I think it happened with a little bit of the transition from the Eisenhower Administration to that of President John Kennedy, the man who basically exemplified Camelot, who basically talked about civil rights and freedoms and personal dignity. Obviously, there was a war fought out in the streets among those who wished to hold on to the past and those who saw the need for change. You saw those changes come about in every facet of our lives, in our dress, in the music we listened to, and the protests that we engaged in. The '60s was a time of great change and turbulence. Certainly, the civil rights legislation that was fostered by the Kennedys and Lyndon B. Johnson was instrumental.

It was a sort of awakening for us who were at an impressionable age, and in retrospect, we say, thank goodness for it because it changed our world. We obviously had to deal with the constraints that our older generations placed on us. Relationships between parents and children, at times, were stressed, but we persevered. It was a good lesson to live by, because, look, today we see those same traits of looking for change emanate from our children and our grandchildren. While we ask them to honor the past, I think we ask them to honor the best of what came out of the past and not all of it. You can't take it *carte blanche*. There are aspects that we're very proud of, and obviously there are aspects that we wish had not happened.

You talk about the '60s. Here I am as a young impressionable guy now going to high school, graduating high school, not fully engaged in the geopolitical positions but listening to position statements that basically fanned my patriotism and my zeal to support my government. In retrospect, I have found that some of the information that was given to us was tainted, and we became much wiser--we used to call the term streetwise--well, we had to become life-wise too. We are ever vigilant today because of lessons learned in our past. When they say, "Be wary of history because it's apt to repeat itself," we're aware of those things that can happen and we see it all the time.

At our family gathering for Passover each year, we talk about the plight of the Jewish people who were leaving Egypt having been slaves, but at our Passover ceremonies, we try to modernize that for our children and our grandchildren and we try to discern what things are happening in society today that reflect the situation back in Egypt when the Jewish people were living in slavery. How is it still happening today, and what can we do, sans divine intervention, what can we practically do to change? Life goes on. Change is difficult at times to accept, but it's a necessity. The '60s are emblematic of change for the good.

KR: You said your neighborhood of Borough Park had a lot of Jewish families. I am wondering, in the 1950s and early '60s, what was spoken in your community and in your family about the Holocaust?

MA: That's an interesting question. I must say that fortunately, or unfortunately, the Holocaust was not overtly spoken about in the circles that I travelled in. Certainly even within my family, they did not talk about the Holocaust. My grandparents did not talk about the Holocaust, and I don't know, in retrospect, whether it was because they did not have the information to make critical declarations of what had happened or whether they were trying to spare us if they did know about the atrocities that went on there.

I'm a child who at age six or seven started Hebrew School. I would go to public school during the day and get out at three o'clock, and by a quarter of four, I was in another school, a Hebrew School, until five, five-thirty. That's where I would learn lessons of Hebrew and the biblical stories and a little bit about culture and music. However, the Holocaust was not overtly discussed. If it was alluded to, it was not spoken about in any depth, and that's the '50s.

I did become aware of the Holocaust at about the age of fourteen and fifteen. The way it happened was not because somebody basically sat me down and talked chapter and verse about the Holocaust, but it was at a pivotal time in my life when I went to a local neighborhood theater, the Loews 46th Street, which was our local movie theater, and I went to see, on a Friday night, a picture about World War II. The movie showed horrendous pictures and described World War II with specifics of the Holocaust.

Now, sitting in a seat in that theater, being, I don't know, fourteen, fifteen years of age, for the first time in my life, I was seeing visual imagery of the most heinous, most debased form of human activity I could ever imagine. I could tell you that I was shocked to see ovens, to see people in ovens, to see children, not much older than myself, being traumatized, being herded, to see train cars of people shoved into those cars, to see the bones of people who had been killed. It was stark. I compare that movie and that imagery to the life that I was living, to the life in which I'm watching commercial television on channel two, four and seven, that basically showed episodes about Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry, and Rin Tin Tin, shows that were homogenized, that were clean. Obviously, there was killing, but people fell off horses and that was it. There was no sensitivity expressed in those movies.

Watching this movie about World War II for me personally was cathartic. I probably came to realize that the level of anti-Semitism, which was a word I didn't truly know early on, although I had felt the repercussions of that word in some elements of where I lived and the other neighborhoods and other people who were not tolerant, but to see those images, the word anti-Semitism first became meaningful to me. I walked out of that movie theater a changed person, a changed person at fourteen, fifteen. Certainly, it was not presented formally in school, in the curriculum or in our history and social studies. They talked about the overview of European history in grand terms, and as time has gone on, I have learned that some of our world leaders were not acting in a manner which was honorable and human. In fact, the underlying sentiments

of anti-Semitism had been pervasive and were gradually uncovered to me as I became more aware through reading, through conversations, and through living life.

KR: After you saw the movie, do you remember if you spoke about it to your parents or your siblings?

MA: I probably did speak about it amongst my friends. They were not able to significantly expand upon that, because I think that was the pervasive approach towards European history at that time. I don't think they even knew enough to basically explain or expound upon it. Remember, one of my favorite recent statements is, "It's not what you don't know. It's what you don't know that you don't know." [laughter] Yes, there may have been a war, but what you don't know is that there was a whole level of depravity going on that you just weren't even aware of. The social circle that I lived in wasn't capable of educating me at that time. I went to a Hebrew School with people who were rabbis and religious teachers who are, I'm sure, more adept at their level of knowledge with regard to what was happening in Europe. Yet it was not formally given to us. Their responsibility, "You guys are going to learn how to speak Hebrew. You're going to read Hebrew. You're going to learn the biblical stories and you're going to learn music and culture. It's going to be presented to you comfortably." That's what it was.

There's a process that goes on now when a young boy or a young girl reaches the age of thirteen called a bar or bat mitzvah, as part of their movement into another category within the religious community, that of being adults. They are charged with the responsibility of giving something called a d'var Torah, and that is to take a passage from the Bible and make it applicable to life and to give an interpretation and apply the topic to today's life.

Certainly, that was not the case when I was growing up. When I was growing up, we did our ritualistic activities with regard to being bar or bat mitzvahed. Girls were not routinely bat mitzvahed, even when I was growing up. My sister certainly wasn't. It's a relatively recent phenomenon that's been happening. We didn't speak about d'var Torah and things like that.

Let me go back. Of course, we talked about the need for change. This change is a good thing. It makes children at the age of thirteen, twelve or thirteen, more aware of their surroundings by not only performing the ritualistic functions of being bar and bat mitzvahed but applying what you've learned to life and seeing how you can adhere to something called *l'dor va'dor*, from one generation to the next generation, that your responsibility as a member of this religious community, a member of the human family, is to improve the next generation. There are many ways to do that. You don't have to see the complete culmination of that activity, but you do need to engage yourself in the process to lead to that end. Did I have those sentiments or awareness at the age of thirteen, fourteen? No. Do I have that as life went on? Yes. That's what I mean, that change is important.

KR: You talked about patriotic messages being sent to you through society. I am wondering, specifically, what you were hearing in the news? What were you hearing in school as the 1960s are going on, in terms of your patriotic messages?

MA: Remember to talk about the '60s, my time of change, I have to talk about the '50s. The '50s were the age of Audie Murphy. Audie Murphy was a Hollywood movie star who won the Congressional Medal of Honor for his activities during, I believe, it was World War II. It would be packaged in a nice thirty, forty minute, one-hour presentation or movie, and everything was done within an hour, clean. He was heroic. He was patriotic because he fought for his country. There was a message there that there's a real cause. [Editor's Note: During World War II, Audie Murphy (1925-1971) served in the Army's campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and France. In the Colmar Pocket in France, he distinguished himself in battle by single-handedly holding off a German unit, during which time he sustained a leg wound. For this, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. Starting in 1948, Murphy began acting in Hollywood films and went on to star in over forty movies in his career. In 1971, Murphy died in a small plane crash in Virginia. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.]

