

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
MICHAEL C. MISHLER
Infantry, US Marine Corps and US Army, Vietnam War

2016

OH
2059

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Mishler, Michael (b. 1949). Oral History Interview, 2016.

Approximate length: 2 hours 41 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, current Wisconsin resident Michael Mishler recounts his service in Vietnam with the US Marine Corps from 1966-1969 and in South Korea with the US Army from 1972-1975. Mishler discusses his early life growing up in Pleasanton, California. His father was in the Navy and the family moved many times including to Japan when Mishler was 7 years old. He talks about his teenage years including getting into trouble with the police. Mishler joined the Marine Corps aged 17 and went to basic and advanced training at Camp Pendleton. He discusses deployment to Vietnam in 1967 where he was based at the MACV compound in Hue as part of a Marine Security Detachment. He tells a story about the first night of the Tet Offensive and some experiences of the Battle of Hue. Mishler discusses at length the impact that his service in Vietnam has had on his life since, including PTSD. He briefly talks about his service in the Army from 1972-1975 where he was stationed in South Korea as a television director for the American Forces Network. Mishler also reflects on the differences between Vietnam veterans and more recent veterans.

Biographical Sketch:

Mishler (b. 1949) served in the Vietnam War with the US Marine Corps from 1966-1969 and later served in the US Army in South Korea. He was discharged in 1975.

Archivists' Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Helen Gibbs, 2016.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2017.

Reviewed by Tristan Krause, 2017.

Abstract written by Helen Gibb, 2016.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH2059.Mishler_user_file1]

Gibbs: So today is Wednesday, 27 January 2016. This is an interview with Michael C. Mishler, who served with the United States Marine Corps from 1966 to '69, and the Army from 1972 to 1975. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Mishler's home in Windsor, Wisconsin, and the interviewer is Helen Gibbs, and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. Okay, so shall we begin with where and when you were born?

Mishler: I was born June 16, 1949 in Grand Rapids, Great Lakes and the likes.

Gibbs: Okay, and did you grow up there?

Mishler: No, was a Navy brat and travelled everywhere. Went to Japan for a couple years when I was younger, and then mostly around Oakland, California until I was seventeen. And that's—when I was seventeen I went into the Uncle Sam's misguided children, United States Marine Corps. And then I travelled around quite a bit, and then I landed in Wisconsin about twenty-six years ago, twenty-six years ago, so yeah. So Wisconsin's my home, but—

Gibbs: So what was it like growing up moving around?

Mishler: It was an interesting—especially Japan, the different ways of life, I guess. That was enjoyable. You learn to adapt pretty quick, you know. Moving around you learn how to make friends quicker, or enemies, one of the two. In my case I made more enemies than I did friends, which is why I ended up in the Marine Corps in the first place because of a police record of fighting all the time. So the Marine Corps said that they would take me to a place that I could do all the fighting I wanted, and it wouldn't get me in trouble, so—

Gibbs: Was your dad who was in the Navy?

Mishler: Excuse me? Yeah, my dad was in the Navy. My—I had one younger brother that was in the Navy also, and then a younger sister that was in the Army.

Gibbs: Is your home—you had a military family?

Mishler: Yeah, pretty much. There was seven of us, and three of us, I guess, went into military, so almost half, but—

Gibbs: And your dad was in for, was it Korea? He was in Korea?

Mishler: Yeah, he retired from the Navy. He got out for a short period of time, and then went back in, and spent the rest of his, you know, then died at a fairly young age,

actually. I think he was in his fifties, so I—

Gibbs: So when you were growing up in California, what sort of things did you get up to? You were—high school?

Mishler: Yeah, high school, I finished tenth grade in high school. One of the situations that I think I was pushed past the tenth grade more than graduated to the tenth grade just to get rid of me out of the classes that I was in. My childhood was kind of in a small town. The biggest thing going was the Greyhound bus station. That's where all the kids hung out, and it was just a store front store, and the little old couple ran it, and they kind of adopted all the kids, and—but we didn't have movies or skating rink and all that stuff. They would bus us to those things at times, so the only thing we had to do was fight each other. So that's what we did. [Laughs]

Gibbs: And you said this got you to some trouble?

Mishler: Yeah, nothing big, mostly if it was trouble in the town as far as fights and stuff goes, the police would always come to the house and ask me what's going on because they figured that I was involved in it.

[00:05:01]

And my mom was kind of hardnosed about it. The police would come to the door and ask for me. She'd say, "He just got here." [laughs] "He's in the back." Or the police would call and say, you know, "We have your son here," and you'd hear, "Yup, yeah he is." And then he'd say okay and hang up. He'd turn around and say, "Your mother asked if you were drunk, and I told her you were. She said to keep you." [laughs] So, and because of that, the last time I went to court the judge said that I was too much for my mother to handle, and he said the best place for me is military. And I went to the recruiters, a recruiter that had all the services in one area, and went there, and the Army and the Navy and the Air Force, all the rest of them didn't want anything to do with me, and the Marine Corps took me and said, "Well, we'll give you something to do." So they did. So I went in when I was seventeen.

Gibbs: So did you have an idea that you wanted to go into—at any point, because of the family connections?

Mishler: You know, I think, even though I was kind of pushed in that direction, I think I remember feeling that I wanted to do that, and I also remembered the feeling of wanting to go into the Marine Corps. I was fighting already on the streets, and I might as well do it for a living. So I can't say I was that proud of being a Marine at first. So I was proud as far as Vietnam went. I was proud to be part of that organization, that military. I wasn't too proud when I came home. I was in the California area, so, you know, I came home in San Francisco, so that was one of—like, being here in Wisconsin was not accepted very well. Just the fact that you were in the military was bad enough, but if you'd been to Vietnam they called you all kinds of names, and it's not like it is today, and I think the older vets owe

the younger vets some gratitude for making us be recognized as veterans also because until they started coming home and started experiencing the problems that we've all experienced, and then people started saying, "Well, these guys were there too." And then there was pride.

I spent a long time hiding the fact that I was in the military and Vietnam. My wife, Linda, she didn't even know when we got married that I was in Vietnam until I started having problems. I had promised her that I would seek help if I did, and we started having the problems, and I went to the VA. And after several years and some medication I'm more level. I still have my times, this month being one of them. And for some reason January is a bad month for me, just normally, and I know it is.

[00:10:06]

But I just, my emotions and stuff get a little edgy, so I get cranky faster. That's, you know.

Gibbs: All right, I'm sure we can get onto that in a bit more detail, but what do you remember about going to boot camp? Did you have expectations?

Mishler: I knew it would be tough, and it was. I took it better than most, even though we were kids—we were seventeen, eighteen years old. I think being from a military family and traveling around and adapting fast made it easier for me to be away from home, and from the time I was thirteen until I went in the Marine Corps, I pretty much was not at home very much anyway. I was out on the streets most of the time, and the whole family kind of was that way. As soon as they could get out of the house they got out of the house as fast as they could. But I adapted to boot camp, I think, fairly well. And the physical part of it was lucky for me not too much. I think my way of life, fighting all the time, kept me in pretty good shape, I guess.

So the training, other than the discipline part of it, and I went into the Marine Corps with an attitude that somebody owed me something, and I was going to get it one way or the other, you know. And then came out of the Marine Corps with the idea that nobody owes me anything, and if I don't get myself it's not going to be done, so it changed me quite a bit, and I never really knew the age difference, the age part of it until later in life, I think. I looked at pictures of me when I went to Vietnam, and I was just a kid. I had teenage acne, and I'd never shaved before. And just—but with the Marine Corps, through boot camp and advanced infantry training and stuff, gave me a lot of—I'm trying to think of the word. The more I think of it, the farther it'll go.

Gibbs: That's fine. [Laughs]

Mishler: Discipline, it gave me a lot of discipline that I didn't have before, and I owe them that, I think. I think without the Marine Corps I probably would have ended up in jail or prison or something. So they did that for me. Then I turned 18 June 16th,

on June 26 that was in Vietnam, and that November I was the youngest Marine in Vietnam, Marine Corps birthday. And they took me out of the field and brought me back to Da Nang, and put new fatigues on me, and some guy that looked like an old boot, he was a first sergeant, and the guy was ancient, tough, the whole time we were there getting a picture taken eating cake, we were in a trailer, and the whole time we were there he was complaining. “This is supposed to be a war. We’re sitting here eating cake,” you know. So he was just—and as soon as he was done he was out, so that was an interesting time of my life.

