

MIKE CLOSE

Our Neighbors, Our Heroes: Forest Park Veteran's Oral History Project

NC: OK, today is August 27, 2019, and I am Nancy Cavaretta for the Forest Park Historical Society Oral History Project interviewing Mike Close. Good Morning Mike!

MC: Good Morning!

NC: Mike could you provide your date of birth?

MC: April 5, 1945.

NC: Thank you. And do you currently live in Forest Park?

MC: Yes.

NC: How long have you lived here?

MC: Since, I think, '92.

NC: Oh, a long time! Where are you from originally?

MC: Originally I grew up in a very small town in California called Kettleman City, in the San Joaquin Valley; a town of 300 people.

NC: In what branch of the military did you serve?

MC: Army.

NC: Where did you take your basic training?

MC: I took my basic at Fort Hood, TX. I took my AIT at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

NC: Now just for our listeners, explain AIT.

MC: Advanced Individual Training for aircraft mechanics.

NC: After AIT, where did you serve?

MC: Vietnam. When I got to Vietnam the lieutenant and the sergeant took me out and gave me training on the 50 caliber machine gun and the M60, so I was pretty much familiar with most of the weapons we had and what Viet Cong had.

NC: So that was on the job training then with those two weapons.

MC: Yeah, pretty much on the job. You know, we'd go out to the field every once in a while just to keep ourselves familiar with them.

NC: So, after your Advanced Individual Training, then from there you were sent to Vietnam, correct? And then where in Vietnam were you?

MC: Yes. I served in Da Nang. I was in a non-combat unit.

NC: How old were you when you, first of all, you were drafted I'm assuming. Correct? How old were you at the time?

MC: Yeah. I was 21 when I went and 22 when I came back from Vietnam. So, I was actually about a year older than the rest of them.

NC: Basically, you were kids. So, these years that you served were from 19...

MC: I was drafted in December 9, 1965 and I got out June 11, 1969.

NC: 4 years-wow!

MC: About 3 ½.

NC: That was long, that was longer than the usual deployment wasn't it?

MC: Well, I re-enlisted. I couldn't say I re-enlisted because I was drafted I wasn't listed the first time, so I kind of enlisted after my draft, so that's how I get up to that.

NC: Why did you do that?

MC: I have no idea why! But I only spent a year in Vietnam. I spent some time in Germany.

NC: Was that after Vietnam, or before?

MC: After

NC: So what was your job over there?

MC: Artillery, I belonged to an artillery unit. It was kind of the same in Vietnam. I was both a clerk and a mechanic and I had to keep records of artillery, and rounds, and stuff like that.

PERIMETER GUARD:

NC: Where were you in Vietnam and what was your first experience?

MC: Da Nang. We had to pull perimeter guard because when we first got to Vietnam there wasn't too much of a build-up. We would pull perimeter with usually 3 Army and 2 Marine units. The Marines were there to keep us from getting killed because we were just

mechanics. Sometimes the locals would have too much of the local beer. They'd form their own vigilante group and decide they were going to go out and shoot a few Americans. So you would go into the jungle sometimes even amongst the rice patties and you would hear a mess of gibberish out of the bushes. Then you'd hear a few gunshots and the locals would run off and you wouldn't know where they went. But the Marines were there at the time to tell us to keep in the shadows, to keep in the foliage, change our pace every once in a while.

NC: Did you feel protected by their presence and their advice?

MC: Pretty much. They knew what they were doing. We didn't know what we were doing.

NC: Besides with the locals, were there other dangers you faced?

MC: Pretty much! Yeah, every once in a great while, one of the little skirmishes would turn into a regular firefight, not so much into a big battle but primarily to firefight. I remember one time the Marines had to bring in a gunship. There were only 5 of us, so we needed back-up real quick. We were in small groups and we replaced each other as we went along. The Marines told the group ahead of us to stay where they were and not to come for support because Viet Cong might try to out-flank us. Going out into the field only lasted about 4 months and then it got so built up that the perimeter increased and other units took the responsibility of the perimeter. In one firefight, one Marine was wounded pretty bad and that was about the worst of it.

NC: So your unit's job there was to patrol the perimeter? You also said something about being a mechanic too.

MC: That was my main job as a mechanic, but when we first got there, it was still building up. So we had to keep the perimeter clear and that's why they stuck the Marines with us. The Marines had better training for that.