The causes in the '60s that were occurring were a little bit more blunted. The messages that we were receiving that the United States is like the watchdog of the world, here to preserve democracy and freedom and to live with respect, and that our inherent job to maintain security for the United States required that we ensure security throughout the world, that the messages we were receiving to foster that were--I think I alluded to this--the Domino Theory in Southeast Asia. Communism is going to take hold. It's going to develop in one country, from North Vietnam to South Vietnam to Cambodia. It would go all through the world and that it behooved us "save the people from this terrible discipline of Communism" and let them be exposed to the joys of democracy. It was a very noble cause and something you'd want to advocate for.

However, when the foundations of those declarations, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution or Domino Theory, proved to be suspicious, if downright not true, it reflected a spoiling of that original concept of patriotism and making life better throughout the world. As a young boy, I was taught that when I see the flag of the United States of America, I put my hand over my heart because I want to thank this country for giving me the atmosphere and the life in which I am able to live in freedom. Those freedoms may at times be questionable and abused, but, nevertheless, when compared to what exists throughout the world, this noble experiment of democracy has been taking hold and should be honored. As a young boy, I did that; I would put my hand over my heart.

I was a Cub Scout. I became a Boy Scout, and I was imbued through those organizations with sentiments of loving your country for the things that it provides you and your prodigy, your future, and so it was very important. The heroes that we had in the media, the John Waynes and the people like that, the Glenn Fords, basically either sacrificed themselves or sacrificed things or their lives to preserve that.

KR: You mentioned being a Boy Scout.

MA: Yes.

KR: For how long were you a Boy Scout, and what were some of the things that you did?

MA: In Brooklyn, you could join the Cub Scouts, Sea Cadets, or some other club, and I chose to join the Cub Scouts. I got to wear a little blue uniform with a little cap, and there were badges to be won. You became a Webelo or a Bear Cat and this and that, and to do so you had to go through skills development. It was also very social. The boys in the neighborhood, at that age, would join, and so I joined. It was led by somebody who was taking the time to teach me how to build a fire. You take a potato and stick it in some aluminum foil and put it on a stick and roast a potato out in your back yard. My God, they're not doing that in my house. [laughter] That's not something that was happening all the time. It exposed myself and my friends to a different lifestyle, to put your fingers up and to take an oath, "I will obey the pack and the pack law," the subtle message that you're going to live your life with a set of rules and regulations. They may be very simplistic at a Cub Scout level, but eventually you're going to move into a fuller society. You're going to become a teenager or a young adult and you've got to adhere to rules and regulations. The message was subtle but then again indelible. We did things in the Cub Scouts that were cultural. I had a butterfly collection at that time. I had some butterflies, and it got me interested in talking about butterflies to my friends. Participation in Scouting showed that you could develop your own personal interests and that basically defined who you were and not everybody performed in lockstep with everybody else. There's diversity in who we are and the things that we pursue. They were very important lessons.

I went from the Cub Scouts to the Boy Scouts. I did not spend a lot of time in the Boy Scouts because there was something--oh, yes, girls. There were not a lot of girls in the Boy Scouts, and those hormones being what they are basically took some boys, as they grew up, into other directions.

However, I must tell you, later on in life, I became an administrator at a hospital, and one of the things that I did was establish a relationship with the Boy Scouts and the hospital. So, it was a specialty unit of the Boy Scouts called the Medical Club, where Boy Scouts who were interested in the health care profession could come once every couple of weeks, or one night a week, and spend time with a health professional who was designated to help guide them through developing an awareness of what goes on in this world. I was pretty proud of that. I also had people working for me who had sons who were involved in the Boy Scouts and became Eagle Scouts. Helen O., my director of the cardiovascular lab, had two sons, one who was an Eagle Scout, and I was very proud of the fact that these two individuals, Filipino-born, naturalized citizens to this country, honored the Boy Scouts of America by having their sons and themselves get very deeply involved. Their son eventually became an Eagle Scout. His projects were interesting, and *l'dor va'dor,* from one generation to the next. You don't have to do something to realize complete success; you just have to engage yourself in the process. The Boy Scouts.

KR: Let us pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on the recording. When you were at New Utrecht High School, what were college expectations for you? What did your family expect from you? What was your school community expecting from you for what your next step would be?

MA: When I graduated in June of 1965, I did not have a discernible pathway to reach an end that would lead to an occupation. I did not actually know what I wanted to do. I was, like many other people, unsure about what the future would be like. I did know, when I graduated high school, my father obviously wanted me to go to law school, to become a lawyer and follow in his footsteps. That was not my calling. I did not feel that I wanted to become a lawyer, and quite frankly, I don't believe I had the grades to be able to be successful in that capacity.

I, basically, after high school, took a job on Wall Street with some firm that took me through the summer and maybe for a period of time after that. What I did was, in September, when people were starting to go to school, I went to Brooklyn College in their School of General Studies, which was also called the Twilight School. It started at three or four o'clock in the afternoon and went on into the early evening. I would go to work in the morning and leave, and when I came home, I think it was maybe two nights a week or maybe three weeks a night, something like that, I took courses in the School of General Studies.

Strangely enough, when I did graduate high school, that summer I did take a course at Brooklyn College in their evening session, and it was on some type of economics or sociology course and was quite frankly beyond my capacity. Brooklyn College was regarded as the jewel of the New York City educational network. It was made up of five colleges: Brooklyn, Hunter, City College, Baruch College and Queens College, but Brooklyn College was regarded as the jewel. It was very highly competitive, and the people that went there were very highly motivated. Even my wife, with all her accolades and intellectual abilities, went to a community college for two years and then transferred to Brooklyn College, and she had success there. During that summer after high school, working and then going to take this one course, I realized that my tools available to me were not well honed and that the people also taking courses in the School of General Studies were highly motivated day students who were just trying to gain a few more credits over the summer. It was a very demanding course that required a lot of independent study. Here I was thinking that it would be an interesting course to take but was unaware of the demands for time and involvement. At the end of that summer, or several weeks into the course, it wasn't for me, and so I dropped out of that course. [Editor's Note: The colleges listed above are part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system.]

I did enroll in the School of General Studies in September or October of that year, taking a more even course load of introductory courses of "Psych 101," maybe a beginning course in sociology. Basically, that's the pattern that I performed. I had other friends who were in schools that were in the City University and, in fact, one or two that were going to Brooklyn College and I was able to join their house plans. There were fraternities, and then there were house plans. Fraternities were ZBT [Zeta Beta Tau] and every other initial that you had, and they were a social format of a brotherhood, under the umbrella of fraternal orders, that were engaged in some good activity and some suspicious activity. There were house plans which were less formal in comparison to the fraternities, without all the ritualistic requirements to become part of that brotherhood. A lot of my friends were in these house plans, and I was asked to join this house plan. It was called Shaw House after George Bernard Shaw. Doing that, I was able to engage in sports, playing basketball or touch football or other things and had a social life associated with the house, and so that was my life. I was working a little bit. I was going to school at the School of General Studies, and I was participating in the house plan. That pattern went on for a while.

Were we dating at that time? No, I don't think we were dating at that time. Then, eventually, the draft. Here I am, I guess I graduated high school at seventeen or maybe seventeen and a half. During the summer of 1965, I went to school. I was asked to sign up for the draft in January of '66 when I turned eighteen. Then, a little bit of time went on, and I got drafted.

GA: Your number was low.

MA: What?

GA: Your number.

MA: My number. Regardless of numbers, I would've been drafted anyway because I wasn't a full-time student. Exemption from the draft required you to have eighteen credits to be considered a full-time student. I believe I was taking between nine and twelve credits. I may have been taking three courses in this school. I thought I was having the best of all worlds, that I was moving along educationally, but not having any real direction, and just enjoying life. I was not fully aware of what was going on in the world with regard to our activities throughout the world, leading up to Vietnam. I was aware that protests were occurring and soon became more knowledgeable about that. That was my high school into college transition.