[00:15:12]

Gibbs: What did you—did you know much about the Vietnam War? Did you know what was going on? Were you aware of—

Mishler: I knew mainly that we were there. I think I fought and had pride in our country, but I really fought for the guy next to me more than anything else, I think. I think I was there for my country, but did the fighting for the guy next to me. We—there’s a brotherhood. You get to show—it’s just not, “I’ll do anything for you.” Next time you go out you have a chance to do anything for them. You’re easily put to test. Instead of saying, “I’ll do anything for you,” and that’s the last time you see him. When you’re put in charge especially, and you turn around and say, “I won’t leave you there,” then you’re held to your word. You got another six guys that see you. If you leave somebody out there you just told them that you wouldn’t, you know. So you’re held to that. So you didn’t say things lightly, and there was times that I was helped when it was hard to accept, I guess, that somebody would come and help you in that situation. But they did, and they also were kids, which you don’t see when it’s happening. When everything’s going on, you don’t really look at everybody and say, “They’re kids with a bunch of old men scattered in.” You don’t look at that. You look at the next guy as being a man just like you are. But then afterwards you take a look at a picture of when that was.

When I first went in to Vietnam we went in a big long line like an assembly line, and there was this table set up, a long table, and there was people on the other side, and there was, I guess, maybe fifteen, twenty people, and they all had different forms in front of them. And you started at one end, and you went to the other end, and they would ask your name, your rank, your home. Each station had something else that they needed to ask you who your next of kin was, who to call, and I remember thinking when I was going through that, I remember thinking, “Why won’t anybody look at me?” No one would look. Everybody had their head down filling out the paper, and no one seemed to care. When they looked at you they didn’t look at you. They didn’t want to put—I realized later that they didn’t want to put a face to the body, to the name that was on your records. They didn’t because all these kids were being paraded to this, and I saw a picture of myself at that time in a helmet, and I look like I was a teenager playing war, you know. And I realized that they didn’t want to look at you because a lot of you weren’t coming

home, and they knew that.

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That made a big impression on my life later. When it's all happening it really just seems surreal. I mean, when you become a Marine and you finish the training and all of that you're proud to be part of that organization. And the training's a little bit different now than it used to be. I remember when in training, in boot camp, a drill sergeant was walking in and out of the ranks, and he was saying we can't put our hands you. We can't swear, can't—and, you know, we can't mistreat you, and da, da, da, da, on, on, on, and he's walking in and out of all the guys. And then he stops. He said, "We're not allowed to put our hands on your for disciplinary reasons." And he stopped in front of one of the biggest guys out there and knocked him right on his rear end. Boom, and everybody just kind of, our eyes got big as soda pop bottles. And he said, "But we don't listen to rules around here very much." So, but it was a learning curve that actually I needed. And I think a lot of the young guys that went did need.

I've been told I have a little bit of a southern accent. For some reason I picked that up in the Marine Corps because a lot of the guys I was with were from the South, and if I'm with, around somebody from Texas or whatever, it takes me a few minutes, and I'm "Y'all", just as southern as they are.

Gibbs: So what was—what did you do for AIT [Advanced Individual Training]? I assume you had an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] hearing.

Mishler: Zero-three-five-one anti-tank, the bazooka, machine gun, bazooka, 106 recoilless rifle, and explosives, but that just meant that you had a number, and they handed you a rifle, and you were all 0311. You were all infantry. My main job was to be the fighting part of everything. In Vietnam, I spent two tours there, actually twenty-eight months altogether. And our job was to do—to take care—I was assigned to MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] security. So we handled the security for the MACV compounds and the MACV advisors taught the ARVINs [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] how to be security. So we were their security, and they taught the ARVINs how to be security, which really never made much sense to me, but somewhere along the line somebody thought it was a good idea. So that was our main purpose there was to do security for MACV and do their convoys, their patrols, and things like that, but mainly security for the compound.

Gibbs: Did you go out there with people from basic and advanced training, or were you—did you just go out in individual—

Mishler: You get into—everything's broke down to squads, platoons, companies, and when you go into AIT you're with another company, or you're assigned in a group. So it's a lot of physical training, but then you also train on the weapons, how to use

them, how to take them apart, how to put them together, how to clean them and whatnot, but it was also a lot of physical running and you ran everywhere you went. So you were constantly in training all the time.

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And you trained for combat. We used popped-up targets for live ammo and stuff, and that was the whole—to the point that you wonder, “Why am I doing this again?” You know, “We just did this last week.” It’s over and over and over and over. Then the first firefight you get into in Vietnam you realize why because you automatically do what you’re supposed to do. And after it’s done then you throw up. You’re nerves get to you then, but during the time that it’s happening you’re not paying much attention. You’re paying all the attention to it, I guess not much—attention’s not the right way to say that. You’re paying every—all of your focus goes on the fight, and it never occurs to you that you might get hurt. It just occurs to you, when this happens, this is what I’m supposed to do. This is how I’m supposed to do it, and it’s—during your training it’s done over and over and over and over and over again. Until you use it you don’t realize that it makes sense to train that way. But for another eight weeks, I think, eight to twelve weeks, I can’t remember exactly, was all AIT, and then my personal situation, I went to AIT, then I went straight from AIT to survival training, and from survival training to Vietnam, so—

Gibbs: How long before you were shipped out did you know that you were going to Vietnam?

Mishler: I checked in to my—had thirty days leave. Checked into my unit, spent maybe two weeks at the unit, and they called me to the office and said I was being—I was going to Vietnam. I had volunteered to do that. I figured if I was going to train to do the same stuff over and over I might as well do it. So I volunteered, and they sent me right away, and then I went to survival school. Well, they say it’s survival school, but it’s survival training. It’s training in jungle warfare and stuff.

Gibbs: Where was that training?

Mishler: That was in Camp Pendleton. Almost everything was in the south, southern California, Camp Pendleton, AMCRD Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. It was all in that one area. Surprisingly, for some reason, I came from California, and I trained in California, and it was usually when you came from California you trained at Camp Lejeune, and when you were around the Lejeune area you trained in California. And for some reason I was left where I was. I guess I didn’t have a—they weren’t worried about me running away or anything. So we did have a few people that did, so.

Gibbs: Oh really?

Mishler: Yeah, they decided they didn't want to be Marines. But that usually just got them into a couple weeks in CC, Corrective Custody. And they have it even harder—they had it even harder. Everywhere they ran they carried a sledge hammer. They went and took a sand pile and moved it from one area to another area with hand shovels and buckets. Then after they got through that area they turned around and moved it all back. Pretty soon they got the idea of taking orders, or they got put out.

Gibbs: And you said you had thirty days leave?

Mishler: Yeah, I went thirty days leave.

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And in that thirty days leave you realize how much you really changed. You seem, to yourself, you seem like you're the same kid that left and went in the Marine Corps, but then when you come home you realize that you're too old for most of your friends, and you're too young for people that you relate with. As far as what to do it puts you in a real awkward position. You don't have fun with your friends because they do children's stuff. You don't have fun with the older people because the older people don't want you around because you're so young. So you kind of—in thirty days you're ready to go back to somebody you can relate with, that understands the nomenclature, the firearms you're playing with, you know. It makes for interesting growing up, interesting conversation now, but then it wasn't. It was just a real confusing time for people, I think. Not just me, but the friends that I had. Funny enough I really didn't have many friends that I know. I know a lot of guys that went to Vietnam that knew—kept all their friends, the guys they served with. I don't even remember names. I remember faces, and most names were nicknames and stuff, short. I was known as Mish instead of Mishler. So, but I don't remember everybody's name except for Bob, the one guy that I was in the tower with in Hue. We were in the same unit. We went through the same fight together. What else?

Gibbs: Should we talk about going over to Vietnam and some of your first impressions, and sort of the expectations that you had of it?

Mishler: I think the thing that stands out the most to me was when I was going over and we flew over on commercial jets, and when I was going over and getting ready to go, and I was on thirty days leave at home before I went again, and I spent a lot of time during that thirty days and the trip to Vietnam the first time wondering, "What would I do? Would I be able to pull the trigger on somebody?" It's okay to hit pop-up targets, but when it's a human being I wasn't sure if I would have what it took to do that. Would I hesitate? And I spent a lot of time thinking of that when I had time for idle thought. A lot of that thought was, "Could I do what I was being sent there to do?" And it turned out that I could quite easily, but like I said, it was trained into you where you do it first and think afterwards. I don't

remember names, but I remember faces and situations, and those will never go away. But I also remember when we landed in country how hot it was.

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Marines went to Okinawa first to do the processing, the paperwork that the other people didn't do from the states, so to make sure they had everything ready for you to come home in a box, I guess.

Gibbs: Did you—you has obviously been to Japan. Did you remember anything? Was any of it familiar from having lived there when you were—

Mishler: Well, Okinawa was different than—Okinawa's more of a military island. We were kind of held on a base. We weren't allowed to go out very much. We took, I think, about five days, and we were processing the whole time, so all you did was do that. And when you got to Okinawa you could drink regardless of what age you were, so we did a lot of that. And I remember—and everybody was really rowdy because you had the guys going to Vietnam and the guys coming back from Vietnam, and the guys coming back from Vietnam wanted to show the guys that were going to Vietnam how much different they were than, you know. It was all in good clean fun, so, but they had all the chairs and tables were bolted down to the floor. There was no glass anywhere. The band was behind a chicken wire fence because people would throw things, and luckily they didn't have any glass. It was plastic glasses and stuff that they would throw. And it was always being closed down because some riot that happened there. Everybody was just so wound up. You were either going or coming back, so.

