

CLARK MAYER: USMC “OP. SHUFLY” EARLY ‘65

Clark Mayer: My name is Clark Mayer, M-A-Y-E-R. I'm originally from South Dakota and came out here in 1976 to Hagerstown, and was just going to be there for a short period of time, and loved the way it looked at the time, and just stayed there. I was in Vietnam ... I was in the military from 1963 to 1969, is when I got out.

Speaker 2: What branch and units were you in?

Clark Mayer: United States Marine Corps and was in Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines at that particular point in time, the early phases of the Marine Corps. Later on I was on embassy duty in Paris.

I grew up in South Dakota, a small little place called Hosmer. It's a place that's west of Aberdeen about 60 miles, and it's ranch land. We did produce some small grain, but not a lot, and most of it was used as feed grains. Then we had a lot of alfalfa and a lot of natural grass, and a lot of cattle, beef cattle. Went to school at a place called Hosmer, South Dakota, for 4 years in high school. But I did go, the first 8 years I went to a single room schoolhouse out in the country. That was right at the end of a lane, which was about 3/4 of a mile from my house. In the wintertime, a lot of times we'd ride down there on a horse, and we had stables down there. At night we'd get back on and right back home again. In the summertime and springtime, I should say, springtime and fall, we would, most of the time we would walk. Grew up in a place, Hosmer, South Dakota.

Speaker 2: So you graduated from high school.

Clark Mayer: Yes. Yes. From there put into the Marine Corps in 1963 to 1969. In '64, 1964 I came home on leave, and my father said to me, "Within a year you'll be in Vietnam." I thought, really, all I'd heard from that is the Buddhist monks were pouring gasoline on themselves and lighting themselves on fire. I thought, "Well, I don't think that will happen. It's not much activity at this particular point." So then all of a sudden we had the Gulf of Tonkin, and then the Maddox was fired on by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. As that happened, then it opened up the arena for war.

Speaker 2: Were you from a military family?

Clark Mayer: Yes. My older brother was in the Marine Corps, and my other brother was in the Navy. I really just wanted to be just like my older brother, and

he was a good Marine. So I thought, well, it would be a good path to follow. So I went into the Marine Corps in '63.

What had happened, we were in Japan for cold weather training. We had a mount out. This was right at the beginning of 1965. We had a mount out from Japan. We went from there down to Okinawa. Then to go to Vietnam, you had to have all types of shots, for yellow fever, malaria, all of that, hemoglobin. You had to have all those shots. So we were there for a few days, and then we again mounted out, left at about 11 o'clock at night, and arrived in Da Nang in 1965, January 1965. We arrived at the airfield.

Speaker 2: So that was at the tail end of ...

Clark Mayer: Operation Shoofly was, we would take South Vietnamese military, Army rangers, out to the field, battlefield, and then drop them off and then come back. That was one of the things we did. We would take reconnaissance photos. Another fellow here, Dave Hugel, he was one of those folks that took the reconnaissance photos and developed them, and gave them over to the advisory group at that particular time.

The VC early on were kind of hit and run. They were there just for a short time, a small skirmish, and then they'd be gone. A brief firefight, if you will. After that point, it kind of escalated as the year went on. But we had some other events that took place. After I arrived there also we were perimeter security for the airfield and the compound. Now, the airfield was about 8,000 feet, so it was pretty close to 2 miles. The airfield and the compound, the hangars, were a long ways apart. There were a lot of military aircraft in between, helicopters as well as regular aircraft.

Speaker 2: Now where's the base we're talking about?

Clark Mayer: This is in Da Nang, in Da Nang itself. Right on the southwest side of it, I should say, right outside. What we did also at that point, was our unit went in as just a very small unit. It was about 200 people is all that went in at that particular point. Our battalion didn't go in. We just went in as 1 company, Delta Company. What we did there was get the perimeter. We set up needed security for installation of Hawks, which were missiles, and they were done by the CB's. They would take dozers and doze it out and level it off, put down the pads for the Hawk missiles, which were surface to air missiles. After that we guarded, if there was aircraft that was downed, we would go out and protect that. We would either set up a perimeter around it, and people would come in, some of the mechanics would come in. If they couldn't get it going and fly it back out, they would

strip it out and destroy it. That generally took a very short amount of time. We never left a plane behind. At later times they did. They didn't have the option.