It was only after I got out of the service that I availed myself of the support that the Army and military gave me with regard to schooling and having the VA share in the expenses of school. When I got out of the service, I applied to Long Island University as a full-time student and was accepted there and declared myself a major in education. I was going to become a physical education teacher and pursued that and graduated, eventually became a physical education teacher.

My time at LIU was, especially after having just served in Vietnam--I think I may have alluded to this--that I came home January 2nd or 3rd, and then school started two or three weeks later. Here I was in a deep tan, having been in Southeast Asia, no hair on my head, and I'm presenting myself to the college campus. It was like a red flag in a sea of white. I was obviously identified as somebody who was in the military and probably regarded with a little suspicion and maybe even worse, since the prevailing sentiments on the college campus was anti-war, anti-Vietnam.

I found myself gravitating to those people who were like me, veterans at that point in time, who were coming back. There was a certain feeling in the school of education, physical education, that you were regarded more for your skills and your adeptness at preparing yourself to educate yourself in this world of physical education rather than in another school of finance or history, where the feeling of inclusion would have been less amenable. I made some friends, very good friends, who also went on to become teachers. I remained a teacher after graduating for maybe a couple of years, a year-and-a-half, two years, and then made the decision that I was going to leave teaching and go to physical therapy school. That's a whole different storyline on how that happened. The Army was very instrumental in helping me with payments on a monthly basis to defray the cost of my tuition and living expenses.

I lived at home, and I maintained my relationships and friendships with my friends who were, while I was in the service, going to school. They were a couple years ahead of me in that respect, in the pursuit of whatever direction they were going. As it turned out, when I look at them, one individual, Henry, became a close friend. We still stay in touch with each other through Facebook and write. He became a psychologist. He's an author, well written, well regarded, lives in Philadelphia. Another friend, Paul B., went into sales, and I think did okay. There were people like that. There were others that, like I said, did succumb to the social milieu out there, the drug culture.

KR: You were drafted in 1968.

MA: Yes.

KR: At that point, how had the war affected your friends and community?

MA: In 1968, well, some of my friends, who were going to college, were on the college campus and obviously exposed and totally involved in the anti-war effort. Others, like me, were peripherally involved in that activity. I must say that, through it all, no matter what positions they were taking, nobody really wanted to see anybody in the neighborhood go off to war because the reports that were coming back were not good and you were at risk, in great peril. The reports of casualties on a weekly and monthly basis were growing. The friendships that we had were maintained, that was more of a bond that we started as youth growing up together, rather than taking sides against one another because of political awareness or positions.

KR: When you were drafted, what was your reaction and what was the reaction of your parents?

MA: Oh, the reaction, when I was drafted, obviously my parents were not very happy. There were discussions, "Maybe you should go to Canada. Maybe you should leave," primarily from my father, who was a lawyer, a pacifist essentially, against war, as opposed to my mother who was more of a street person and sort of an adherent to patriotism. She did not want to see her son go to the service, but after all her brother, Morris, had been in the service in World War II and you have to answer your country's call. They ask you to go, you go. A strange set of positions within a family.

Me, at the time I was drafted, I'm trying to remember what my sentiments were. Deep inside, I was probably a little scared. I saw the newscasts and read headlines. You were putting yourself in peril during that period of time. I probably adopted an attitude of being somewhat fatalistic. I don't know whether I did that to protect my family and my sister and brother and close friends from having them perceive that I was scared or ill at ease with serving. To try to protect them, I probably played it a little bit nonchalant and, "Yes, it's no big deal, I'll be fine. I have a set of skills. I'm confident in who I am and I'll be just fine. I'll get through this." In reality, when I look back, I was probably quite alarmed. I remember conversations I had had with Fred when he would ask me, "What if you come back wounded and this and that?" Even for him, I did not want to unveil myself to show my sentiments of being concerned, but that bravado, neighborhood bravado, came out, "Ah, I can handle this. Don't worry. I can take care of myself." I was drafted, and I had to go.

I think I may have in the past talked about the neighborhood bully who was also at Fort Hamilton during the induction ceremony. That whole episode of him hurting himself to get out of serving sort of maximized a feeling of, "Wow, this is reality. This is happening." Also, the fact that we were drafted, on induction day they needed a number of Marines to serve, and whether you volunteered or not, they were going to pick out several Marines from this group of maybe twenty, twenty-five people who were being inducted that day. If you had paid any attention to the news at that time, the people who were at the vanguard of these activities were Marines, and they were experiencing large casualties and to be with them required you to be in the service for three years. I think it was three years. However, as it was explained to us, at that moment in time at Fort Hamilton, if you volunteer to come into the Marines, you'll only be required to serve two years. A special type of arrangement had been made. I didn't believe that, but nevertheless that's what was happening. Everyone in line sounded off, one, two, three four, one, two, three four, went down the line, and they said, "All the number threes step forward," and those people were "drafted" into the Marines. For the fate of having a different number, I could've been in the Marines. My situation in Vietnam, although dire in some respects, could've been more so, and so that was the time around my induction into the service.

If you ask me now, as I look back, yes, I was probably very, very--I'll use the word--concerned. Here I am, I'm only eighteen, nineteen years old. I'm a kid who's lived in a civilized place in society, relatively speaking, and I'm going to a whole different world on the ground living there twenty-four/seven. Maybe the specter of that was probably weighing on me, but I did it.

KR: In our first session, you did talk about basic training at Fort Gordon. You talked about when you lost your necklace and the story about that. I am wondering what daily life was like at basic training.

MA: Daily life. Well, I think I alluded to the fact that my first two days in the service were spent on KP, kitchen patrol, one, because my last name started with an "A" and so I was the person that was designated to be on KP, to scrub the pots of dried-out stew, or whatever they were serving, and as you would expect, carving potatoes and then doing basically hard labor with very little rest in between. Feeding two hundred people three meals a day was significant and the cleaning and the informal harassment, or maybe formal, from those higher ups that basically were trying to adhere to the regimented manner in which work was done without any feedback from you to modify what you were being asked to do, was daunting. The fact that after that first day, I opened up my mouth in response to a sergeant who basically said, "Do you have any questions for me after your first day in the service?" My question was--I won't go into it now but a little embarrassing for him. I don't know if I mentioned it, that I'll hold off, because it does speak to an activity that is not condoned by society. [laughter] Anyway, he basically told me to go back to the barracks, take a shower, and come back for KP a second day. The lesson that you keep your mouth shut and you do what you're told was delivered quite effectively to me at that time.

There were other things in basic training. The first rules that were given were that after our heads were shaven and everyone looked like everybody else, that we were told, "From now on, you will not walk anywhere on this campus. Whenever you have to go from A to B, you'll do it

running. If you are seen walking, you'll pay the price." Usually paying the price was knocking out twenty-five or fifty push-ups at a time. Thank goodness for being young and being strong, because that was interesting, we were taught in those first days things that I never did at home, make my bed every morning with hospital corners and they had to be tight. Sergeants were going to come with a quarter and bounce the quarter on my bed to see if it was tight enough. My goodness, my mother never made me do that. Displaying and organizing our foot locker in a very specific manner, and any detraction from that organization was met with some type of physical punishment, like I said, either running around the quadrangle or doing push-ups.

I used to regard basic training, in those first few days and weeks, as following a mantra of hurry up and wait. You've got to wake me up at four-thirty to rush to go to the bathroom to shave and shower and do whatever you have to do, so that I could be out twenty minutes to five on the quadrangle in formation. Now, you're going to make me stand in line and wait for breakfast for one hour. In other words, it was you do what you do according to their timetable and you will basically, like I said, follow their timetable. That means waiting an hour for breakfast and having breakfast, which was food that I normally did not eat. I had to get used to it--they adoringly called the food that they had there "shit on a shingle." You've heard that. There would be a piece of toast with this guck on top of the toast. Maybe you had cereal, and once in a while, maybe there'd be an egg or two or something like that, and coffee or juice, and that was breakfast.