NC: Was it security for yourselves because there were no lines right?

MC: No, it was for the runway that ran east and west. On the south side of the runway there was nothing! The Vietnamese sympathizers and the Viet Cong would sit out there and snipe at us every once in a while. I knew these people had AK 47's that weren't really good sniping weapons.

ASSISTANT GUNNER AT GUARD TOWER:

NC: Did you have weapons training too in your camp?

MC: Oh yeah! I was an assistant gunner at a guard tower. I had to know the 50-caliber machine gun inside and out. I also had to know the M60 inside and out. Well, the M60 was pretty basic. When we'd get mortared, I'd go up, I'd try to get to the tower and this might sound odd, but once I was in the tower, I felt pretty safe because I know that the VC were trying to mortar the planes and the equipment, or maybe a bunker. But, I knew if they were going to knock down the tower, they were going to try and overrun the base. I knew there weren't enough to overrun the base, and I knew if they tried to aim for the tower, that would cause more commotion than they wanted.

NC: So, you did feel that the tower protected you, rather than being a target for them?

MC: Yeah because I knew if they were going to knock down that tower all hell was going to break loose. Because they don't want that tower around if they are going to try to infiltrate.

NC: Infiltrate.

MC: Yeah, infiltrate. But what struck me as kind of odd was that there was a 50-caliber machine gun up there in the tower which is a heavy weapon. The M60 is much smaller and lighter. It seemed to me to be more practical to have an M60 up there even though it

didn't have the range. A 50-caliber round would literally blow a man in half. But all you have to do is stop them. And with the M60, you'd get out many more rounds and more accuracy. It doesn't have the range of a 50-caliber but you don't need that much range anyway up there.

NC: Right, they're close enough.

MC: They are close enough, so I'd much rather have had a 60 than a 50 but luckily I never had to use it.

NC: So you were pretty confident in your training before you were set up in that position.

MC: Yeah, I was up in Da Nang where the Marines were at. But, people think that the Marines and the Army is the same, but they're not.

NC: No, the Marines a branch of the Navy!

MC: Yeah, but I mean just even the tactics and everything are completely different. When the Marines went into Baghdad that was the furthest inland combat unit, a Marine combat unit, had ever gone. I mean, they station Marines at embassies and that and they might get a thousand miles from shore. There are Marine units everywhere but combat units don't go too far inland.

NC: Away from the danger.

MC: But whenever it comes to combat units, Marines are there to clear out an area near the shore because at one time you didn't have planes to fly you so you had to go by ship. And so, the Marines would land by ship and they'd take as much area as they could and then clean up the area after. After the Army landed, it's such a huge unit, it cleans up as it goes because the Army is there to stay.... That's why the Marines were in North Vietnam because it was a real narrow strip there. When you get into South Vietnam it winds out.

We were an Army aviation unit and we spotted artillery for the Marines. Sometimes the Marines also used the navy gun ships. I thought it was kind of odd that we are an Army aviation unit spotting for Marines. First off, the Army is not aviation, and the Army's not the Marines. (Laughter)

NC: It's kind of hard to understand how they join those branches sometimes.

NAVY HOSPITAL:

NC: So Mike, what came next?

MC: They had a Navy Field Hospital right next to us and they'd bring in the wounded Marines. A few of us would always run out to the tarmac to help bring them in. The first one I saw had the whole bottom of his foot blown off and there was just raw bone and some of the calf meat kind of flopping around. They had 2 tourniquets on it-one was a regular tourniquet you get in a first aide kit and that and the other one was a make-shift tourniquet. One was above the knee and the other was below the knee. That got me more than anything because you bring in these guys and I'm not a medic which is Army and I'm not a corpsman which is Navy. Some wounds are not life threatening but they're extremely painful and you hear this person crying out in pain and someone next to him is actually bleeding out, he's numb, he can't say anything! And you don't know if you made the right pick or not!! That's always bugged me to this day whether or not I made the right pick!

NC: Oh my goodness! Whether you made the right pick.

HUMOR AND CHANGING THE FOCUS:

NC: That was an intense start to set up the perimeter, then guarding the tower and the Marine medical involvement. How did you guys relieve some of the pressure?