Speaker 2: What was the total population of US forces there in this advisory capacity?

Clark Mayer: Well, US forces I don't know how many were there, but us, there were fewer than 700 there. Out of the security group it was about 200 Marines. We did the security for every ... And we were utility people. We didn't just do that. We moved chemicals. One of the chemicals that you're very familiar with is Agent Orange. There were a lot of other agents as well as that. How that came about was they'd call you out. One time I got a call, as I recall, to go out and help out. So I went over to the hangar, me and another fellow went over to the hangar, moved some of the barrels from a Connex box to the flight line. The flight line was no more than outside the door. That was all controlled and done with Air Force folks. We didn't have anything to do with that. Normally we wouldn't have even done that, but they were short on people. They needed help. So obviously, the Marines picked up the utility, whatever needed to be done. Some of the other agents were White, Pink, Blue, Green, Purple, and obviously the Orange. There were 6, as I recall.

We had 2 different types of security there. We had the outer perimeter was done by South Vietnamese, and the inner perimeter was done by the Marines, just as a part of security. In between us there was a lot of barbed wire, if you will, around the compound, and bunkers. So that was all pretty much in place. But the uses of the chemical agents was mostly taken up to the DMZ area, which was north of us not that far. They could do it by helicopter or plane. Most of the time they did it by plane, going up that distance. Then the closer ones, in and around rivers and streams, they used helicopters for that.

Pretty much to teach them how to fight. A lot of them didn't have the proper training. We were not part of that fighting group. Unless you were fired on, the rules of engagement had you did not fire unless you were fired upon, at the early stages. Later stages it was a little bit different, to where we changed to search and destroy missions, and then you would fire whenever you saw people with ... You had to have cause. You had to have arms of some sort to be able to fire on them.

They didn't have the training. Just a story here as a byline. The South Vietnamese were shorter people. The UH34, one of the helicopters that was part of that theater at that point in time, were about to my navel,

perhaps, and I'm not a real tall person. But nevertheless, the South Vietnamese were a little bit shorter. Then if you have a 40-pound pack on, you cannot get on the helicopter. So we used to have what was called load masters. They would push people up and also off the aircraft. Then somebody, it finally dawned on them, we should just build a bar that goes on the bottom that's like a step stool. It was perfect. It worked very well. It was there permanently, and it worked very well. That's how that came about.

At that particular point in time, they were using pretty much leftovers of what the American government was not using. French rifles, they might have had some, but most of the Vietcong had them. They didn't have that, but they had M1's, a lot of M1's. They had a lot of carbines, because they were smaller people, so they couldn't really support a bigger rifle at that time either. Because an M1 is a lot larger than a 30 caliber carbine. So that was one of the things that they had done.

Speaker 2: Did you get involved in any personal instruction yourself?

Clark Mayer: Well, the instruction was not so much as it was tactics. They all knew how to fire the weapons, and so on, so it wasn't so much teaching that. It was pretty much getting them to places, showing them where to go and what they had to do to correctly fight and to block and so on, exactly what to do strategically, not so much hands-on, if you will. A lot of them had ... Well, they obviously had their own interpreter. But they had the dogs, and the dogs were very important. The dogs a lot of times early on would go into the tunnels where people didn't have to go. So they went in after the VC at times, if you had a dog in your group, and if you didn't then you had to figure out another way to go into a tunnel.

That term came, obviously, from the Army probably. I don't recall ever having heard that. We were not that discriminatory to pick on small people.

Anybody went. If you were in a group and you had to go down there, you just had to do it. I personally never went into one of the tunnels.

Speaker 2: Down there?

Clark Mayer: They had several squadrons. First of all, I think they only had 1 initially, but that was only for a very short time, like a 2-week period of time. Things happened very, very rapidly. HMM 163 was there, and then I believe it was followed by 162, HMM 162.

Speaker 2: What does that stand for?