Then, you went on with your day. Usually, it was roll call and all this stuff and then the physical activity for the day, which they called the "daily dozen." You would do PT, physical training, in which you would be in either a t-shirt and shorts or a t-shirt and pants and these weighted boots that you had and you went through the exercises that could take as long as they wanted. It might be a dozen exercises, but each one was done for a specific amount of time and after that running. They would run, run, run, run, run, and you would be running up and down in these combat boots for long periods of time. There might be a long march at the end, a ten-mile march. I think they started off with five miles, ten miles, went up to twelve miles. Then, there would be sessions where you sat in these bleacher-type structures and were taught. Obviously, you were taught about the most basic things that you needed to be aware of, what a rank was, the need to salute. You were told that you salute--if you see an emblem on a car that designates that that's an officer, you salute the car. It seemed a little silly to me, but, like I said, I was not going to question anything after my episode with KP.

Then, there was learning the rifle. I think we started off with an M-14. Eventually, in Vietnam, I used an M-16, a M-79 and a M-60 machine gun. The M-14 was a very heavy weapon, and you had to learn how to strip it down to its component parts. You had to learn how to clean it, and you had to learn how to put it together again quickly. Then, there was the number of maneuvers, learning how to do right shoulder arms, port arms, present arms, all those things that you use in the parade when you were marching. That was the weapons training.

There was training in pugilistic activities. They would use a stick that had the equivalent of boxing gloves on either end. Two people would get in a circle and beat the crap out of one another. Basically, if you just stood there, you're going to get "hurt." You had to learn how to defend yourself, and they did training in physical contact. Of course, then, there was the other

basics, like learning the twelve general rules. There were standing orders about what your responsibilities were while you're on guard duty, your relationship to other people. They were basic. They basically would instruct you in things like the [Uniform Code of Military Justice], which were the rules and regulations that governed your existence here in the military. You were told what an Article 15 was. It was like a punishment that could result in loss of pay or some time in jail, what they called the stockade. That was the life that went on, seven days a week, except for some period of time, I believe, on Sunday, when they basically allowed you to go to church. [Editor's Note: Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice is a non-judicial form of punishment that allows a commanding officer to discipline a subordinate without going through the court-martial process.]

There were no formal temple things. If you found yourself in the barracks, when others were going to church, [laughter] you were designated for some activity, go clean the barracks. By the way, every morning, there was an activity of two hundred men lined up shoulder to shoulder. You bent over, and you had to walk across this large quadrangle and pick up any cigarette butts or dirt or paper. The sergeant would say, "All I want to see are elbows and assholes." [laughter] Basically, two hundred guys would all move, picking up butts, and that is all you saw. So, it was somewhat gruff. It was a little bit different from neighborhood language, and you learned very quickly.

Like I said, they had the marching songs that you would learn. You were given a basic orientation to the Army, rules and regulations. You needed to demonstrate physical adeptness and capabilities, and there would be tests for that too, with armaments, with learning how to shoot a rifle. After the first thirty days, there was a ceremony. You were awarded the National Campaign Ribbon, which designated you as having served in the active military for thirty days. Here we are, we're all buck privates, and we had a nice little ribbon on our uniform. It was the first ribbon that I had received. There were no passes or time off or anything of that nature during basic training, and so that was Fort Gordon, Georgia.

The barracks were wooden barracks. They had these stoves in them that were fired up by wood or coal, and every night, guard duty required that there would be one or two people walking outside the perimeter of this barracks and one person who would go through all the barracks that they had. That was called fire duty, because there was a stove and these were wooden structures. They were on guard to see that there was no fire there.

The one other thing that I look at as comical now was that they placed such high regard on the weapons that you had, that they were very important and should be considered so, that if you dropped your weapon during your exercise period or learning period, that night you would put your weapon in bed and you would sleep on the floor. You would put your weapon under the covers, against the pillow, and you slept on the floor. Brilliant. This is the Army. They had their little methodology of using the correct terminology and doing things their way. You called your weapon--your weapon or your rifle. You did not call it your gun. That was a *faux pas* of enormous proportions--and you've probably heard this before--they probably did it with every group, that if you called it a gun, you stripped down naked and basically stood on a stool and held the weapon and said, "This is my rifle. This is my gun (pointing at your private area). This is for firing. This is for fun." Well, okay, like I said, the stuff, the things that make up the

training were at times funny, sometimes I regarded as stupid, like hurry up and wait, and sometimes cruel. During the formation, if you had a beard--that means that you did not shave--some drill instructor, drill sergeant, would come out and maybe after the first warning, if it happened again, would do what they call a dry shave, which meant that this drill instructor would take a razor and, in front of everyone, start shaving you dry, which resulted in a bloody face, nicks and dings all over. So, you learned. There were funny things about the songs and everything, but there were things that bordered on cruelty, that you just made sure that you got everything done in the morning. I'm sure there are other things that are in basic training, but those are the things that immediately come to mind.

KR: After basic training, you went to advanced training, and then you were selected to go to Non-Commissioned Officer School at Fort Benning. How did the opportunity come about to go to NCO School?

MA: After basic training, I went to advanced infantry training, for another, I think, ten weeks or so to learn more and basically also to go through a process of testing. They did aptitude testing, and they would interview people and said, "Based on whatever test you had taken, we would like you to pursue this," your MOS [military occupational specialty], which was a designation of what your military occupational service would be, MOS. They came to me and asked me, based on this aptitude test, "We'd like you to go to Warrant Officer School to learn how to fly a helicopter." "Learn how to fly helicopters, all right, what does that entail?" "Well, Mr. Apsel, that will entail you give up your two-year enlistment and make it a three-year enlistment. They will send you to school and you will serve two nine-month tours as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam and maybe one nine-month tour in Germany. We will make you a warrant officer," which was some type of specialty rating that's equivalent to a lieutenant, but three years. "Thank you very much, but I'm going to decline that offer." The next offer was, "In that case, we would like to send you to an NCO School, Non-Commissioned Officer School, at Fort Benning and that is for twelve, fourteen weeks in leadership training." Here's my thinking. "Yes, all right, I'll accept that because eight weeks in basic, ten weeks in advanced infantry training, twelve to fourteen weeks in Fort Benning. This war is going to be over, so, yes, send me to school." They'll send you to school, but obviously the war went on for much longer than that.

I was aware that there were other people, by the way, with regard to the declining to go to Warrant Officer School, that had signed up for six years with the promise of going into military intelligence and, yes, the Army fulfilled its obligation to send him to a school for military intelligence. He barely was able to get out of high school but fancied himself brilliant and, I think, as I look back at those times, knowing this individual, I thought that the military was somewhat deceptive in assuring him that he'll go to this school. Yes, he would go to the school and they probably knew he would flunk out, not pass, and then you still had a six-year obligation. Here's this individual who now found himself in the infantry or I think I saw him in AIT, advanced infantry training. Hearing that rose my level of you've got to be aware and a little skeptical about anything anybody presents to you. With regard to NCO School, I did accept that, and I went through that process.

KR: What sticks out in your mind about NCO School?

MA: NCO School, what sticks out in my mind, well, I had already been in the service, in basic and advanced infantry training, and now I was going to school at Fort Benning. I went to a facility called, excuse the expression, the War College. That's what it was regarded as. It's called the War College. It was a school. You would sit in the school and you'd be taught strategies and logistics and how to read maps and how to shoot azimuths with your compass and plot courses and strategies of how to identify your position, your enemy's position, how to relate that to aircraft that were flying around, and a little bit more sophisticated, more in-depth training, more physical training. Then, there was a whole battery of exercises designed to test your ingenuity with regard to being presented a problem with a group of men and, with the resources that you had, use those resources to neutralize the situation or succeed in the situation. It could be like you have a body of water, and you have a badly-wounded person. How are you going to transport this person across that body of water? Here's what you've got, a few boards, maybe some rope, how are you going to do this? There's a current coming down. What are you going to do with these things to resolve the situation? There were a lot of situations like that, a lot more physical training, a lot of leadership training of techniques that would put you in a situation where you had a group of people, now you need to deal with resistance on the part of individuals or maintaining an ordered approach towards what you were doing. The training was good, but as I was going through the training and I said, "My God, they're training me in all these aspects of military life. They're going to drop me off in the middle of some jungle with a fish hook and a stick and they're going to say, 'Survive.'" I was obviously concerned about that.