I remember the few times that we did get off base. The driving was crazy. People honk that means you're coming to an intersection. When you're all crammed as many as you can cram into one of these little taxi cabs, then you'd hear your driver honk, then you'd hear somebody else honk, and that both of them weren't going to stop at the intersection, so it was a matter of who got there first. That's about all I can tell you about Okinawa.

In Japan we lived on [inaudible] Japan, so we were actually with the general population, and I remember as a kid it was really different. We celebrated a lot of the festivals that they had there, and participated in a lot of them that had children pulling things and stuff like that, like the big ropes. All the children would be pulling on this big statue thing, or whatever, and they'd pull to a certain area, and then all the orange drink and everything was free to the kids. It was fun. It was the drums and all that stuff. It was really interesting. My sister Vicky was one of the first people to go trick or treating in Japan. She wasn't supposed to get on the bus, but she did. She went home, so she decided she was going trick or treating anyway. So she put on her costume and went trick or treating, and somehow she managed to make everybody understand that they were supposed to give her stuff. So they gave her all kinds of rice cakes and everything.

Gibbs: How old were you when you were over there?

Mishler: I came back I was eight, so seven, six years old I guess. We spent two years there.

Gibbs: Was there anything that you missed when you went back to the US from when you were living there?

Mishler: Financially we were well off in Japan at the time. We had a housekeeper, things like that. When we came back to the US we were at the low end of everything, and my mom got divorced, and so it was—when we came back we were at a different social level, and I think that that affected a lot of things. But nothing earth shattering.

[00:40:25]

Gibbs: Interesting, so landing in Vietnam, you landed where?

Mishler: In Da Nang, Continental Airline, I felt sorry for the stewardess because being in a small flying tube with a hundred or so oversexed Marines that were kids, they went through a lot, had to hand it to them that they didn't kill one of them or more, so they went through a lot. I remember that on [inaudible], on the flight home, or on the flight there that they were pretty rowdy with the stewardess. But some of the stewardesses were pretty tough too, so more than one guy got smacked. I know that. Flying over there wasn't much. Landing was—after we landed it was different. Everybody got off the plane and got into a formation and I remember the heat mostly. It was all either packed dirt or asphalt where the planes landed and stuff, and it was just, with the sun beating off of those it was just scorching hot. It was just, you could feel it when you breathed in. And you got used to it eventually. You just got used to sweating to the point that you just didn't pay any attention to it. Things like deodorant and stuff weren't used because you couldn't go through the jungles and wear Old Spice aftershave, be like saying, "I'm here. I'm here."

But I remember they called out names, and they would call out names and not serial numbers, but we had [REDACTED] was my military number. Then later they started using your social security, so they would call out your number, and they would have them fallout, you know, into a different formation, and they would be sent to—they would say, "You're going to 1st Marines," whatever area you were going to, and then they would pile you on trucks and either take you to a place where another military transport would pack all your stuff up and you'd fly on a C-130 to somewhere in country and stuff. And I remember I went to 3rd Marines, 3rd MP battalion, which I thought was pretty good, which ended up being fairly good for—I saw action, but I didn't see as much as a lot of guys did. I got my purple heart and all that good stuff, but I didn't get in it as much as the rest of them did. I never really thought of myself as being anything special. I just did

what I was supposed to do.

[00:45:09]

Then in Tet, 1968 was the closest I got to dying, I think, than ever before, which is what bugged, not bugged, caused a lot of pain in my life, I think. Just one battle is all it took, but it was a battle that lasted for a month, so we just squeezed it all into a short period of time.

Gibbs: So you were sent up to Hue?

Mishler: I was sent to Hue—our rear base was right there in Da Nang, but then from Da Nang they sent me to Hue, and we had security detachments in Hue, Quang Tri, Dan Ha. There was a lot of different areas that we went to, and each one had their own attachment of Marines for security. Again, I don't know why we had to guard the Army, but, you know, someone thought it made sense, so. And to be honest with you, after Tet, the Army guys were glad we were there, so there was no—everybody said so. Army—the Marine Corps is the best, the Army, whatever. When it comes down to brass tacks, they're all the same. A guy's going to do what a guy has to do. And it really doesn't matter, even though I have to admit I would go—if I went to combat again it would be with Marine Corps. I knew I wouldn't be left behind, and everybody would have your back. But I remember waking up, not waking up, getting out, having the sun come up the first day after the major attack, the first attack, and looking down on the streets from the compound. And there were little NVA [North Vietnamese Army] flags flying on all the houses all the way around the compound and some big NVA flags flying at some of the other that you could see the flagpoles from, and that's when we realized that we may be into a little bit of trouble, so.

Gibbs: So when did you arrive in Hue, or in country?

Mishler: Nineteen sixty-six, no, '67. I turned eighteen June 16th. June 26th I was sent in to Vietnam, and then after I got to Da Nang I think I spent two days in Da Nang, and then they sent me to Hue, and they could have sent me south or north or whatever, right, and it's just, Hue was where we—where I was sent, and but even though I was stationed in Hue we went to the other—Quang Tri went there sometimes, and we ran convoys from Da Nang to—that's what they would use to get us back sometimes instead of flying us back on helicopters and stuff. We would be protection for the convey going, which was—it's where I was exposed to Agent Orange, one of the places.

[00:49:58]

Gibbs: So what was your sort of day-to-day, if you had day-to-day, routine at the compound in Hue?

Mishler: Well, mostly clean the weapons, the security of the compound, fill the sandbags, and general security type of things, checking the wire. We had claymore mines and other mines on the wire, so we had to check those, and it was a constant, same thing over and over and over. And then sometimes we flew with the Black Cats that were there. They needed gunners. Sometimes their gunners would be sick or want a day off or whatever, and they would come over, even though they were Army, and they would ask us if we would fly with them. They couldn't fly without having a gunner. So they would ask us if we, you know, one of us or two of us would go with them. There was always one other gunner when we went as a gunner that was an Army gunner, and I don't think any of that was ever recorded. We just went. It needed to be done, so. And the pilots would ask us because they knew that we understood the weapons and the Marine Corps did a lot more extensive training on all weapons than the Army, I guess. I met guys in the Army that didn't even know how to use an M16. But they could operate a computer and they wouldn't know how to put a round in or how to release the magazine or some of that stuff. And in Marine Corps you had a Marine anything and if he doesn't know how to use it right away he could figure it out. I mean, that's what he's trained for. And that's part of what we did too was to train the Army personnel.

When there was trouble when we got hit in the compound they were assigned different positions for them to go, and we were in charge of those positions, so if you went to like my post, I was in charge of whoever was sent there. And usually there was two maybe two guys, three guys at the most that was sent to each post, and then the Marine guard would tell you, "This is your field of fire. This is your field of fire. Anything that comes in that field, shoot it." And we trained that same idea so that everybody ran to whatever post they were supposed to be in, and they knew what port out of the bunker they shoot out of and what they looked at so there wasn't a bunch of confusion at the time. You just automatically went and did what you were supposed to do, or you should anyway. Not everybody showed up when they were supposed to show up.

And then we trained them also on the equipment that we used, and Marine Corps is not known or the newness of equipment, so we had a lot of like, .30 caliber machine guns and stuff that are, you know, they wouldn't be used. They'd be using M60 machine guns normally, and we had a couple of M60 machine guns, but most of our post had .30 caliber machine guns, the old fashion like you see in a war movie. And Marine Corps is famous for getting hand-me-down weapons, even Marine Corps Air. They get hand-me-down jets and nothing brand new for the Marine Corps. You know, it might be brand new as far as M16 rifles or you know, but M16s, by the time we got M16s, M14s were way out of use.

[00:55:11]

So we ended up with M14s at first, and then they gave us M16s later, and the reason they gave them to us was because the bullets were bigger. M14s fired 7.62 rounds and M16 fired 5.56. Well, you can't put a seven point in the other

machine, so we had to—couldn't get ammo for them, so they gave us the, you know. But we still had BARs, which they don't use anymore, Browning Automatic Rifles, and they're magazine fed instead of belt fed. And you can only fire twenty rounds and you have to—but the M60 you can put a belt in and fire a hundred rounds before you have to change the belt. And if the guys knew what they were doing you could clip two belts together so you could fire a couple of two hundred rounds or so before you had to reload.

Gibbs: What do you remember about the city itself? I know it's supposed to be kind of an important place in the country.