Clark Mayer: That stands for Helicopter Medium, medium-sized helicopter. Then when you get into the A's, you get into attack helicopters.

You couldn't do it. You could not do it. They experimented with motorcycles. I was never part of that, but I know they had some motorcycles there at one point trying to see if they could help get out quicker to some of the areas. They experimented with amtrax. Amtrax were too heavy when they got to the rice paddies. They sunk in. Ontos, which was a large, 6-gun, moving cannon, if you will, that also was a little bit too heavy. At the same time, the person that designed that, the cannons were all around the outside of the carrier itself, so that whenever a person had to get out to reload, you'd have to go through the hatch in the back. It didn't make much sense to go outside and then load up and then go on to drive to your next target. But I think the initial design for that was to be a stationary type of device in the rear area to where you could fire, but they tried that in the field as well. That didn't work. That was not successful.

We did have tanks. We just did not use them in the field, or anything that I was involved in. It was never there. Now, they were part of the airfield. They were outside of the airfield. They were there for security at that point, and then later moved out as we moved out. But I don't recall any on any operations, any mechanized vehicles, as a matter of fact, other than sometimes a truck would take us out or pull us back in from an area. Other than helicopters. We pretty much flew in and out everywhere.

Yes, indeed. The whole purpose of that was when we landed at the Red Beach, moved on inward, and the places that needed to be secured were Hill 327, which was right southwest of Da Nang, and Hill 268, I believe it was, and that was right behind on the west side. Many, many times the Vietcong would throw down mortars from the top of those hills. They were never secured, other than the South Vietnamese. They just didn't do a good enough job for us, so we ended up taking those. But we had to dispel those troops anyway somewhere. So it was a very secure area, and it went out quite a distance.

So that in later time, at the beginning of July, I'm just going to jump ahead a little bit, we had people that came in. They were sappers that came in. We didn't have mortar fire that came in and destroy aircraft.

Speaker 2: Tell everybody what a sapper is.

Clark Mayer: A sapper is a North Vietnamese ...

Speaker 2: Say it again without the ...

Clark Mayer: Sapper.

Speaker 2: Say it without ... I'm stepping on you. I don't want to get my voice. It's just going to be your voice.

Clark Mayer: A sapper is a Vietcong that is part of a suicide squad. They'd just run in. They'll pull a cord. They'll have a pack on their back, pull it, and it'll explode. It was not electronic, as things are today. It was everything was just pull it. Then sometimes they would take that pack off, if it was a CP, a command post, pull that cord and throw the satchel in, and then it would explode and they'd still be around. But most of the time they were suicide squads.

Speaker 2: Did they crawl under the concertina wire?

Clark Mayer: Well, they got through a couple different ways. They'd blow their way through sometimes. Most of the time they would get in somehow past checkpoints, and get in, and then once they were in that would happen. But it only happened 1 time in July, 1st of July is when they came in. I think they destroyed 6 aircraft at that point. They pulled them off the airfield at that point, and then they stripped out whatever they could again, of all the aircraft that was damaged, and then took control of it, and then cut up the aircraft.

I don't think it was so much of a surprise as like the IED. That was something we had as well. With that, they were very innovative.

Speaker 2: Of course, it was mostly called booby trap in Vietnam, was it not? As opposed to IED?

Clark Mayer: That's correct. It was pungee stakes most of that time.

Speaker 2: Tell us what that is.

Clark Mayer: A pungee stake is a bamboo shoot that's been cut down and sharpened, and has a very sharp edge and cutting edges. With that, they would put on different types of ... feces they would put on it to infect you if you did step into it. So it was long after you were out of it that it would hit you. But most of the time they took care of that with antibiotics. There was another type of pungee stake, besides the ... Well, there were several of

them. Another one was the steel spike. At the end of the steel spike, coming back towards the ground, away from the pointy surface, was almost like a fish hook type of device that would hook you.

If you stepped into that, you couldn't just say, "Well, okay, I'm going to pull out of this. I know I'm hurt." You would have to figure out how to dig that whole thing up and get out of there, and get out of there alive. Because a lot of times they were close enough together so that if you stepped in one, you would be in a couple of different ones. If you tried to pull back out of there in a hurry, you would just rip the flesh away and really injure yourself. There was nobody that I knew that stepped into that. We had 1 that went into a bamboo pungee trap, but never a steel trap.