Also, there was sophisticated equipment, something called a Starlight Scope, which was quite new at that time. It was a scope that basically allowed you to use moonlight at night to see a vast area in front of you with just the light of the stars or maybe the moon. You'd look through this Starlight Scope, and you would see your field of vision as if it was almost like daytime. It had a green haze to it, but if you were in a no-fire zone, which meant no movement was allowed in this area, that anybody who was moving was subject to being neutralized--neutralized, one of their words--and killed. You also had standing orders that if you were in a situation where you were about to be overrun, your orders were to destroy that Starlight Scope rather than have it fall into the hands of the enemy. You would give that Starlight Scope to maybe a sniper in your unit, and they could pick off the person. Starlight Scope. Today, you can go into an Army-Navy store and buy a Starlight Scope for thirty, forty dollars and you could use it at night. At that time, Starlight Scopes were very expensive. They weren't given out to everyone, and your orders were that no activity should be moving after dark in the evening hours. If there was, that person was going to be taken out. Starlight Scopes. That's what was presented at Fort Benning, Georgia. [Editor's Note: Starlight Scopes were the first generation of night-vision devices used by the American military.]

Strangely enough, Fort Benning was actually the first time when I got passes on the weekend, and I was able to go to services. There would be a rabbi or something like that, and we were able to go on a Saturday. I think I did go a few times. I think I spoke about it before. It wasn't very traditional with respect to what you might expect going into a temple, but it was at least congregating to share some words and sentiments. It was comfortable. Fort Benning.

KR: You went through your training in 1968, the year of the Tet Offensive. What was spoken about the war while you were in training?

MA: I'm trying to think about the specifics during the basic and AIT, advanced infantry training. There was not a lot of politicking or information given. There was some but not to the extent that we would receive in NCO School. They talked about Ho Chi Minh and the effects of Communism and how it affected the world. You were asking?

KR: What was spoken about the war? It was 1968.

MA: Tet Offensive. They used the word Tet Offensive. I really did not know what the Tet Offensive was. I came to learn that it was the time of the year when they would celebrate. [Editor's Note: While informal cease fires were honored during the Tet holiday, or lunar new year, during the mid-1960s, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong coordinated a series of surprise attacks on over one hundred cities and towns in South Vietnam, beginning on January 31, 1968. Known as the Tet Offensive, the attacks on American and South Vietnamese forces occurred again in 1969.]

I think I mentioned that I came to Vietnam on December 31st, 1968, and my first situation was being woken up at night by all this commotion, firing, and it was New Year's Eve. However, two or three weeks later, people were talking about the expected Tet Offensive because it occurred every January, February, however the calendar worked out. While it had occurred and it was something that they were talking about, I had not really experienced it. Then, I did experience it two more times, once in that January-February of my first few weeks in Vietnam and then at the end of 1969, when I'm about to leave the country. Bob Hope is there, and he's got these fifty thousand people in the area with helicopters all around us. I really didn't want to be in a large group of people. My street awareness was that's a great target for people during the Tet Offensive to lob some military ordnance in there and cause havoc. Tet Offensive saw an uptick of activity.

Remember, I said in Vietnam, there could be periods of unbelievable activity and then the whole world's coming to an end with firing, killing and blood. Then, there could be ten days, two weeks of nothing, boredom, just nothing happening. During the period of January and February, remember I told you, I think I said I was in my first firefight on January 18th. What was specific about that? January 18th is my birthday, and for the first minute or so, I was on the ground and nothing that I had learned in schools was passing in my head but for the fact that I saw this tombstone, "Marvin Apsel. Born January 18, 1948. Died January 18, 1968."

KR: 1969.

MA: '69. That was the image that I had, but I shook through that. I got through that and then started to react. That was the first time, the first contact I had. That was Tet. Tet was, you were basically more vigilant because of the Tet. I recall the heightened vigilance. You'd make sure your armaments were ready to go. They should be all the time, but during that period of time, you made sure you didn't have twenty rounds in your magazine. You put nineteen because the humidity and the sand and the grit. If you had twenty rounds in a magazine, it would catch and it would not feed into the chamber to fire your weapon because of the grit and the humidity. If you kept nineteen, they seemed to feed easier. The spring action fed the bullets into the weapon

faster, so that was alertness and vigilance. You kept vigilant all throughout the year but basically more so during that period of time. They were not letting anybody go on things like R&R [rest and relaxation] during that period of time. I guess they had figured they needed you to be there. There was a little bit more leeway during other times during the year.

KR: When you were out in the jungle on operations, how well prepared were you?

MA: I guess I was pretty prepared. I had to deal with the problems that everybody had to deal with. I had maps. I had maps, but the intense humidity from the monsoons turned those maps into indistinguishable pieces of paper, so you were very hard pressed to find yourself on the map. Sometimes, you would have to do things by dead reckoning. I think I showed you that wallet--I have it in there, letters and photographs--that every time I look at it or take it out, that smell of jungle and humidity, it gets to me.

Was I prepared? Yes, I've got to tell you, the first time I had to call an air mission in, there's this jet. I call it in. He said, "Where are they?" I said, "They're in front of me." So, he had a few choice words to give me. I came to my senses and I said, "This is my position. I'm shooting an azimuth. They're two clicks from here. They're two hundred yards from the smoke that I'm putting out and that's where they are. Here's the azimuth." Then, he would drop his ordnance on that area. After that, it's almost like the first time you go to a football game or a basketball game or the first time you do anything. You're a little nervous, you're not sure of yourself. You can have all the training in the world. This is training; this is real, this is real.

I told you the first mission I went on was with a master sergeant, Sergeant Wright, who gathered us around and basically said there was a downed helicopter that we were going to have to go out to secure and that it was a hot LZ, meaning a hot landing zone. There was activity there. The words that are emblazoned in my head were, "Some of us may not be coming back from this one." [Editor's Note: Marv Apsel makes a groaning noise.] The reality was stark, and I remember going out there. It turned out to be a routine mission. It was a hot LZ, but there was no conflict. The first time you do something, you're nervous, but that's why, when I got there, I had people who were seasoned. They were there eight, nine, ten months, and I would ask them, "What do you think about this? What do you think about that? What's your impression?" because information is key. I didn't want to come in there, "I went to school. I've got stripes, see?" That street-smarts type of thing came into play.

KR: You talked about the maps.

MA: Map.

KR: What were your leadership duties as a squad leader and then as a platoon leader?

MA: Yes, well, they would basically say, "Apsel, all right, you take this map. Here's our position on the map. We want you to go and reconnoiter a mile this way and a half a mile that way and check it out for any activity. If you see anything suspicious, come back. If you're encountering anything, you have to deal with it." You had a base camp that you were in communications with.

I would be with, when I first went there, myself and ten men, nine men, ten men. So, I would have myself, a radio operator, a machine gunner. Everybody else had either a M-79, which is a grenade launcher, and the other people had rifles. That's the type of things that we would do, reconnoiter, investigate this, investigate that, and then come back. You're going to come back.