MC: OK, we had a platoon in Da Nang that was in a Quonset hut. You know what a Quonset hut is? Enlisted men had billets there which were the sleeping quarters. They had foldouts from different magazines, not just playboy, but other foldouts. I mean, it was just shingled with these things and there were so many you would have to pick up one to look at the other one underneath! They had some kind of a rule that you couldn't have one within 18" of a family picture, but every available space had these foldouts. And right in the middle was a life-sized, black and white poster of Phyllis Diller. (Laughter) Yeah!

THE TUNNELS:

NC: That's hilarious! Are there other memories?

MC: When we were out on patrol we accidentally came across a tunnel and looked around. There were 5 of us. One guy was too wide to go into the tunnel. These were real small tunnels (laughter), and they looked at me and another friend of mine who always called himself the "Polish Hillbilly." I was about 5'10" and he was about 6'1" and these tunnels were made for people about 5'6" at most, but the both of us were the skinniest so I got to go in! (Laughter)

NC: And what was in the tunnel?

MC: There was nothing in the tunnel really.

NC: Protection. Was it protection?

MC: Oh, the Vietnamese, the Viet Cong had tunnels everywhere! I went in, looked around, came back out, and coming out I had to literally hold my arms up... going in and out I had to hold my hands up because my shoulders were too wide, and that's how tight it was! We were reprimanded for it a little bit saying we should have reported the tunnel so that somebody who knew what they were doing would be sent out... And, they came out and put a big canvas thing over it and put a telescope down it with a real bright light

to look around. They sent a Marine down there. I didn't see the whole thing. I was told what they did later and later the Marines collapsed it and it caved in. I did see the guy they sent down. He said he was a Marine but I swear if he was a quarter inch shorter he would have been a midget! (Laughter) They wanted small people, but from what I understood later, even if that would have happened a few years or even 6 months later, the Marines wouldn't have even done that. They would just throw gasoline down the tunnel and burn it out. They stopped checking out tunnels unless they were pretty sure there was something down there that might need to be checked out. Other than that, after a while they just collapsed them or burned them out.

HELICOPTERS AND FRIENDLY FIRE

NC: Vietnam TV images on nightly news always contained helicopter and friendly fire stories. Do you have any stories like that?

MC: Oh yeah, I remember there was a USO troupe in a helicopter that was shot down. They don't know if it was mechanical, or if it was just shot down, but it caught fire. The whole USO troupe, well it wasn't the whole troupe, just part of the troupe, because they came in on 2 helicopters went down. The pilot, the copilot, the whole troupe was lost. And so, because the rest of the troupe in the other helicopter were a little jittery about flying back to Da Nang, they wanted some protection so they stuck me in a helicopter and flew me past an old type vehicle and a couple of barrels and drums. I got to shoot at them and pretend I was a door gunner! So they stuck me in there and it was actually not very practical to have a door gunner because it's more practical just to go from point A to point B. When you put a gun on there and an extra body and you're just putting more weight on it, but they were kind of jittery and they wanted protection and we flew up high enough. So I was a door gunner for about maybe 30 minutes, got to see the sights, look down, looked around, and at the ground. (Laughter) Nothing important! They believed it was probably a mechanical reason the other helicopter went down because they flew up high enough to where it was hard to hit, so probably something mechanical happened to that group. The bodies from the USO group were burned, looked like sticks of wood.

They'd stick them up and they stuck the bodies up behind the tent where I was staying and that's a smell you will never get over!

NC: That's what I've heard.

MC: Yeah, it's just something-it just stinks!! Then I always tried to go up in the little planes. There was an order from the Vietnamese AO, that means Aerial Observer, or Marine Observer because we were spotting for the Marines. The pilot was Army, and then below that was the crew chief, and below that was the mechanic. So I was kind of on the bottom, but every time I had a chance, I went up because I knew what these guys were going through and I just wanted to give and be as helpful as possible. Sometimes we would even come down to about 40 feet just to get the Viet Cong to shoot at us so that we would know where they were at. They won't shoot at you, because they know if they shoot at you, it's going to give them away. So we'd try to pretend like we knew where they were and every once in a while we were lucky. One time they knew there was some movement or action somewhere and they sent out a mess of Marines to check it out. Observers sent us to check it out. Now we're in the air and the Marines are on the ground. But, nobody told us they sent Marines, and nobody told the Marines they sent us. So we went up there and we saw movement while we were flying around trying to figure out who it is. Now I'm with my 45 up there trying to scare up whatever is out there, and there were the Marines!! We were shooting at friendly people!!