There's 1 more that was a hanging one. That was about 2 to 3 foot long. That was suspended by ropes up into a tree, along an avenue of approach, a path, if you will. On the outside of that, it would have a couple of pungee stakes in there, perhaps 3, perhaps 4 on 1 side. If it missed you the first time, it came back. It would get you on the way back. Most of the time, in the daytime you never had to worry about those things. But if you were on patrol at night, going out, setting up an ambush, you had to be very wary of something like that, and make sure that you didn't hit any trip wires to set the process in motion.

Pretty much everything was trip wire based, trip wire and also explosives in the ground as mines. You had to be very careful. A lot of times, if you had an avenue of approach, you had to be extremely careful. If you were out in the plain, very rarely, if you were separated, would you run into any issues. If you did, at that point, you would then follow a trail. But out in the open, you never really had that issue.

I think it was probably more than it probably should have been. I don't know how the media ... Well, the media gets ahold of everything, I guess, at 1 point in time. But it was a free for all, but it didn't last very long. Not too many of the rank and file, if you will, talked to the press. I think it was just mostly the brass. We just went and did what we had to do and kept on moving.

Speaker 2: How did your role change when now we have combat troops over there, and you were prior into more of an advisory role?

Clark Mayer: Well, that was pretty easy to slip into that, because that was a role that we had been accustomed to. Again, there we were still utility people, because there were only 3 battalions there at that particular point in

time. By the way, the Army was originally supposed to be one of the people that went in there, a group that went in there. It was the 173rd Airborne Brigade. They decided that that was too much SNAP and crackle, coming in from the air with the parachutes. They really didn't need all of that. So the marines were more self-sustaining, so they just brought people in by way of sea and air at that particular point in time. It was a lot less. We had our supplies right there. We had everything right with us. So it's a lot different than the 173rd would have been.

Speaker 2: How did they arrive?

Clark Mayer: I don't know how they arrived, but they were in Central Vietnam later, because we were primarily in the I Corps area, which is the northernmost provinces. They were somewhere in the Central. I had read about them years ago being in central highlands somewhere. Ours extended down just to the edge of the central highlands, the I Corps area, and the 5 different provinces.

We'd go up with support. We'd call it reinforced. So reinforced means bringing everything with you. We had from cooks to, gosh, to armory people involved in the rear area at that particular time, as support people. So we had about 5,000 people total when we went there. Not only that, we just made the transition, and from Shoo Fly, when that happened, on that day, Shoo Fly ended. Then we went into the Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines. Going back to when I first arrived, it had more of an effect on me at that point in time. When I first arrived, we got into the mess hall, and this is under Shoo Fly. Got into the mess hall. We had fantastic food. We had steak about once a week. It was great. But we didn't have it very long.

My initial evening that I went into the mess hall, I was sitting across the table across from some folks that were in camouflage uniforms, and different utilities, and some dressed in black. I wondered what they heck, what might they be and what do they do? I looked around, and all of them had the best armor that you could possibly think of. They had the Swedish K's, which were 9 mm weapons. Some of them had Thompson machine guns that were the 45 caliber. In close battles, if you will. Some of them, 1 of them had a grenade launcher. All of them had fragmentary grenades. Who was paying for that? I don't know and never asked them the question. I was kind of afraid of them.

They were mean looking people. But they were from their early 20s to early 30s. They were mercenaries from different countries. You could hear it in their speech. They tried to speak English, and then if not they

would relate to mostly French, because they had to speak French, and you could speak French in the countryside, and a lot of people understood it.

When I first arrived also we were slated to take French lessons so that we could communicate a little better. Because they had already doing the Vietnamese lessons. Slated to take French lessons. But that never really got off the ground. We were shuffled along to something else. Things happened so rapidly when I arrived. But I just wanted to tell you that about the mercenaries coming in. I thought that that was quite interesting.