Mishler: It used to be the capitol of Vietnam, and they had the citadel, which is the big wall they talk about, and it was beautiful, very ornate. At one time it was beautiful, and it was very ornate, real, very picturesque. The wall they talk about is huge. I, geez, I'd say maybe a half a block thick, maybe even more than that. I mean, real thick wall, so you—by the time the battle was over that wall had great big pop marks in it from rounds, tank rounds and stuff hitting the wall, machine gun fire, you know, just bullets. Everything was chipped up. Everything was—it went from a pretty city, oriental city to a burnout bombed mess. No roofs, not very many roofs anyway, none of the streets were—all the streets were covered in debris, and it stayed that way for months, for a long time. When I left it was still pretty much that way. The streets were clean, but the signs of war were there by quite a bit. It still showed the battle that it was in, what happened. It was in all the streets and the buildings. You—it was sad, really, to see. It was unnecessary and sad, but strategically for them it was a loss.

We were able to keep our compound from being overrun. In the 1st Armored division, which was on the other side of the wall of the citadel, they weren't overrun either. They stayed intact, and we had one Air Force house that had, I think five or six guys that lived off base. They didn't fire a round, but it's a good thing they didn't because they didn't have power to—we went out to get them and bring them back. Somehow they managed to not fire a shot or get a shot fired at them. So they saw them running around the NVA and VC [Viet Cong], and saw them running around back and forth and stuff, but then none of them came into their courtyard.

[01:00:08]

They know that they were there, so I guess they didn't think they were that important.

Gibbs: I guess not.

Mishler: Yeah, they were pretty worried when we got them, when we went and got them, so they were glad to see us. The city was decimated, and a lot of the people in it, the innocent people suffered a lot. There were some pretty hideous things. That's

when I realized how evil, I think, maybe evil's not—sadistic people can get in combat. I didn't witness any of the atrocities that we may have done. There are plenty of stories, but I did witness the after effects of what they did, and that's something that I'll always have. That's one of the things that doesn't wash away. You can't go through enough psychological things to get rid of that. I mean, to this day and probably for the rest of my life I'll see images and faces. And unfortunately I remember more of the horror part of it than I do the good part. I know that we laughed and made jokes, but I don't remember all of those. Every once and a while one or two of them will come to mind, you know. I'll smile, but it took me forty years almost to even discuss Vietnam because it was hard. Everybody called us baby killers, and it was hard to defend against that when the only things you remember are the horrible things that happened. It affects, I think, every part of your being. I mean, there are times that I smell things. I can—because there's so much blood involved I can remember what it smelled and tasted like in the air.

[01:05:01]

I can remember what people looked like on both sides dead and wounded. I remember—fear a lot, things like that. For some reason those are the things that stick in some people's heads, and they don't stick in other people's heads. And I'm not really sure why. I think everybody that's been in combat suffers from PTSD of one sort or another. I think a lot of it—now the Army does debriefings, or the military does debriefings and stuff when you come back. And then you just came back, and within twenty-four hours you could be sitting in the streets. I spent two tours there, and I came home thirty days in between tours, and I couldn't sleep at night. I'd walk the streets. I remember I hit my mother. She put her hands on my chest when I was sleeping. But it was weird. It was like you were glad that you were out of Vietnam, but your body never really felt that you were out of harm's way. Loud noises, different things that happen on a daily basis set you off. You can be in a real good mood and one thing happen, a loud noise or something, and you're lost for days. I went home and even the older friends that I had were younger than I was in a lot of ways than I was. What they valued in life was totally different than what I valued in life. I valued my being, my life in general, and they were worried about really mundane things. I couldn't connect with anybody, and then when I got home and realized—got home the last time, and realized that I wasn't going to connect, and it was easier after a couple—I got married, had a son. He was sick, and so I ended up back in the military, went in the Army.

The Marine Corps wanted me back, but they weren't going to give me my rank back, but put me in the same MOS, and I told them keep the rank, you know, just give me some MOS that was feasible for the outside life. So they wouldn't do it, but the Army did, and the Army trained me to be a television cameraman, and it was a little easier in that part of my life because there was veterans that I was associated with in the Army. There was a communication that could happen. I

didn't feel like I was standing on an island as much.

[01:10:01]

But the Army was—when I went in the Army I asked to go through their boot camp just to see the difference, and when I went through Marine Corps boot camp it was in 1966, and when I went through Army boot camp it was in 1972, I think. And it was—a lot of the things like getting off the bus and stuff when you first get there are the same. They come in and I knew it was going to happen. So everybody's sitting there on the bus and I had a big grin on my face, and sure enough the guy jumps up. "What are you doing on my bus? Get the—off my bus." And everybody's running and running into everybody and their stuff. I was in the back of the bus laughing, but then they all got off the bus, and we got into formation. They start telling us all the rules and regulations of being in boot camp, and they were saying that the break room was off limits until 1800 at night, 6:00 at night, and I—break room? Marine Corps didn't have anything like that. You can't get any beer out of the beer machine until after 1800, and we didn't even see a candy machine for twelve weeks. So, I was just laughing.

So then one of the younger drill sergeants was walking back and forth and yelled and everything. He stopped in front of me, and I knew him, and I had met him in Vietnam. We had pulled him and his group out of Vietnam, out of the field in the helicopter, with the Black Hawk, and I had him by the hand. And the reason I remembered his face was I had him by the hand when the helicopter took off, and he was saying, "Don't drop me. Don't drop me." And I hung onto him and pulled him up into the helicopter. So from that time on I was known as Senior Drill Sergeant Instructor. I'm trying to remember how they worded it, trainee, Senior Drill Sergeant Trainee. So I got out of most of what you had to do, but it was hilarious. There was no comparison at all between the two at all. What are you doing? [talking to pet]

Gibbs: You said they trained you as a cameraman?

Mishler: Yeah.

Gibbs: What kind of—

Mishler: Television cameraman, and I ended up in Korea. I went as a television cameraman, and we did the same thing that a regular television station did. The only difference is instead of Wheaties commercials and stuff like that we did VD spots, reenlistment spots. We called them spots, but they were like commercials. They were run, you know, "Retired such and such age, reenlist and get whatever bonus," and stuff like that. So it's the same regular television, but it's all military. And I went after I trained for that in Fort Bliss, Texas, I went to Korea, and I spent a couple years in Korea. And I went in as an E3—E2, actually, when I went in. By the time I was out of boot camp I was E3, and I spent two years in Korea, I think,

and by the two years I was E6. So the military Marine Corps training made a big difference. It was things I remembered that—and I'd been in uniform things are a little bit lackadaisical in the Army. It's not so much in the Marine Corps. Didn't use to be in the Marine Corps. I see now some of the younger Marines, not all but some, would definitely be in trouble.

[01:15:02]

When I was in the Marines you would get called out for your uniform being wrong, or wearing your cover at the wrong time or keeping your cover how you keep your cover. You're supposed to keep it under your belt, and dress violations, and another Marine, regardless of your rank, would have called you out on it. Would've said, "Marine, that's not what you're supposed to look like. That's not what you're supposed to do." But now it's pretty—you don't see anybody doing that. And I think that hurts pride, I think, military pride. I think in the long run pride maybe is not the word, discipline. I think in the long run it hurts discipline. You don't care as much. It shows that—it looks like you don't care. You might, but, you know, when I was in I knew everybody cared. I mean, even when we went downtown we looked at each other, and that's when you wore a uniform. We weren't allowed to wear civilian clothes for quite a while. What else can I tell you?

Gibbs: Well, should we pop back to Vietnam for a little bit and talk about the beginning of the Tet Offensive?

Mishler: Okay, I do have a tendency to skip over that a little bit.

Gibbs: That's fine. It's up to you.

Mishler: We were—my post and I, January 31st, 1968, and my post was post number two, which was an eighteen-foot tower that was set up by the CO's house, and it was just me in the post and Bob Robertson, who's the sergeant of the guard. Bob Robertson and myself were the two ranking Marine Corps security people there. We switched off. Sometimes he was sergeant of the guard, and I was sergeant of the guard, and he was on whatever post. And we had heard that we were going to get hit that night, but that was something that normally—it happened a lot. They told us we were going to get hit, and not very many times did we ever get hit, you know. A lot of times we got hit, and they didn't say anything. They didn't tell us, Army intelligence.

So Bob Robertson was brining coffee around. He didn't have to. It was something he just did. He brought Styrofoam cups, big pot of coffee that he made. And he went to the main gate, which was post one, and then he came to my post, and I got a cup of coffee. And he said, "Doesn't look like intelligence was right again." And I said, "When is it ever?" And as soon as I got done saying ever, just on the other side of the house a rocket hit and blew up. You could hear it, [imitating rocket

sound] boom. And the tower had a tin roof on it, and you could hear debris landing on the tin roof from the, it was just on the other side of the building. A house, regular size house, like it blew up in the backyard sort of, and we were in the front of the house. He dropped the coffee pot. I dropped the coffee. We both went up in the tower.