NC: My goodness, did anybody get hurt?

MC: No, nobody got hurt, but you know that's the way it screws up sometimes. And, one Marine finally jumped out in the open and started waving his hands like, "We're out here!" I thought I could hear the prop. The prop's real loud because what he was saying probably wasn't too friendly! That was pretty much it! (Laughter) We flew past something, but most of the time when the plane was hit, you couldn't hear it because it was real thin, the aluminum. But if it hit the engine or around the engine, you would hear a "pink", or if it hit a strut you'd hear a "pink." When we landed, I knew we got hit but I

didn't know where. So we sent a new-be out to check out, I don't know if it was miscommunication or if he just wasn't too bright-it was one of the two. The elevator is the part that flips up and down at the back, and the part that holds it is called the vertical stabilizer, then the horizontal stabilizer. The vertical stabilizer is the piece that goes straight up in the back and then the thing that goes back is the rudder, just like the rudder of a ship. Our plane had a couple of rounds that went through the horizontal stabilizer, out the horizontal stabilizer, into the vertical stabilizer, and out the vertical stabilizer. So, that's one round that made 4 holes. The new-be counted 4 hits when it was just 1 hit-it was just 1 round! I think we were only hit about 3 times, but by the time he got through counting holes, he counted the exit holes the entrance holes. He could have been just counting the holes and we thought he was counting the rounds. By the time he got through counting, you would have thought we were sprayed with a machine gun.

NC: He was very strategic! Lucky it didn't hit a different part of the aircraft! Hope you corrected the new-be's errors!

BURNING CHUTES:

NC: Yes. Wow. It's amazing some of the things that happen and how people survived.

MC: Yep. I kind of think of the helicopter going down, you know one gets hit and he comes out OK, and the other one, everybody gets killed! I had a friend who was a lieutenant and I think he was up for promotion to captain. He was killed, shot down and killed, as a round went up through his back and through his head and his head just exploded! They asked me to burn his chute. I dug a hole and poured some diesel on it and threw his chute in there. Well, first I tried to clean it up because I wanted to send it to his family. I cleaned it up as best as I could to send it to his family, but I was told, "no, burn it!" I threw a tantrum but wasn't reprimanded for it because it was mostly emotional. He and I were about as good a friend's as any-you can't have enlisted and officers can't get too close, you just can't do that but we were about as close as you could get-that's about the best way I can explain it.

NC: Yes, I understand.

MC: When I went to burn his chute, I dug a hole and threw some diesel on it, but the Vietnamese were there reaching for his pens, and pencils, and the pilots had their little maps. I kept trying to shove them away-just leave him alone! Finally, I got pissed and you could give me a rifle at one time and I could hit anything at 600 yards. You give me a pistol and I can't hit that wall from here! I'm not very good with a pistol! I had a 45 and let off a round as this guy was reaching for something on my friend. The round hit the dirt before him and a whole mess of chars came up and everything messed up his hand real bad. Then they finally got the hint. I just wanted to burn the chute alone. They took that guy over to the Navy Field Hospital, I don't know if the Navy calls them MASH units or not.

NC: I think every branch calls them MASH units no matter what, even though they're called Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals.

MC: They patched up his hand. I had to burn chutes a couple of times. I don't know why they always asked me to burn the chutes of the people.

NC: Did you ever contact the lieutenant's family?

MC: I always wanted to, and never did.

NC: Where was he from?

MC: I think he was from somewhere, not quite Ohio or something.

LIFE ADMIDST DEATH:

MC: I remember one time I was coming back from a place called Tribach not too far from where we were with the Marines where we were only allowed beer. Enlisted and even the Marines were only allowed there. The enlisted Marines were only allowed 2 beers, but we were allowed as much as we wanted. Tribach was a regular Army unit and they served hard liquor, and every once in a while I would walk over there and have a scotch and soda. When I was coming back, a firefright broke out and I tried to get down to see if I could be of any assistance but it was a ways away from me. While I was working my way down, I was being sniped. I was up on high ground, and down below was a rice patty where there was a pumping station there for the rice. There was a mess of civilians hiding behind the pumping station because rounds were flying. The pumping station was made out of bricks so it offered some protection. So, I was trying to figure out where the sniper was by moving around a little bit. The sniping ended after a while but maybe he just ran out of bullets, I don't know. And right in the middle of the whole thing, some woman went into labor!