Never felt comfortable with them. If they were out in the field, it was always what if. You always had to be very careful. I really didn't place a lot of ... I shouldn't say trust, but that's the word that comes up. I did not feel comfortable with them at all. I don't think anybody in our group did. So we just took care of ourselves and looked out for ourselves, and made sure that we never got involved with any South Vietnamese in that sense.

When the country split up, the South was not able to send the men, at that time they were called Viet men, not Vietcong, back to the North. They let them settle in the South. In that, they already had a force. They had knowledge of other people, other forces. The Vietcong that were in the South, that were left behind, knew absolutely everything about the countryside, just as if they were native. They did not have to leave. So in that regard, they were always a danger. So you didn't really know who to trust at that point. So you looked out for yourself.

In April we were the first unit to go on an air assault into the field, as all Americans, and they were all Marines at the time. It entailed 3 companies. We went out. We had 2 of them that kind of drove people through the countryside, and then we as a Delta Company, we were doing the blocking. We had very little result in that. It didn't yield a lot. So it wasn't very successful. But the point was, we were the first ones in the field by the helicopter. The Army will dispute that.

Speaker 2: So that was H34. The UH1 had not made it's appearance yet. Is that correct?

Clark Mayer: That's correct. That's correct. It wasn't until the summer that the UH1 had come onto the scene, and we didn't have very many rides in it. The Army had most of that. We seemed to get things secondhand, the Navy and the Marine Corps. But at any rate, the UH34's, they were very, very

good in the field. I mean, it took a lot to bring down one of those helicopters.

Well, we had what they call the small Piper Cubs that would go out and do reconnaissance. Then they'd take the photos that they took back. A lot of times you didn't need, you didn't have to have photos. You could see them on the ground, and then they would call in air strikes from naval gunship fire, or from regular artillery. Most of the time it was artillery. Early on it was from ships. Then the other ones were aircraft that they would deploy, and then they would do some bombing runs at that particular point.

I personally didn't see that. We didn't get to go to the rear area. The only way you got to go to the rear area is if you had to go to the medical or dental. That just didn't really happen anymore. We couldn't get back there. We kept going once we hit Hill 327. We kept pushing out southwest of Da Nang. When we finally left, we had a perimeter set up 17 miles southwest of Da Nang. The area in between then we had, it was pretty well secured with different battalions along the way, but as that grew in size, more and more people kept coming in. When I first arrived, there were fewer than 700 Marines. When I left, there were 38,000 Marines. That might have even been higher than that. But some of the reports that I have read, I didn't know but I found out later that it was 38,000 Marines.

Speaker 2: Are they starting to go out and establish fire bases in the outer ...

Clark Mayer: Well, they had perimeters set up, and they did patrols. That's how you really find out where the enemy is and what it's doing, and how to protect yourself.

They too went out on operations, but never with us as an integrated group. They would go and do some protection on 1 side and another. But we stayed together as a group. We never intermingled when we did our operations. It was go pick those people up, drop them in. Helicopters would drop them in. Then they would come pick us up, drop us in. Then it would pick up perhaps another battalion of South Vietnamese, drop them in. But never together. And kind of kept it separate. Again, we were kind of looking out for ourselves first, for the best of everybody, but nevertheless, ourselves first.

We were very positive at the beginning. We had a few things that happened that kind of had a negative impact on people back home, even

at that early stage. As it turned out, when we left, we had done a pretty good job with what we had available to us.

Speaker 2: So you were doing search and destroy missions even in those last 6 months that you were there?

Clark Mayer: Absolutely. Absolutely. They became more and more dangerous, if you will. More and more VC were found, discovered in the fly overs. Then when we were sent it, we would go after those folks. A lot of times we found them. A lot of times we didn't. A lot of times we'd been out on night patrols, once we had a perimeter established out in those areas. They proved to be pretty fruitful, for small groups going out. We did that, and it kept escalating as time went on, with people and the intensity, and the duration sometimes. At first we had just brief skirmishes, some sniper fire here and there, and then later on we had full head-on with automatic weapons that they had. It stands to reason that they would have something like that as well as we had. But it just took a while to get into place.