Now, as a platoon leader, I had four quads. I would have the responsibility of orienting them, receiving the orders from the captain or the lieutenant and then disseminating it out and giving responsibilities to each person, what they were supposed to do. It could be like providing security on a road. "There is going to be a convoy coming down this road in seven hours and we need to have security along this road. Set up a position a half mile here and a half mile there" and basically make sure everybody knew what their responsibility was. To call in air missions when you had to. To call for a medevac. In the group, there was a person who had the leadership or overall responsibility, the radioman behind that person to maintain contact, and your medic. That was a central organizational thing. You also had the responsibility of designating who the point person would be, so that point person, who walked about fifteen or twenty feet in front of this column, was there to try to give early alert to something that was happening. We didn't yell out. We just had hand gestures, [makes hand signals] stop, go, down. If there was a problem, call it in, and rotate the different people into the point position. You couldn't take more than fifteen minutes of that, fifteen or twenty, because the responsibility of walking point was very stressful, because if they let you go through it would be dire, and the VC [Vietcong] would let the point man go through and get the body of people, especially the machine gun and the leader, whoever the leader was, and the medic. That's what their strategy was. This communications person had a radio with a long antenna. The point man had to look because they would put these little strings up on the trees, so as the antennae went by, it would trip the wire and it was attached to a grenade and they would blow up. The responsibility of that point person was very important. Designating who would go into a tunnel, if you found a tunnel, those types of things. Maintaining order and finally taking the responsibility and making decisions. I'd much rather today let my wife make the decision. [laughter] It's an easier approach, but those decisions that had to be made could result in somebody getting hurt.

KR: What was that process like, that mental adjustment, that you had this responsibility in this leadership position?

MA: Adjustment? You sort of never got used to it. I mean, that's why people craved for what they call stand down. Every month or so, they would give you two days to stand down, go back to a safe area or go to R&R, rest and relaxation, or go to a place like Vung Tau, a beach area for a day or two. You can clean your sores and get fresh clothing and sort of de-stress the situation.

Look, people smoked out there. I'm not going to--you can't talk about that whole Vietnam experience without realizing people were using grass, it was all over the place and you had to make sure it was controlled--look, people are going to do it--but you've got to make sure that, "Tomorrow morning, we're leaving this base camp at five-thirty. You've got to be ready to go and you've got to be really fully ready with all your stuff, and if you're under the influence, it's not going to cut it."

You had to deal with other situations. I had a guy, his last name is R., who when we were about to go out acts out. I'm taking these guys out of the base camp, and he lays down and throws a temper tantrum, "I'm not going," jumping, trying to be like crazy. So, we gathered around, and I said, "We're going to all wait for you. You are going out. You're going out, all right. So, you're just going to tire yourself out. Either we're going to drag you out ..." Then, he stopped. He comes to his senses and then he goes out, but dealing with situations like that. I'm not a psychologist. I didn't have time to, "Let me hold your hand and we're going to talk about this." It was more the immediacy of the situation that warranted that you had to do something quickly for the benefit of everybody; you can't have somebody out there acting like that. Also, when you're out there, making sure that people didn't get separated and that there was accountability for everybody, that you never left anybody and you were always aware of where everybody else was. Basically, the other things were to write--sometimes, people were killed and to communicate to the family. That's what was done.

KR: Are there any times that members of your platoon or your squad got lost or were separated?

MA: I got lost. Oh, yes.

KR: Okay, tell us.

MA: There was a situation where I had a group of men and I've got this map. I'm supposed to go someplace, and it's just not correlating, the map and where I am. We're lost and so that feeling of being lost and not in contact with somebody in the rear is very frightening because if I needed help, where are you? At one point in time, I called for a white phosphorous round to be sent out and exploded under a coordinate that I had on a map. I thought I was over here. "Send this white phosphorous round. Send this white phosphorous round at this coordinate." So, I would see where it is, I could get under it and align myself to where it was. Not only did I not see a white phosphorous round after it was sent out, I didn't even hear it. So, I knew I was lost. It was a difficult situation.

The other thing was not to show you didn't have the situation under control because the panic that would go through, I don't care who you are, would be significant. First, you had to keep on moving, moving until you found a geographical landmark; stream, water, something you could correlate to the map, and then find your way out. That was pretty scary, not having an awareness of exactly where you are.

There were times when I was in a place called the Michelin Rubber Plantation. Rubber plantations are a place where the trees are in line as far as the eye can see. They all have these little pots attached to them, and the white substance that comes out of the tree is used for rubber production, for making tires. In an area like that, everything looks the same. There's nothing to demarcate where you are, and you get a feeling like you're just going on and on and on. It never ends. There was some contact in that area, and people got hurt and wounded. I have such an adverse feeling towards the Michelin Rubber Plantation in Vietnam that, to this day, whenever I bought cars, new cars, and I saw Michelin tires, not that I had anything against the company, but the feeling, the association of that area of Vietnam and the tire, I would ask them, "Maybe you can put another tire on, another brand on, a Bridgestone or whatever." They're probably using

the same rubber. It's like the banana plantation. This is Chiquita and this one's … [Editor's Note: The French tire company, Michelin, established the rubber plantation in the Dau Tieng District in Binh Duong Province in South Vietnam in 1925. During the Vietnam War, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese staged operations from the plantation, and as a result, it was the site of much conflict with American and ARVN forces. After the Communist takeover of South Vietnam in 1975, the government seized and eventually nationalized all of Michelin's plantations in Vietnam.]

GA: Dole.

MA: They're all the same bananas growing in the same field, but they were labeled differently. [laughter] That was in Hawaii? Hawaii, yes. Decisions. What were we talking about?

KR: For the record, can you tell us the area of South Vietnam that you were in? What base camps did you operate out of?

MA: Yes. I was in an area, initially, in a place called Dau Tieng, where our company basically formed its missions. The bigger base camp was called Cu Chi, which was a large, very large, base camp. For a long time, I did operations out of Cu Chi. For the first part of the year, it was Dau Tieng and then Cu Chi. Then, I was out in the field for long periods of time on the Cambodian border, performing these missions where unfortunately people were coming from Cambodia into Vietnam, doing their things, and then going back into Cambodia to the safety of the border that we weren't allowed to go across. The border being a border, nobody is standing there with a rope and saying, "This side is Vietnam. This side is Cambodia." We would be out in the field doing ambushes, trying to get the people coming in or going back.

Out in the field, we also were searching for caches. Cu Chi was known for the Tunnels of Cu Chi, in which there could be a small city underneath the ground. On top, there would be all this foliage and triple canopy stuff, and what they would do is the military would fly in and use this Agent Orange and spray it. It was a defoliant, and after three days, that would cause all the vegetation to fall to the ground. We would go in and look for these entrances or exit points, and we would find them. We would go in, and strangely enough, the smallest, most diminutive person would be given the responsibility of going into that hole with a .45-caliber weapon to see what was there. [Editor's Note: During the Vietnam War, the Vietcong (VC) built an extensive network of tunnels in the Cu Chi district, northwest of Saigon. The Tunnels of Cu Chi extended from the outskirts of Saigon to the Cambodian border. The chemical defoliant Agent Orange, which the United States used in Vietnam to clear jungles, causes a number of serious health problems in humans, including cancer.]

I had one guy by the name of Jackson who was small, and he went in. He was in, and whoever was in there obviously came out through the other opening and fired on us. I remember, when he came up, "What's all the excitement going on?" I said, "We're in the middle of it." [laughter] That area, the growth was so enormous that if somebody got hurt, you would have to create a space for a helicopter to come in, to take the wounded out. Sometimes, we'd have to use grenades or something to clear an area, so that the helicopter can land and we can get the wounded out.

I would say Dau Tieng, Cu Chi, Cambodian border and areas north. We did some missions with these people called the River Rats, who were Navy and used these PT boats. We would be on the PT boats with them, and they would travel along the waterway and stop. Our guys would go out and reconnoiter and do whatever we had to do and then come back to the boats. The thing I liked about that was that the Navy ate very well. [laughter] We had C-rations. When we'd get a mission with these Navy guys on PT boats, they had dinners. I said, "My goodness, there's food. This is food." So, it was good. We did that for a while.

Then, there were times when we would actually have other types of responsibilities, going into a village and bringing medical assistance. There'd be a group of people who came into the village, we would provide security, and they would help the kids or people who had medical issues get treated or resolved. Missions like that occurred that don't get talked about. Everybody talks about My Lai and the devastation that occurred there. I think that is an outlier. Obviously, my unit did not engage in activity like that. [Editor's Note: The Medical Civil Action Program (MEDCAP) was a program in which American medical personnel treated Vietnamese civilians.]