NC: Oh my goodness!

MC: And, that always stuck with me because here were people trying to kill each other and this woman is giving birth!

NC: Quite a paradox!

MC: Yeah, oh yeah! Yeah, it's hard to believe. If the kid survived, the kid would be 50 years old now!

NC: Really, how do you know that?

MC: Well it was 50 years ago when I was in Vietnam! So, if the kid survived...the kid's a grandfather or grandmother now probably.

NC: It must have almost been like an unreal experience-you're so young and you're seeing these types of things. This was radically different from anything you had ever imagined went on in life.

POST-SERVICE AND RECONCILING THE PAST:

NC: And speaking about the jobs and everything, when your service was over what did you do in terms of your work?

MC: Well, I actually grew up on farm labor, but there was this thing in upstate New York called Woodstock that was going on.

NC: 50 years ago!

MC: Yeah, and my brother and I and a good friend of his bought a van and we headed for Woodstock. Well, we got as far as a place called Nineveh, Indiana, no Paoli, Indiana and the van kind of said, "I'm tired of working." You know it was one of those vans. (Laughter) and what's ironic was that I had an aunt who lived there. She was my father's sister that I never even knew-just this little town out of nowhere. I found out that my father lived in Chicago. Well the thing is, my father was an alcoholic and my mother suffered from the same thing so my grandmother didn't want anything to do with him. And, I don't think he did either. I realized that he would phone the little town I grew up in. He'd phone the firemen, the firehouse, because not everybody had phones back then. Yeah, and then they'd come down and pick my mother up and she'd go up to the fire house for sometimes 20 minutes, sometimes an hour later she'd come back. After I sobered up I realized he was phoning around 10 o'clock our time and there's 2 hours difference so, it must have been around 12 o'clock when he was phoning and he was probably half drunk when he was phoning. He never mentioned, made an attempt to get in touch with his kids, and my grandmother didn't want anything to do with him. As a matter of fact, I never even knew he lived in Chicago. I just knew she would get these phone calls when I was 15 years old, you know what I mean? My mother was in AA for a

little while, but it just didn't hold. She met this guy and they started drinking. He flipped his car in an irrigation ditch and my mother was pinned underneath. He then walked all the way back into town, 3 miles out of town, then he walked all the way back into town and went to bed!

NC: Did your mother survive?

MC: No, she was killed there. And it took me years to figure out he was probably in a blackout and never even knew what happened. Yeah, yeah.

NC: That's a terrible disease. So, when you came back, you said you had done some farm work before the military. What did you do in terms of work?

MC: Well, when I came back to the states, I got out of the Army and at once I took off for Woodstock..

NC: That's right, that's where we were before.

MC: I found out where my father was, well my grandmother finally gave in and got a hold of my brother who was with me at the time, and of course, my aunt who I didn't know existed told me. So I went up to see my father, and I got a job in the same plant he worked in. And, I eventually worked my way up to tool and die maker.

NC: Wow, so you did an apprenticeship and everything and learned that trade.

MC: Well no, my apprenticeship was kind of like on the job!

NC: That's what they are, yeah, that's right.

MC: I don't think you could count it an apprenticeship, they just kind of said, "This is a lathe, can you operate it?" I said, "Yeah, it looks pretty simple, it doesn't look too

complicated.” I have had people ask me where I got my training and like, “Were you training for this?”

NC: Did you find that it was simpler than some of the things that you did when you were deployed?

MC: Yeah, I can't understand, I could never understand, why you needed training for this. Really!! Because whenever I was in school I was one of these people who rarely did his homework. I was constantly angry and pissed off because I didn't have a father, plus I suffer a little bit from dyslexia so I have a little bit of trouble reading, not full blown. I can read about a paragraph. Do you ever see these letters that have a real thin vertical line and a fat horizontal one, well those things just drive me nuts! I can read enough too, but not that much and when I got into high school they said I had an IQ of 84 -I'm glad they don't use IQ tests anymore. And when I went into the VA, the VA said, “You don't have an IQ of 84, you've got 40 points higher than that.”

NC: Because half of that test is related in knowing how to read! (Laughter)

MC: Yeah! (Laughter) But no, I just wasn't interested. I went to school because it was somewhere to go! I didn't go to school to learn anything; I went because it was somewhere to go! And so whenever I went into a shop and saw a lathe there, or a milling machine or a few other things, to me it was pretty straightforward. But you know, whenever you are treated like you aren't too bright, sometimes you wonder if you aren't too bright. And people ask me where'd you get your training and I said, training? You need training for this? It's fascinating that they train someone to do something that's logical!