One of the things, going back to the IED if I could, one of the things that they did where they were pretty ingenious, they would hook up a trip wire to an IED that was not electronically controlled. What they would do is if they had found some of our mortar rounds, if you will, we had 81's. They did not have that size or that capacity to use that particular piece. So what they would do with that would be to wire it, trip it when either people were near, or have a self-tripping wire, one or the other, and that would kind of take care of that. If there were any other ordinance that were not a size that they could use, they would use them as IEDs.

Early on it never had that much of an effect. The significance of it really wasn't there at the start. But as time went on, after I left Vietnam, you could see a turning point, to where people really didn't care anymore, and I kind of coincided with what was happening in the United States. A lot of these people were being drafted at that particular point. They didn't really want to be there. So you have a lot of issues going on there at the same time, and now try to put them into a country and try to secure it. We kind of went backwards a little bit at that particular point in time. Everybody was still watching out for the next guy, but still not as ... not with as much gusto as before.

Unfortunately, we were on the second patrol. They had stepped off and gone directly across some rice paddies. In that they came across some Vietnamese that were in the brush. It started out with small arms fire, but it ended up with a lot of automatic gunfire. We, at that particular

point had stepped off into a creek down the back side on the Song River. We were coming up the other side. We never made it up there in time for that all to take place. When you're going through a creek with large rocks, you cannot get out of there very quickly. So by the time we got up there, we saw some of the helicopters come in and leave at the same time. There were probably around 15 or 20 of us in that group. We just cleaned up, was what we did when we arrived there. Then we were lifted out as well.

But that took place almost on a daily basis, we had that happen. But not as many that particular day. The reason it comes out, we had more losses that day than we ever had, whether it was by KIA or WIA. That day was the largest.

Speaker 2: And a lot of them were simply the men running to a little rock point in the middle of the rice paddy, and sure enough, they had it booby trapped.

Clark Mayer: Yes. That was our 3.5 rocket launcher fella. He ran right dead into a booby trap and was totally demolished. He died within minutes. He ... He was a pretty good friend. At any rate, he passed away there. He said some Hail Marys and died.

Speaker 2: Obviously, you're trained to stay away from areas like cemeteries, etc., where you might go for shelter in the midst of ... But I guess when you're under gunfire it's hard to remember all the things you've got to think of when you're being fired upon, to be also looking for trip wires.

Clark Mayer: Well, at that point in time, he didn't. There's not much you can do to prevent that, unless you have several different sets of eyes. You cannot see all of the things that are coming on down around you. You're just dealing with what you see at hand, and with a reasonableness of looking around and challenging whatever you have to overcome. That didn't happen with him that day. It could have been very well disguised as well, as most of them are.

After I left the country, went back to Okinawa, and from Okinawa back to stateside, and then took up my next orders and they were right there in California. Within a month or 2, I was asked if I might be interested in becoming an embassy Marine. So at that point I said, "Oh, sure. But I only have 6 months left of my time. I will extend if I pass the school." The school was 3 months of education in Washington. I said, "I'll do that." So I did. I passed it. So okay, my extension went into effect. I went to Paris. I was originally slated for Bogota, but something came up. My clearance

hadn't come through yet, and I had to wait another 2 weeks, and then I was off to Paris.

I went there. Original tour was 2 years. What had happened in '68 was the Paris Peace Talks came in. At that point, that's where I had met my wife. Paris Peace Talks came in and then they needed more people at that point. I was supposed to be gone at that point, out of there. Then I was extended at that point at the convenience of the government, and stayed on until January of 1969, is when I left Paris and came back to the United States. But then I got out.

Speaker 2: Not a bad place to have ...

Clark Mayer: It was excellent. Excellent. I did mind that at all.

Speaker 2: Is your wife French?

Clark Mayer: No, she isn't. She was State Department at the time, and that's how we met.

Speaker 2: Great place to have a courtship.

Clark Mayer: Exactly. We were ... I lived about a block and a half from the Eiffel Tower. As beautiful as it is, when we had to go to the embassy, we had to pass there, and in the summertime with all the traffic, people, pedestrians, and so on, we used to just be upset going through that area, because people would just kind of stroll across the street and so on, and you had to take your time going through there and getting to the embassy at that point. But it was a great duty station.