I'll tell you, one time, in one of the letters I have here with Steve, a friend and an NCO in another outfit, talks about losing a platoon. We also lost a lot of men in a platoon, almost a whole platoon, because somebody, while we were out in the field, had to light a cigarette. You were required, if you have to smoke, you had to keep the tarpaulin over you. You can have your cigarette, but because the light emanating from a cigarette could be seen miles away, it could be a point where they could key in your position. In fact, that's what happened in another platoon and people were killed and hurt through the actions of one irresponsible person.

In the aftermath of that, our activities went on, and we had a situation. I don't know if I've mentioned this before, where we found a VC or possibly it was NVA. I think it was a VC. [Editor's Note: VC refers to Vietcong, South Vietnamese guerrilla soldiers allied with the North Vietnamese. NVA refers to the North Vietnamese Army.] Tensions and sentiments were very high. There were people who would have done this person great harm if not to end his life; under no circumstances would I let this happen. I actually do pride myself with the fact that I would not let that activity happen, that this person was captured and this person would be sent back and interrogated formally in the rear area but would not allow what I would call vigilante justice to happen over here, no matter what had happened in the days previous. I understand what the sentiments were, they were significant, but that vigilante justice didn't happen. In fact, that person was sent back.

You talk about having a background that is considered moral. Let's forget about the whole scenario of being in a war that is immoral, but in that situation, it would not have been moral to let that happen to this individual, and I think it would have been a travesty if it had. I had people in my company over there with platoons of soldiers that were from different areas of the country and had different approaches towards the weaponry. They were hunters. Everybody had these little instamatic cameras that they had and wanted to take a picture, if they killed somebody, that's not going to happen. It wasn't going to happen in the group that I was overseeing. Unfortunately, it was not a good situation to even have to address. Things like that did happen. I

probably talked about the person who ambushed a NVA soldier walking down a road with his rifle.

KR: No, you did not, no.

MA: I won't go into it a lot, but we were setting up the ambushes. I had a man who identified a person who was coming down a trail, an NVA person with a weapon. He was walking on a road; you never walk on a road. That was too easy. You were a target. You always walked off through the bush. He was killed. When I got to that position and I looked at him, the thing that was so difficult for me was that I'm looking for information that he has. I took out his wallet. He had a wallet with a picture of his wife and kids. I said, "My God, this guy probably had life in Hanoi or wherever he was from." The reality, the stark reality, of what's being done here was thrown at you. I don't care what kind of person you are, it affects you. It affected me for a long time. I said, "Oh, my goodness, once again, this is reality." It's not television. It's not Audie Murphy running through a movie set and John Wayne running through a movie set and doing whatever. This is reality. There were situations like that that occurred.

You talk about the stresses of being in a situation like that. I talked about times of open conflict, but there were also times when you would say this was such a hardship that you want to end it all. I don't know how often this happened in Vietnam, but people chose to end their lives themselves. There was a situation where our company, being led by a captain and lieutenant, was moving maybe eighty people, and they walked us through an area that is best described as quicksand. Basically, they probably didn't realize what they were doing, and before you know it, you're in this, you thought it was mud, but it was really quicksand. It was for a long distance, and we were able to move, under the heat, without any water, we're carrying sixty pounds on your back and a weapon, being dog-tired. Your resolve was being tested. Here I was, following this unit through this area. You couldn't sit down. You couldn't take a rest, because it was quicksand. I remember having the feeling that this is so physically trying and I'm at the end of my limit, why not just succumb to that. Obviously, you come out of it and you can't do that. I went on, but there were times when I said, "Gee, this is intolerable," and people complaining, "Oh, where are we?" Maybe it was mistake on the part of whoever, but eventually we got through it after what seemed like most of the day. The heat was oppressive--you couldn't even drop your weapon. I mean, we'd lose it. This weapon, after a while, like this [arms held up holding the weapon] with everything; you're going through quicksand. You're going through an area not just like this, but it just seemed like miles. It was unbelievable. Those are stressors that were in Vietnam, yes. Did I digress?

KR: No, not at all.

MA: All right.

KR: You mentioned the C-rations.

MA: C-rations, yes. C-rations were given out. There were favorites. Everybody wanted that chicken C-ration, or little chicken pieces, but there were other C-rations that were handed out that mimicked food and really didn't taste good. The fact of the matter is we didn't carry a lot of

C-rations because the feeling was, "Do I want to carry all these C-rations or do I want to carry ten more magazines of ammunition or a hundred more rounds for that machine gun?" Every man in our platoon wore two bandoliers of machine gun ammo, in addition to whatever they had. There were a hundred rounds on each bandolier, because the major firepower was that M-60 machine gun. He may carry a couple hundred, three or four hundred rounds, but two hundred more rounds from everybody gave him more ammunition, because if anything happened, that machine gun was a very powerful weapon to have. Food, yes, we didn't need a lot of it. It might be coffee in the morning, brewing some coffee. You got C-rations and you got a small brown bag, and in the bag was some salt, sugar, pepper, a roll of toilet paper and maybe coffee. That's what was in that C-ration pouch, a can opener, a P-38. A P-38 is a little can opener to open up the cans. Did you eat? Yes, you probably ate; you had coffee in the morning and you probably ate at the end of the day, maybe four o'clock or so, three, four o'clock, five o'clock and that was it. Every once in a while, they would fly in a helicopter with these big vats of food, chicken, and that was like a treat. You would get a can of soda, a can of beer. They had milk. So, that was, "Wow, a treat, food." The men would save the beer and they would play poker or whatever for the beer. Well, we had to have a rule about that, that you'd get the beer, you've got to drink the beer, one can of beer. It was like 3.2 panther-piss beer. It wasn't real beer, but, anyway, I couldn't have them getting stewed on beer. Gee, the things that pop into your mind, amazing.

KR: Did you lose weight?

MA: Did I lose weight? Yes, I did lose weight. I lost weight, and I look at some of the pictures of what I looked like then. I probably went in weighing maybe 175, 185. I probably got down to 160, 165. It was sweat, dehydration. The water was, you had a canteen of water. So, they gave you two pills, a white pill and a pink pill. One was for a daily use, and the other pill was an anti-malaria pill. So, I think you took the malaria pill once a week, and the other pill was an iodine pill that you put in water. You'd fill up a canteen of water, I mean, I don't care what, and you would put this iodine tablet in. I'll tell a story. So, Gail and I were writing to each other, and so I'm talking about this water and I said, "Gail, please, can you send me some Kool-Aid, so I can take the Kool-Aid and put it into my canteen so that I can kill the taste of this iodine tablet from this river water." So, Gail sends me Kool-Aid. [laughter] I get an envelope a couple weeks later, a few packages of Kool-Aid, and it said, "You must add sugar." I said, "Where the hell am I going to get sugar?" [laughter] I didn't have sugar. The Kool-Aid without the sugar was difficult to get down, but it was different.

Water was very important. There wasn't a lot around. In fact, I think I may have told you last time, I had two guys from Hawaii who were in my platoon. We were on a mission once, and we ran out of water. We were told that the water wells in the area were poisoned, that you could not drink out of this water well or that water well. We were dying of thirst and we were dehydrated. They talk about people who have dehydration and fall down, and the Army has the approach that to prevent heat stroke, you piss on their head to cool them down. So, people do that. These two guys were able to, wherever we were, in this field, identify bamboo. I thought, "Bamboo?" They cut bamboo, and they said, "Watch this." They took it and cut it like that, and they stripped it down [makes a sipping sound]. They were able to suck out the fluid from the bamboo; it was sweet. It was sweet. I said, "My God, you guys are geniuses." Now, I grew up in Brooklyn. I never even saw bamboo. [laughter] I wouldn't know bamboo. The only bamboo I saw was

maybe a chair made out of bamboo, but these guys were able to identify bamboo as a plant that was able to give us some sweet water nourishment. Amazing. That was an interesting day.