[01:20:00]

And it's just that he ended up being there. He'd have been in any of the posts when it happened, but he ended up being there. And then we had another guy, Bobby Hall, which, he was a Marine driver for a major that was there, and Frank Doezema [??], which was the Army guy. He was the only Army guy we had in there. And so there was rockets and mortars going off everywhere, and then we started hearing small arms fire, and then we started seeing people shooting at us. We ended up in a firefight, and Frank, when Frank came up into the tower we were already shooting, and just a couple of rounds here, there. We could see them running around, and Frank said that the machine gun was his, and I was on the back of the machine gun this time. I said okay. I wasn't going to argue with him. Felt kind of bad about that, but—because if I had stayed on the gun I'd have been the one that died, but Doezema had the .30 caliber machine gun, and Bob Robertson was on the right hand, and I was on the left, and Bobby was in the middle of both of us. He went back and forth, and all of a sudden everything light up in a huge explosion, and I ended up laying on the floor, and stuff falling and smoke, and I couldn't hear. And I said I couldn't hear. I said, "I can't hear." And Bob Robertson started laughing. And he says, "You can't hear?" He said, "Neither can I." And when I opened my eyes and got up the roof was missing. There was a big hole in the roof, and it was a B40 rocket, RPG, rocket-propelled grenade, what they call now. And it had missed the machine gun and went up past him and hit the roof and blew up, and it was within, like the roof here, your normal sized roof, I think it was. It wasn't really far away. And it blew up, but then we all got back up.

Then there was more to shoot at because they started moving thinking we were done, and we kept fighting, and then all of a sudden the floor behind us blew up in a big explosion again. And I ended up on my back. Everybody was laying around the top, and everything—everybody was okay, so we got up, start shooting again. And the colonel's house was telling us, "Get out of the tower. Get out of the tower." And we said, "You come up and get us out of the tower." We were all saying in the tower, "I'm not getting shot in the back climbing out here." And so then we started fighting again. And the third round blew up, and it hit right under the gun, and it blew us all over the—we were all laying all over the floor again. And everybody got up like they did before and said they were okay except for Frank. Frank was still sitting by the machine gun slumped down. And we all reached for him, pulled him back, and he was missing his legs from the top of his right leg below the knee and his left leg above the knee.

[01:25:08]

And they had got—it wasn't missing. They were there, but they were just a big hole. It was—so they started, Bob Robertson and Bobby Hall started wrapping his legs, and I started shooting. And then Bobby Hall went down, climbed out of the tower and went over to get a stretcher for Doezema, and then I saw a bunch of people in a ditch not too far from our post, and they had white bandages on their heads. And I asked Bob. I said, "Are these guys wounded?" I thought maybe they were friendlies wounded. And he says, "Oh, it looks like it." And I said, "You know, something's not right." And then the guy—there was a guy bent over, and he was going from the front to the back, and when he was going he took a white scarf-like thing and tied it around his head. And I said, "They're not all head-wounded." And Bob looked, and he said, "You're right." We took care of them.

And then they came with the stretcher, and Bobby Hall came up. They threw ropes up on top. The door, the floor was so small, and one part of it on the back was gone pretty much. It wasn't very safe. And you couldn't let the stretcher down. It was like a helicopter stretcher, basket type, and it wouldn't go down through the hole. You could barely get up through the hole yourself. You had to put your rifle up first and then climb up to get into it. And they came with the stretcher, whatever you call it, basket, threw the ropes up. We pulled it up and put Doezema in it, Frank, and strapped him in, then lifted him up onto the sandbags in the back, and basically dropped him. We didn't drop him, but we let him fall fairly fast, and it stopped before he hit the ground, and we had rope burns on our hands for a while from stopping it. And then two corpsman took him from the bottom and ran to the back.

Then Bob, Bobby Hall, and myself fought the rest of the night till the sun came up, and I had two magazines left of M16 ammo. I think Bob was down to his 45, and I think we ran out of BAR ammunition, and then I think Bob, Bobby Hall had a rifle, but I don't think he had any ammunition left. And I had eighty-five magazines when I went up there, and I was down to two, twenty rounds a magazine. And then we said, "Well, we better get out of the tower, otherwise we'll be throwing rocks at them [inaudible]." And in the tower it was sandbags, no rocks, so we decided to go down. So we went down as fast as we could and ran over to the colonel's house, and they were still shooting at us. You could hear the bullets ricocheting off the building, and so we were trying to get in the door and shoot at the same time, and by the time we got in the door I was down to my last two rounds on the last magazine that I had, and we weren't on automatic. We were just one at a time. There was still debris flying off the sandbags by the door from people shooting at us. I got sand in my eyes and stuff from trying to go through the door.

[01:30:07]

And then we got in and sat down on the hallway, and the three of us were sitting

there. We finally—I smoked at the time. In fact, we all smoked, and somebody gave us some cigarettes, some officer. And we were just tired. We'd been up there, you know, all night long, and high stress. You know, we were all—and so we were smoking a cigarette, and I felt something on the back of my neck, like it itched. It was part of Frank's legs. I wiped it off, looked at my hand, and there was a chunk of Frank's legs on the back of my hand. So I just shook it off, and we just sat there in the hallway and listened to officers tell us how crazy we were staying up in the tower. But then the rest of the time—then we'd look out the windows after we sat there for, geez, we probably sat there for twenty, thirty minutes, and we looked out the windows. You could see NVA flags flying everywhere. The sun came up, and we thought, "We're in trouble," because the Marine Corps had most of the ammunition for the compound, and we were down to nothing. But they brought some in, so we were all right there. But the battle ended up, we got hit every night for a while. There was always gun fire going on for the next month or so. And there was always snipers.

And then weird things happened like the tanks were sitting on our side of the river, and they were shooting at the citadel on the other side, and they were using armor-piercing rounds trying to break the wall, which was not doing them any good, but one of the—they said one of the tank rounds hit the water, and it made it ricochet back, and the center part of it, which is about the size of a softball, maybe a little bit larger than a softball, was all steel, and it went down to a point like a bullet does, and I'd say it was a good five pounds of steel, and Bob and I were on the second floor part of the compound and heard this [imitating bullet sound] and whack! And that part of the round, the steel part, hit the wall, stopped, landed on the ground afterwards, and sat there and spun. And we both just sat there and stared at it while it was spinning. And it never occurred to either of us that it could go off at any time. Then after we saw it's not, you know. Bob tried to pick it up. It was real hot. Another time when we went out we went out to get the guys in the Air Force. We were sitting by this wall from—the police station was right on the corner.

[01:35:01]

And they had a wall that went all the way around it. So we were sitting on the ground where the wall was, and Bob Robertson and I were talking, and all of a sudden my foot slid over, and I heard this thump, and my foot slid over, and there was an inside of a .50 caliber armor-piercing round. It hit me in the foot and moved my foot over. It didn't—it just was laid there on the ground, and Bob said, "What was that?" He noticed that my foot move, and he heard it. And I said—I looked down and reached down and picked up this hot piece of metal. [Laughs] So I let go of the hot piece of metal, and it was an inside round of a .50 caliber. I mean, weird things like that happened. You don't think they do, but, you know. You can't, you know, so many of that kind of weird happenings. Like, if it'd been just a little bit higher it wouldn't have hit the sole of my shoe. It went over the toe of one boot and hit the instep of my other boot, but if it had been a little higher and hit just the fabric part it probably would've went into my foot.

But then the rest of the battle was trying to get them out of the city, and the Marines came. There was a major standing in front of the Marines from Phu Bai. And it was a welcomed sight. They were the ones that brought the ammunition with them. And this major was walking down the street in front of his tanks. And you'd hear bat! And the major would take this stick he had and he'd point at whatever, a window or bell tower, or whatever it was that he was pointing at, and the tank would [imitating sound of tank movement] boom, and blow it up. And then it'd go back down to follow him, and he'd just walk in front of it. Anybody that was stupid enough to shoot at him, he'd point at it, and they'd blow it up. Those guys went door to door and cleared the city from there, and we helped them sometimes. You know, they'd call and ask if they had anybody that they could lend us for, you know. So as long as we were supposed to be back, and it was like a mission to go there and come back, get whatever, come back up. You know, we were able to go, well, I don't know if we were able to go or not.

We went, so, but that was probably—we had been hit three different times with IEDs [improvised explosive device], I think, or RPGs, RPGs, and all of us were wounded. Frank died, and they named the compound after Frank and gave him a Navy, no, Distinguished Service Cross from the Army. And Bobby Hall, I heard, got either the Bronze Star or the Silver Star. Bob Robertson and myself didn't get anything besides purple hearts, and Bob didn't get his purple heart until several years later. We wrote the Marine Corps and said my purple heart was in the records. He was with me, and so they finally sent it just before he died of cancer. So they finally sent it to him. But we didn't get any other kind of metals for it because number one it was our job, and number two we were the two ranking Marines in the compound in our unit.