I think we should have won it, but we didn't go about it the same way as the Korean War, or even World War II. They had objectives. They had clear-cut perimeters at all times. They knew where the enemy was. In Vietnam, you never did. They could have been everywhere. Like I mentioned earlier, the Viet men that had stayed behind in the south when they split that country up, they had a lot of control down there. Some of them were heads of police stations and so on. Now how you deal with those folks, it's not quite so easy.

At the end, I felt relieved that we were finally out of it. Because the mood of the country was so far to the left as far as ... You couldn't go out and ... I was even kind of ashamed to say that I had been there at that particular point in time. Then, you know, as time went on, maybe a couple years after that, that all changed. I felt proud of what accomplishments we had

done at that particular point in time. Because when we left there, everything was pretty secure. Then it went downhill, as I had mentioned, with the drafting of people that didn't really want to be there, and then the campuses, like Kent State. When that happened, that really just seemed to break it all loose at that point, to where there was no ... You had to end it. You just had to end it. I was, like I had mentioned, just relieved that it was finally over.

But you know, I was from Vietnam before it was popular to be from that place. So I'll always stick to that.

Well, it was scary at the time. But in looking back on it, I think it helps you realize, hey, don't take life that seriously. Because your life was right at the edge of somebody's finger, if you will. It just didn't select you that particular day. I think about that often. For people that say, well, okay, just as a sideline, people that say, "I don't believe in God," you haven't been shot at enough times. You'll be a believer if you get shot at. Guarantee it.

They were regular Army units, so I assume that they were a mixture of draftees and also volunteers.

Oh, I was always ... To search and destroy, once we got on those missions, it was always to try to get the enemy, flush them out from wherever they are, and believe it or not, to capture them and get as much information from them a possible. Most of the time that was not possible, because most of the time they were hit and run. They would be there 1 minute. The next minute they'd be gone. So even if you wounded some in shooting them, they would get up. They would grab them and take them and put them in their spider hole so you didn't know where they were, a lot of times. But if you found them ... In 1 instance we caught up with 3 of them, and a fellow threw a grenade in and killed all 3 of them. Now most of the time they have little corners that you go around so that if something like that happens you'll not kill them. Well, as it turned out, they didn't even have time to go rush around with their rifles and stuff trying to get through there, because the holes were quite small, and took care of them.

Speaker 2: You said that it sort of became a media set-up.

Clark Mayer: Well, the media had talked to this one Marine and talked him into lighting a thatched hut with his lighter. Anybody that's been in the country long enough knows that that's probably, you can get the job done, but it would be a hard long way to do it. Then the press went

ahead and filmed that, him doing that. I have seen some pictures of it. There's mention of it in 1 of the books that I brought down here. He went ahead and tried to light that hut on fire. As he did that, they were taking pictures of him. Anybody that's been there some time knows that ... I was a machine gunner at that point. All you had to do was, if you found a VC outside of a hut, all you needed to do was fire on that hut with a burst of ammunition. About every fourth or fifth round was a tracer, and you would light up that hut, or anything behind that if it went through there. So that was kind of a fallacy.

But when that came to the United States, that had a profound effect on the public. I even got a letter from my folks asking me, "What's going on here? Is that how you guys do that?" The answer was, "Absolutely not." That was something that kind of turned, if you will. At that early stage, that was in July or August of 1965, is when that happened, and a fellow that was just coming on shore, just got into country.

I don't think that, we were never arbitrarily burning down houses. That was never the case. I don't know what their point was. I think it was probably a set-up in the sense that they really didn't want the American's there, meaning our own Americans. Here's a good clip that we can use at the 6 o'clock news. By golly, it worked. But that's not how ... The people that were there knew that that's not how you do things. You didn't do that.

Speaker 2: Although wasn't there a term that was associated with the name of the lighter for this?

Clark Mayer: Zippo. Zippo lighters is what was used at that particular point, yes.

Speaker 2: And they called that action Zippoing a hooch?