There would be times when we were told that there's going to be a B-52 airstrike, and a B-52 airstrike was very significant, in that when those planes come down, large areas of territory were susceptible to causing great harm. The shrapnel coming from these drops would just level anything that was in the area. When we were told that a B-52 strike was coming tomorrow at two o'clock in our area, we were basically ordered to be down. We'd have to dig in, find shelter, while these B-52s would drop their ordnance. Then, we would go out and look for these tunnels in the aftermath. One funny story was, they would leave big craters, tremendous craters, and in the monsoon seasons, these craters would quickly fill up with water. I had a group of guys, and one guy, a Mexican fellow, from New Mexico, he was new to the platoon, and so we had to keep an eye on him. We were ambushed, and so everybody took cover. Obviously, you'd find cover, and he jumped into a bomb crater that was full of water. [laughter] He went down like a rock, and so we had to get that guy out. It was, "Don't jump into a bomb crater filled with water with sixty pounds of things and guns and ammo." Everyone helped one another.

There was one time that there was somebody who saved my life. I was crossing a stream, over a log, a tree log, and we all had to move forward. Maybe because of the monsoon, this creek was now fifteen feet deep with water. I was crossing it. We were doing a duel mission with ARVN troops. These were Republic of Vietnam troops. I slipped on this thing and I fall off this log and I went to the bottom. I dropped my weapon. I tried to get up and I was drowning because I was weighted down. Even though I tried to get out, I was still drowning. Somebody, an ARVN guy, jumped in and was able to get me up, to get my head above water, so I could get to the side. Did I ever tell you that? [Editor's Note: Marv Apsel says this to his wife Gail.] I survived. Then, I went down and got my rifle. You had to watch out for everybody, no matter what. These ARVN troops were working with us. I was very thankful.

You talk about C-rations. We would eat, in the early evening, maybe we'd eat at four or five or six o'clock, the C-rations. They [ARVN] would eat their own brand of C-rations. They weren't from the cans. They would take rice--they had big bags of rice. They would boil some water, do the rice, and they would take whatever protein they saw--it might be a snake--and they'd chop up the snake and they would put it in there, whatever sauce they had, and that was their meal. It was different. It was just different.

I did have my criticisms of the ARVN troops. Our men went out there with all this armament and magazines and this and that, and they, the ARVN, would have one bandolier around their waste and carry their weapon on their shoulder, slung over the shoulder, like they were out for a Sunday walk. You could see that their army was not as disciplined as the American Army was. I was a little resentful that, on one hand, here's a guy that saved me. I've got to tell you--I have to give him credit--he saved me from drowning, but on the every-day missions, they were very casual. The message was that this country's not going to survive with individuals who are just nonchalant about their responsibilities and their commitment to this effort. That was that.

Then, there were mercenaries in Vietnam, people from Australia, other countries, who for some reason were being paid to fight alongside the American troops. They were from Australia and,

every once in a while, would be assigned to our group and go out, and they were pretty adept at what they were doing. Also, they weren't burdened with all this stuff that we were carrying. They went out and did the job. That was Australians, yes. [Editor's Note: Between 1962 and 1973, approximately 60,000 Australian military members served in the Vietnam War.]

KR: What was the purpose?

MA: Every once in a while, there would be a film crew, and they would have some film crew with our platoon or company. Actually, it maybe happened once or twice in the entire year, and they would go along and basically film life or film whatever was happening. Like I said, most of the times, things were very routine and boring and regimented. That was life. If there was an expectation that there would be some tremendous upheaval that they could capture on film to document, maybe it happened in other places, but it wasn't happening with us. There were a lot of different characters around.

KR: What did you think of your commanding officers?

MA: I don't know how many months into my tour, I had a lieutenant who was the lieutenant for our couple of platoons. We were in a situation. We were in our positions. I think he stepped on a mine, and his leg was blown off. Up until then--that was the first time I think I threw up in Vietnam, because I got to his place to call in a chopper to take him out of the area, but his leg below his ankle was blown off. The things I remember, the smell of burning flesh is something you don't forget. Rotting flesh or burning flesh is something you don't forget. That was the first lieutenant, and so the lieutenant was out. The NCOs would have more responsibility. There was a captain that was in the rear area at the time. He wasn't with us on this mission, and so that's basically it. You took on more responsibility. By that time, I had been promoted in the field, and so I had more responsibility. That was what happened. The other lieutenants you saw, the captains, you'd see in the rear area. Look, I thought L., Lieutenant L., was a very capable, quiet man, who had gone to school and, like us, was new to the country and was in a situation where he benefitted from the fact that he had people that were seasoned and he took advice. I know you have to maintain that leadership role, you can't show any human frailty, but he was smart enough to realize that information is king and experience is very important.

GA: Are you exhausted?

MA: Yes, I'm exhausted.

KR: Let us pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: We are back on the record.

MA: There were many missions obviously, in Vietnam, and a lot of them were reconnoitering and checking out areas. There was one situation that is particularly memorable for the negative aspects that it presented to me at that time. But let me preface it by saying in Vietnam, if there

was a person in Vietnam who had another relative, a brother or a sister, who was coming into that war theater, the policy was to take one of them out of the war theater. That is a policy that I believe emanated from the case during World War I, where the Sullivan brothers, a group of five people from one family, were on a ship and that ship was exploded by enemy fire. [Editor's Note: In the Battle of Guadalcanal during World War II, a Japanese submarine torpedoed and sank the USS *Juneau*, resulting in the deaths of all five of the Sullivan brothers who were aboard.]

KR: World War II.

MA: World War II. All five members of the Sullivan family perished. I believe it's been a policy to try at least to prevent multiple people from a family to be in war theater. We were on a mission, and I had a member of my platoon--his name was C. In addition to the normal people that made up our platoon, there was a Cobra helicopter that came down with a high-ranking officer, a lieutenant colonel, who basically had to confer with an officer in another platoon that was nearby.

We were in a holding position on this mission because we identified an NVA ordnance that was up on a tree--it was high up on a tree--that could be exploded causing casualties among the people. It was decided, by the lieutenant colonel, that one of our sharpshooters would fire on that ordnance, explode it, detonate it, and neutralize the situation. As it turned out, the colonel did go and positioned himself in front of the body of our platoon and had C. fire on that ordnance, detonating it. It seemed pretty routine. The explosion went off, and everything was seemingly normal, except that one individual, C., a private, was laying on the ground. We went over to him. There was no obvious wound on his person, but through a closer inspection, opening up his shirt, we were able to find a small hole caused by shrapnel, no bigger than an aspirin. It went through his chest and came out, I believe, on the other side. Obviously, this person needed immediate attention. Here was the lieutenant colonel in the field with his Cobra helicopter in close proximity to C., and rather than put C. on that helicopter to take him back and leave the lieutenant colonel in the field, the lieutenant colonel left the area. Needless to say, C. perished. He died of that wound, waiting for a medevac. It turned out that that little piece of shrapnel went through his heart.

That one incident left me with a very dour, distasteful feeling about the responsibility of leadership, and maybe in years since, I've thought, "Well, maybe he had some overriding need, this officer, to leave the area." Maybe he was "too valuable" to be left susceptible to conflict. Nevertheless, he was in the military, he was an officer, and he was supposedly a responsible person who needed to accept that responsibility and do the right thing. In my mind, the right thing would've been to use the helicopter to transport C. out.

C., obviously, had a relative who was coming into Vietnam, and we received notification after his wound that C. needed to be taken to the rear. Unknown to them, he had already perished. C.'s brother was coming into this theater, and so C. was to be taken out. You talk about the things that go on in wartime. Maybe if the info about C. arrived a little bit earlier, he might have survived. That is the fate of our existence. The actions of that officer still bother me to this day. Like I said, it's not what you don't know; it's what you don't know that you don't know. Who

knows what other compelling issues were going on to cause that officer to leave the area? My thoughts were of C. He was a person in my platoon. I wasn't thinking broadly; I was thinking more singly about him. So, that's the C. account.

KR: Okay, we are going to end for today and reconvene for a third session. Thank you so much, Marv. Thank you so much, Gail.

MA: Thank you.

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

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