[01:40:08]

There was a major, I think a full bird colonel might have been there, but nobody wrote us up for it. And we didn't write each other up. So another person said he was there and he got a Navy Cross, and he wasn't even there. But that's all right.

Gibbs: At what point did you know this was part of a much larger—

Mishler: When the sun came up and I saw NVA flags going up all the—because I knew the 1st Armored division was on the other side of the citadel, and I know that the force that came at us was so heavy, and they were not just armed heavily, but they were carrying like explosives and stuff. The guys that we shot in the ditch were all carrying satchel charges, explosive charges, and AK-47s, which were automatic rifles, and they didn't waste fire power like that on just anything. And when we saw NVA flags, especially the bigger ones over by the financial buildings and stuff, and there was one on the bridge too, we knew that we were [inaudible]. We knew that we were in for a longer fight than just that night. That and they fought through the night, and they were still fighting when we got out of the tower. I

think that we fell asleep in the hallway, I think, for a little bit, even though firing was going on at the time. But we ended up staying in the colonel's house in his bed with—he had a big king sized bed, so the three of us went to sleep on the king sized bed. He had white sheets and stuff, and we laid down in there. And I remember in the hallway I looked over at Bob, and he was just filthy because of the gun powder stuff, not just out of the rifles but the RPGs got all sooty and I asked him. I said, “Am I as dirty as you look?” And he said, “Yeah.” So we went, and all three of us looked just like we were coal miners or something. So they told us to get some sleep. So we went, and he pointed us to a room. So we went, and we didn't know if we were supposed to sleep in the bed or not, but we were, you know, they said get some sleep, so we figured that's the place. So all three of us laid in this big bed, and when we did wake up the sheets and pillow cases were just filthy. We still had our boots on. [laughs] I don't know where the CO slept, but he didn't sleep in that bed that night. I can tell you that. That's all I got to say about that.

Gibbs: So the offensive lasted for the rest of the month, but what was the rest of your tour like?

Mishler: Not bad, they sent me to Tan Ky, which was south, to another unit there. Tan Ki had never been hit before, and the night I got there they got hit by mortars.

[01:45:00]

No ground attack, but mortars, and the guys that were stationed there already said I could pack up and leave any time I wanted. [laughs]

Gibbs: Following you.

Mishler: Yeah, but it wasn't too bad. I had a little bit of a problem temper wise, and they wouldn't let me extend again, otherwise I would have extended again. So they said no more Vietnam for this guy, sent me home. Then they said anyone that had a year less to do in the Marine Corps, and if they didn't want to accept a duty station they had then they could get out. And they said anybody that wanted to get out go on the other side of the room, [laughs] and everybody else stay seated. The whole [laughs] whole thing got up and went over on that side of the room. And then we got out, and they—we were still in jungle fatigues and stuff at Camp Pendleton.

So everybody was all spit and polished at Camp Pendleton except for us. You know, there was no sense in even trying to put shoe polish on our boots. And we stuck out like a sore thumb because we had camouflage fatigues. We weren't dressed like everybody else, and we weren't used to saluting officers either. You don't do that in Vietnam. I mean, that's like saying, “Shoot him. Shoot him.” [laughs] You know, it's not a good idea. So we got a little bit of trouble for that, not saluting officers, and they'd yell at us. And we'd tell them, “Hey, I'm sorry.

We just got back from Vietnam, and we didn't salute there for a good reason." And then a lot of them then saluted us, and said, "I salute you and—" But it was funny. You'd go up to, in Camp Pendleton whatever, you'd be in line like at a hamburger place or something on base, and you walk up to the line over in the PX [post exchange], walk up to the line, and people would see you coming, and they'd move out of your way. Big long line, and all of a sudden you were at the front.

And then they tried to get us to pick up things and stuff. We went to sleep underneath the barracks. They were raised up off the ground, and there was a little space in between, so they would say, you know, we have, what do they call it? I don't remember what they call it. There's a word, not PT. Anyway, there's a word for policing up the grounds, picking up cigarettes butts and all that kind of stuff and fixing the Marine Corps grass, which was sand with rake marks in it. So they'd tell us to do that, and we'd go up underneath the building, lay down, go to sleep. And then we were supposed to have a guard at night in the barracks, and we were supposed to take turns taking guard, so we had an alarm clock. And the alarm clock would go off at the end of your shift. You'd wake up, holler, and see who was the next person on shift and throw the alarm clock to them. [Laughs]. And the next guy would set it for two hours, and he'd go back to sleep. So we were unconcerned at the time that they were going to do anything to us, and everybody was a little bit afraid of us anyway thinking, "These guys have been on a combat, so there ain't no telling what he's going to do."

Gibbs: When were you discharged?

Mishler: Nineteen sixty-eight, the end of '68. I spent three years, three months, twenty-three days and eleven hours in the Marine Corps—

Gibbs: You know it exactly.

Mishler: —somewhere around four years in the Army.

[01:50:13]

But it just, it stuck with me. I don't know the amount of time that I—not that I hated it. It gave me a lot, took away a lot for a while, but that was my fault. I allowed it to rob me. I didn't—I think what a lot of people nowadays are doing too is I didn't accept the fact that I needed someone to talk to. I needed someone to help straighten myself out. And I owe a lot of that to Linda, my wife. I made her a promise, and she held me to that promise. And so I spent about three and a half years, I guess, in therapy, and went through a lot of different therapies, and the one that worked the most, I think, was cognizance, and it was a twelve week thing where I wrote down everything I felt and everything. Then I was able to see how my emotions were triggered and how to handle them, feel them more. I think when I first came back I was emotionally dead. I had no—I'd just as soon shoot

you as take you out on a date. To me it made no difference. My temper was way out of hand. And I wouldn't allow myself to get emotionally attached to anything. Number four wife, she was the one that helped me get help. And I, unfortunately, hurt a lot of people in between, especially women, I guess, because I wouldn't allow myself to feel anything. You know, when the relationship got too complicated or too argue-y or whatever I—I'll see you [??]. Worked for everything but the last one. [Laughs]

Gibbs: Do you think that was something to do with as you got older you had more of a need to try and talk about what had happened to you, or were there other things?

Mishler: I think when Linda and I first got married, I think the desire to love somebody, to use that emotion, was the strongest. I looked at marriage totally different. I realized I had spent five years alone before Linda came along, and I thought that a lot of the things that I used to feel had gone away, and the thing was, was that I didn't—I had put myself in the position to feel that or to deal with that problem, so then I thought it was gone because no one had put—there wasn't that road block in front of me. It wasn't there, so I thought that I had no problem. And then we got married, and I wanted that in my life. I wanted a family part of my life. My family isn't necessarily the closest family.

[01:55:02]

We all want to be, but we're all not willing to put in the time it takes until we got older. And I think that age made a difference, but I think the woman that stood with me made more of a difference. She made me desire life, the other part of life. I experienced to the fullest the combat part of life, so called manly stuff. I had already done all that, and I'd been to the extremes of hate and anger, and I wanted something to be soft and nice and laugh, which we do a lot of. But it took a long time to do that, and I think it's harder—well, I think it's easier now, but it's harder for men and women to deal with just the simple fact, even if you don't see any action, just the simple fact of having your world be in a combat zone, and knowing that every beer can, light post, big rock, or anything could end your life. There's a lot of stress that goes with that. And if you spend enough time, and a lot of the young people that are doing it now; they go back for five, six, you know, and if they don't get help, somebody's going to pay for it later. And I don't mean necessarily in violence towards other people, just the loss of them and a lot of happiness. I think it'll affect a lot more people than we realize, children, marriages, relationships with families, all of that. You just can't live through that kind of pressure and not have it effect you in some way. I often thought that I'd like to do some kind of work that way, and to be able to tell people that it's okay. Those feelings are normal. I mean, you don't have to sit there and question yourself of why you feel uncomfortable. You feel uncomfortable because you've lived through some strange stuff, you know. You put your life out there on the edge, and you can't expect to do that and not have some after effect, and now I've heard of young guys that are going on their sixth, seventh tour. You can't expect

him, them to do that and not have an emotional problem. I mean, you got to—you're in those situations you have to expect the fact that the friend that you're standing next to may not be there at any given time. So you don't allow yourself to get that close to them, and you meet someone new, you right away put them on the outside of your protective shield that you have, and you never try to get that close. Sure you have buddies that you fought with and almost died with, and that gives you a closeness, but you don't have that camaraderie with just everybody, and you're not going to be in a firefight or worry about a car blowing up, or whatever, in the states here. So your feeling apprehensive is normal. You don't have to hide it, and I think a lot of it is just voicing the fact. I needed help. I needed someone to tell me it was okay, that having someone close to you was a good thing.

[02:00:10]

I admire people that have friends from high school and even military and stuff, and I have none of that. The friends I have and the family I have now is a very small group, and most of them know me and know when to shut up. Not really, I'm not that bad, but most of them understand, you know, when I do get upset to give me a little bit of space, and I can deal with it.