Clark Mayer: You know, I don't think so. I really don't know the answer to that, but not to my knowledge.

Speaker 2: Was there something else you wanted to say?

Clark Mayer: Yes, there is one other thing. This was earlier on, when we were security for the airfield. We had gone down there 1 night, and there were several people standing around this aircraft, sentries if you will. Went down there and there were 2 helicopters. I hadn't seen helicopters like that before in my life. Most of them were the UH34's. The new Bell that the Army had were setting on the other side of the field. Here were these 2 helicopters. One of them was where the passenger was sitting down

lower, and 1 right behind him a little bit higher in the rear. It was a very narrow, like a small car. You could see out of both sides. The view as tremendous, had to be tremendous in there.

Everything was locked up. We couldn't go in it. They were painted completely black. We didn't know who they belonged to or whether they were Army. We knew they weren't Marine Corps at that point in time. They were probably, what we suspected later was prototypes of the attack helicopter, the Huey Cobra. It had cannons on both sides, and then mini guns on both sides. So that had to be a devastating plane. Both of them together like that, with that much fire power, had to be an ace.

Speaker 2: That was the new GE 2000 round per minute?

Clark Mayer: That's correct. The mini gun. It's a GA. It started out that way. That's correct.

Speaker 2: Interesting. That's right. They made their appearance in Vietnam.

Clark Mayer: They made it then, yes.

Speaker 2: They were pretty ferocious attack ...

Clark Mayer: They did put them on other helicopters as well at that point, you know, once they saw how successful it was. Then the rockets as well. First of all, initially when Shoo Fly just came down there, they didn't have machine guns on them. They developed those as time went on. In '63 they put them on a crew chief side. In 1964 they thought, "Well, okay. We've got 1 over here. We need to balance this out and put 1 on the other side." So they put 1 on the opposite side as well. That would be the area where, if you didn't have anything to do, or you were in a rear area, you would be called on to go ahead and man that particular machine gun. The other 1 was the crew chief. You were never part of the crew. You were always a volunteer, if you will, or a person that was sent in out of necessity to man that opposite side machine gun.

Exactly. Exactly. That and the M60 proved to be very, very powerful. Then later on, the mini guns.

When I first arrived there, we had ... Our battalion commander had instituted a machine. He established a Jeep with an M60 mounted on the back. We used that for transport to and from the listening post. The compound was about 3 miles from the airfield. So we hauled dignitaries back and forth at different particular times. Then sometimes you'd get

sniper fire from outside the perimeter. Whenever that happened we would fire back, because we were fired on first. That was quite a weapon. We would take ... We had the commandant there at 1 point, transported him, Maxwell Taylor, Westmoreland. We had all those people in there that we transported. We had 2 of those machines, and there were 4 people. We would rotate and constantly be patrolling around the area on that. Sometimes we had to go very fast, as fire came in, and get out of the fire, get out of the line of fire. But that was an interesting sidebar that whoever thought you'd do something like that. But it was interesting and challenging.

Speaker 2: Did we not have 30 caliber machine guns in World War II?

Clark Mayer: We did. We had water cooled and air cooled. But the water cooled came from the World War I. The air cooled were from World War II, and they were 30 caliber. Then NATO went to 7.62, so they were interchangeable with other weapons in the NATO arena.

Speaker 2: But the big boy was still the 50 caliber?

Clark Mayer: Oh, yes. Yes. Very, very ...

Speaker 2: But that was pretty much ...

Clark Mayer: You had to have a lot of respect for that one.

Speaker 2: You needed a big vehicle to mount that on.

Clark Mayer: That's correct. It had a slower cyclic rate of fire. But it was very devastating, because it took a while for that shell to get in there and out of there. With the M560, it was between 650 to 550. 550 was the rate at which you'd fire most of the time. Then the 50 caliber was a lot slower than that. That was probably around 300-350, because it was such a big piece. But it was very effective. Whatever it hit, it took care of. It could go through the block of an engine in a heartbeat from miles away, a mile away. Not miles away, because you couldn't see it.

Speaker 2: All right, Clark, I think we got it. Very good. Thanks.

Clark Mayer: Very good.