Gibbs: You said earlier about how attitudes towards Vietnam veterans has changed over that period. I just wondered if you would speak a little bit more to that.

Mishker: When I first came home from Vietnam I was in the San Francisco area, the Haight-Ashbury, the real strong—they were hanging people and stuff in airport bathrooms at the time because they were veterans and stuff. There was a couple of—not that it happened a whole lot, but it did happen, and if you were, you know—and it's not like nowadays where you have a high and tight haircut and you can be right in fashion. I mean, you don't even know. I mean, you have a high and tight haircut in those days, everybody else had shoulder-length hair, and they could pick you out in a heartbeat. A block away. And there was always somebody saying, "You're not in a real war." You know, "You're baby killers." And "No wonder the people are fighting because you're not supposed to be there." And everybody was against you. To be a veteran was not a good thing, people-wise. You see now, I think, it's a twofold deal. I think what happened now is the Iraqi veterans and the guys that went to Kuwait and all the other conflicts, they call them, and really it's war. You can call it a conflict if you want, but when people are shooting at each other it's war. But those guys came home, and they came home as heroes. We came home as more of a malignant group, so then the younger vets started standing up and saying, "Hey, these guys are vets too. It's not just me. It's all vets." Everybody that's shooting at—everybody that stands up for this country is a vet, and they deserve respect. At the very least they deserve respect, you know, and it's not bad to reach out and give them a hand, reach out, just hug one of them, and tell them, "It's okay. You can come home. It's okay." And now people say, "You're a vet?" And they don't—they read the back of my car, and I

have a purple heart on my license plate, and they say, “Thank you for serving.” That’s from the younger vets. Because they came back as heroes we’re now looked at as heroes.

[02:04:13]

[End of OH2059.Mishler_user_file1][Beginning of OH2059.Mishler_user_file2]

Mishler: But it’s hard for Vietnam vets to bridge that gap, to forget everything. I’ve been spit on, thrown things—people threw things at me. I’ve had to throw a few people here and there, because they made me angry. And the angry part is what people remember. The angry part is what—they say, “These Vietnam vets, they were coming back and knocking heads and taking names, and there’s something wrong with them. Have you ever looked at the look on these guys?” And it’s because these guys were trying to hold everything in until some lovechild came along and pushed a little bit too hard. When he was thinking about the wrong thing, when he was thinking about his friend back in Vietnam and you come up and say flower child, baby killer, and it pushed him over. So yeah, he had a funny look on his face because he’s trying to live with something that you don’t see. Understanding, I think there’s more understanding now even though I believe that the United States is going past—I lost my train of thought. But going, you know, the United States is—I don’t know how to say what it is I need to say.

Gibbs: We can come back to it.

Mishler: One thing that happens is I’ve had a stroke, and I know the word, and the word flies around in there. I just can’t grab onto it. But it’ll come back to me in the middle of nothing.

Gibbs: I’m just trying to think. There was maybe just a couple of things. Just to take you back, you actually met up with Frank Doezema’s family?

Mishler: Yeah.

Gibbs: And that was much later on, I presume?

Mishler: Yes, yeah, that was how many years—

Linda: That was 2006, I think.

Mishler: Yeah, 2006, about six years ago, no, six and fifteen—

Gibbs: It’s ten now, ten years ago?

Mishler: Yeah.

Linda: It was at least six years ago, something like that.

Mishler: Yeah, I had tried to find them when I first got back, didn't succeed. I didn't really try very hard. I was told in Vietnam that Bob Robertson was dead, and he had been told the same thing about me.

Gibbs: Oh, so you were split.

Mishler: So we didn't come in contact with each other for many years. Then we went to, on the internet there's a virtual wall, and Frank Doezema's on there, and I was on the site. Actually, my wife was on the site, and she read a letter from Bob's son that was saying that he—did anybody know his dad and stuff. And so Linda wrote him back and said, "Yeah, my husband served with your dad," and stuff. And I thought he was dead. I mean, that's what I was told. So I come to find out the next one that he wrote me, I got this letter, and it was Bob. And he said, "How you doing?" all this, and he'd been doing a lot of research on everything, and there was another person that took credit for what we did even though he wasn't even there.

[00:05:10]

And that showed up on the virtual wall thing. I wrote my account on there, and then Bob Robertson wrote his account, and there was two of us saying a different story than him. Now that post is taken down. So I don't know. Because we wrote a few people and said that this guy's got a medal that he shouldn't have. He's claiming something that he shouldn't. I don't know if that took place or not. I'm not bitter about not getting the medal. It was our job, so we were doing what we were expected to do, what we were trained to do. So those other guys, they could have chosen not to run out to the post, and it would have been fine. Bob and I would have just done it ourselves. What was it? I'm sorry.

Gibbs: Just the family, do you want to take a break or anything?

Mishler: Sure.

Gibbs: You're more than welcome to if you want.

Mishler: Okay, yeah.

[pause in recording]

Gibbs: Okay, good.

Mishler: America's missing a real important lesson because of the Vietnam vets. They're not looking back at the Vietnam vets and saying how much problems they have and bringing that forward and saying these guys—we spent twelve months in

average on a combat zone. Some, a few, spent more than twelve months. Like, I spent two tours. I actually spent twenty-eight months there, and now you're sending guys back that are having five, six, you know. And I think the United States is looking past the Vietnam veterans as far as that goes and the problems that they have, and they're not getting ready for the problems that they're going to have with the vets coming back after six, seven, eight tours. And maybe they've changed something, but I can't see what it would be that they could change to make it easier. I mean, eventually it's going to come back and bite somebody if they're not ready.

I think it should be mandatory that they go through a winding down class. I mean, the idea that they're getting back just as fast as we are. They're in combat one day. Twenty-four hours later they're sitting at home. And most of them can't put the two together. They, "Oh, hi. Bye." You know, hug on each other, and it's great to see the dogs and the farm animals and all that, but—and it's great to have Johnny back, but Johnny's really not back. Johnny physically is there, but there's a deadness in Johnny's eyes. There's something wrong. He can't connect with anything or anybody and "He's just getting used to being home." No, Johnny needs to be talked to. Johnny needs someone he can talk to and not look funny, not be chastised because he has these feelings, or the idea that he wants to speak out or need help controlling his emotions, his anger, you know. He's angry at something, but he doesn't know what it is. And they need to spend more money, I think, in that direction, for the younger vets. I think the older vets like myself, I think they can only go so far because I had to put up with it for forty years before. So it's been burnt in, but I'm still a lot better, and I owe all that to the VA because they took the time, offered me the time to find out what it was, and I took the longest way, the hardest way every time that I could.

[00:10:04]

And it made a difference. It wasn't comfortable. It wasn't a fun thing to do, and I spent a lot of time crying. But now I can at least talk about it and not go off the grid for months at a time. Now it's a couple of days at the most, and it's usually only at a certain time. January, for whatever reason, is hard for me. I just—and I know what the problem is. And I—but it's hard to see past that. I know what it is, but I can't get rid of the feeling in my chest, in my stomach. I get a tightness that's there, and then after this month, then things will get better. And then around Christmas time I'm real good, and everything goes downhill for a couple weeks, but even that I'm getting better at. She knows that I'm a little bit uptight this time of month. I think too with the younger vets, you got to give it to the women who stick it out with these vets, these guys, you know. It's not a one person fight. Linda and I, she went through some of the stuff that I did, the psychological stuff, and it's a fight together. She learned how to see things in me and how to change so that the point gets across, but, you know. Like, we used to live by the airport, and I used to work at night and sleep during the day, and that there were helicopters. And helicopters demand my attention. They're either bringing you

into or out of a bunch of stuff, and it's usually not fun. So I would wake up angry and not know why. I mean, right from the start I would be angry and not have any clue why that was. And then we found out that it's the helicopters, and then what Linda would do is as soon as she'd hear the helicopter she'd remember, and then as soon I woke up she'd say the helicopters were over the house, and I would know that I shouldn't be feeling bad, that I was feeling bad because the helicopters were—it brought back something in my dream world or something. And by then I'd had medication that keeps me from having those nightmares again. I have them. She still deals with me flopping out of bed or yelling things and stuff, but they're not as much, not as heavy, not as long lasting. So that's what I remembered. [Laughs]

Gibbs: So we were about visit to Doezema farm?

Mishler: Oh yeah.

Gibbs: I think that's where we were at.

Mishler: So we had gotten in touch with Bob Robertson, and Bob had been in touch with the Doezema's. And then the English guys came and wanted to do an interview. So we went to Michigan, and the English guys met us there.

Gibbs: And they were from the Discovery Channel?

Mishler: Yeah, the Discovery Channel, yeah. And so we, Bob and I, saw each other for the first time in forty years. I kind of resent that because it had been a lot of years that we could have gotten closer in a totally different surrounding, but there's nothing I can do about it.

[00:15:00]

But Bob and I, it was just like we'd never had been separated; we just—it was still the same humor, the—we laughed a lot, and it was really good to see him. Unfortunately he was sick at the time. He didn't know. But we went to see the Doezema family, and they have been contacted by someone else that sent them a big story. So we told them the truth of what happened. And it was nice. It was sad in a way. I mean, his dad, you know, didn't want to go through it again, but the mother was curious about what was—what happened, what really happened and what was going on. So we sat at the table and just talked. They asked questions, and we answered, and it was really enjoyable meeting with them. We went to their family reunion too. That was fun. They introduced us as—there was a guy that had been to Vietnam with Frank, and all that, so it was real nice to do. And then after that Bob and I were in touch, both of us trying to take away a metal that wasn't deserved through the military channels, and to get our story out to, what's it? There's a writer that—

Linda: [inaudible]

Mishler: Hmm?

Linda: Gil Reza [??].

Mishler: Gil Reza, I think, is writing a book on the Hue Tet Offensive, and he was asking us a bunch of questions and giving us information at the time. And about the year, two years, a year and a half after that I got a phone call from Bob. When he said hi he sounded funny, and he took a long time. “You know, I was just thinking that maybe you could come visit,” and I told him, “Yeah I’ll come visit.” And then I got this weird feeling, and I said, “Bob, are you dying?” He said, “Yeah.” So I went there and spent the last three or four days of his life with him. And he died an hour after I left on an airplane. And I resent the Marine Corps for telling us that—both of us that we were dead already, and I’ll never know why. No one knows why. There was no reason for it. So the one friend that I did have was short lived afterwards because of that. He was with me, or I was with him, however you want to look at that, when it came to closest I come to dying. I can remember another memory, just flashes back in my head every once in a while, things will do that, memories will, and it used to set me off, but now it doesn’t necessarily. I can remember I was in—we were in the tower, and we were fighting and shooting and everybody was shooting at us. I went to change magazines out of the rifle, and I sat down and put my back my up the corner of the sandbags and dropped the old magazine, shoved the new one into it, and I happened to look up, and I was facing the back of the tower.

[00:20:18]

And tracer rounds, you can see when they’re going away from you or going across from you, but you can’t see them when they’re coming right at you. And I remember looking up and seeing all these tracers and stuff going through the tower and hitting a building in the back. And right away I said, “This is something you don’t want to think about.” And turned around and started fighting again. You could hear the bullets going by, but you couldn’t see that they were tracers, and in between every tracer, every two tracers, there was five bullets. They do that, and we do that. It helps keep it on aim.

I don’t know how you’re going to make this all tie together, but that’s—

Gibbs: It’s tied together already. [Laughs] I’m just trying to think if there’s anything else. I don’t have any more specific questions, but if there’s other things that come to mind that we haven’t spoken about that you’d like to have.

Mishler: You know, I—you would think after spending several years of not talking about Vietnam and when the word Vietnam come up turn around and walk away from groups of people so you didn’t have to discuss it or downright lie when they turn

around and say, “Well, you’re about that age that—” And there’s certain places, San Francisco, Haight-Ashbury, that area, and Madison [laughs] has to be another one of those areas, but I have to admit that a lot of them now look back and say, “You know, I’m sorry.” You know, “I blamed you for something this country was doing.” And really why most of us were there was to help the guy next to us out. I mean, yeah, we joined the force to protect the United States, and the United States happened to be there. But we weren’t fighting because of some political mess that was going on or the oil shelf or any of that stuff. We were fighting because Bob was there, because Bobby was there, because Frank Doezema died there, you know, because I was there and hundreds of people like me, thousands. We don’t sit in the White House and make the decisions. We just do the work. And it’s awful to blame a veteran for the troubles that our government gets us into.

And I think there’s an understanding. There was a hurt, I think, that’s starting to heal between the Vietnam vets, and I know that there’s several of them that have said the same thing. You know, the United States better start looking at the guys coming back spending six, seven tours over there because they’re going to need somebody to help. You know, somebody’s got to reach out to them and hang on tight because it’s not going to be easy. You can’t spend that much time in a combat zone and not have something broke, something that’s not normal, because combat’s not normal.

Gibbs: You mentioned that you’re interested in helping out some of the more recent veterans, but have you been involved in veterans organizations?

Mishler: Linda and I, we have talked to a few group people, and they’ve talked about doing something, having me be like a mentor, and I’m interested, and I keep telling them I’m interested, but then it’s kind of like this interview. It took a long time to get to.

[00:25:02]

And that’s basically what happened, and I’m sure that eventually it’ll happen where I’ll take one person under my wing and listen basically, and just tell him it’s okay. You can feel those things. Understand that you’re not sick. You just have a little hiccup in there that someone else doesn’t have, you know, makes you special in a lot of ways but not dangerous other than you’ve done it before. I think most vets need an okay to love somebody or to feel love for somebody, to have the attachment of your children, your wife. I think a lot of wives that divorce these vets, and it’s just as much their fault as it is his. It’s—she didn’t try to get help from the vets, veterans’ centers, and they have a ton of stuff that’s available. You just have to search for it and get it done. And it’s work. It’s hard work. There’s no two ways about that. It’s not going up to the veterans hospital and telling war stories with somebody. It’s laying your heart out, your guts and saying this is it. I don’t understand why something upsets me the way it upsets me. I know it’s wrong, but I can’t help but feel that. Why am I feeling that? And that’s

the big part is the giving of the reason why they're feeling it, and letting them see that, that that's what made the difference with me is the cognizance.

There's thing I witnessed that aren't important for general conversations like this, but dismemberments and things that for conversations they don't get you anywhere. It just increases the sick-vet aspect of things. And if they did it to us than we did it to them. I'm sure atrocities happened. I didn't see any. None of the guys I was with or was in charge of did any that I know of. And if you left them out of your sight long enough for them to do something then it's your fault because they shouldn't have been out of your care. You were told to take care of them, and you need to find out. You need to know where they are and what they're doing. But yeah, if they call and tell me—if they don't call then I'll go up to them. I know a lot of the—I've had a lot of, because of my exposure to agent orange and stuff, I've been to the hospital quite a bit. My lungs are full of tumors, and I've had three toes removed, things like that. That's all folks. [laughter]

Gibbs: Is there anything else that you'd want someone listening to this in the future to know about your service and your life and—

Mishler: I have no complaints. I mean, some of the times are rough. I needed to be taught a lesson.

[00:30:00]

The Marine Corps taught me a lesson. Vietnam taught me some good lessons, let me know where my limits are, what I'm capable of, and I know I'm capable of a lot more than I like to think I am. I think military is something that all young people should do for at least, like Israel, for at least a period of time. Maybe not go to combat, but live in the structure, military structure, I think. When I was younger I had no structure. My mother wasn't strong enough to deal with me. The Marine Corps gave me structure, showed me what I could do, and then put me in a position so I could do what I was shown to do. And it wasn't fun, and it left big scars, but it's easier now that people see me as a vet, not that I'm special, but I'm not the bad person that they thought I was. I'm sure there's other things that was done for me, and that I don't know right off hand, I don't see right off hand, but I know overall, out of all of it, I'm proud that I was in the Marines and the guys I served with. I live in a pretty good country, not that I agree with them all the time. That's about it.

Linda: But there's an honor and an integrity that you carry with you that a lot of people don't have, and I think part of that came from going through what you did. You're the kind of guy that people can count on, and like you said, in the military you didn't leave anybody behind, and that's a big thing, and that's how you make me feel. You know, because of what you went through you make me feel safe because I know I can count on you.

Mishler: Well, I saw more than some but not as much as others. I don't think you can put a number on any of it. It can be five minutes is too long. Two years is just the right amount or in too long. It gave—it does give me the—I don't say I've got your back easily, and I realize what the—for me to say, "I got your back" means even if it goes against me I have your back. I don't turn you in so I can have it easier, and you just don't say it if you don't mean it. It's not easy saying I got your back and I'll bring you home when you got to run across the rice paddy, grab him by the flak jacket and drag him all the way back over the rice paddy because he would die if you didn't, and sometimes he did anyway.

[00:35:08]

But you got five other guys looking that are looking at you saying, "He said he'd bring us home, and he brings us home." You can't put a number or you can't quantify that, you know. You can't. You either do that or you don't. And in those situations you know if you don't because everybody sees. You got to be willing to stand up and do the things that most people wouldn't do because you said you would do that. And I know because of where Uncle Sam put me that I'm one of those people that will go out and do what he has to do even if it's under fire because I said I would do it. Thank you, Uncle Sam's misguided children.

Gibbs: Anything else?

Mishler: I can't think of anything. Of course, I said that last time.

Gibbs: I'll turn it off now, and [laughter; inaudible] next few minutes. Thank you very much.

Mishler: Thank you.

[End of OH2003.Mishler_user_file1] [End of interview]