NC: That's because people who have dyslexia have visual capabilities that people without dyslexia do not have. Like Thomas Edison had dyslexia, so was Henry Ford and they imagined in their minds all these things that they invented. Henry Ford actually visually saw 3 dimensionally all the pieces of the internal combustion engine, which is in

every single car that we are driving around. That's why you didn't need training to operate the lathe! That's pretty high level!

MC: Yeah but, in Vietnam my biggest thing that really got to me more than anything was pulling the marines, the wounded Marines out of the planes, yeah! I didn't know, and what's odd is after I got out, that my cousin was in the Marines at the same time I was. He had a friend who lost a hand and his friend says you know my cousin's George, his friend always says; "If it wasn't for George, I'd be dead!" And for a long time I'd have nightmares about bringing in the wounded Marines. When I grew up, my father abandoned us when I was 5, and my mother died when I was 15, so my cousins and my family were basically my family and my grandmother. For a long time I'd have nightmares about pulling in the stretchers. Those nightmares went on for 10-12 years. And then at a reunion I saw my cousin for the first time since the both of us went into the military. It dawned on me that in the nightmares, I was looking for my cousin.

NC: Well, you've described some pretty serious situations and your emotions that went with it at the time, and being a very young 20 something, that had to be overwhelming with you. It probably took many years to situate your experiences in your mind.

MC: Yeah, I was kind of screwed up before I even went in. I honestly believe what pulled my cousin through was a strong family. My cousin went through a whole lot of crap, but he came from a very strong family. His father stayed with him, his mother stayed with him and I come from a family that's broke up and beat up and...

NC: Yes. And there was no regard for any of that when many of you returned from Vietnam after you suffered trauma, but if you came in with trauma and then suffered more, what was the help for you at that time? Trauma is being looked at differently now for people who return from combat, thank God!

MC: When it comes to trauma, the biggest thing was the actual combat, I've been shot at a few times, and I said there was this one firefight that lasted about an hour and that was

pretty horrendous and luckily I think the Marine that was wounded came out OK. But, I always went up any chance I had – always, because I knew what these guys were going through and, I just wanted to give them...

NC: As much support as possible.

MC: Yeah. Oh yeah.

NC: You know in the end, it's our intention that is the deciding factor of our actions. It's the good that we wanted to do, the help that we wanted to give and you did that! You did that!

MC: Yeah I was talking to a shrink and even as a civilian I used I fight, I flight, or I freeze.

NC: Yes.

MC: Just normal civilians use I freeze. I've been hit by so many snowballs, because I just freeze. And I asked her why didn't I freeze back then in Vietnam? She said probably you went through your head scenario, after scenario, after scenario that when something happened you knew what to do. But you don't go through a scenario being hit by a snowball. She said imagine, going through a scenario being hit by a snowball and next time you probably you won't freeze.

NC: Interesting! So, we have the information already.

MC: Yeah, but another thing too is I was just scared of doing the wrong thing, of freezing. You don't want to let the guy next to you down-you just don't!

NC: Yes, and that's the glory that those of you have been in combat understand. You may not even know the person's name, you might not ever see that person again, but you have that duty and obligation and that will to help that person.

MC: Oh yeah!

VETERAN CONTACTS AFTER SERVICE:

NC: Speaking of that, Mike, have you stayed in contact with anybody from the time that you served or are you active in American Legions, because I met you at the American Legion in Forest Park?

MC: Yeah, the American Legion, the AMVETS, and I started getting in contact with people. I got a hold of this one guy who lives in California. We don't remember each other, but we do remember events. You know what I mean?

NC: Yes, was he in your unit?

MC: Yeah, he was in the unit but I don't remember him, but we do remember events.

NC: Have you ever met him face-to-face?

MC: No, but we talk on the phone every once in a while.

NC: That's good.

MC: We talk back and forth every once in a while. I'm trying to get a hold of other people.

NC: How do you find them?

MC: I've been finding most of them on "Face book" now.

NC: Oh, interesting. And when you find them do they want to talk about their experiences with you?

MC: Usually we just talk about the kids we have, or the jobs we had, or things that are more important to us.

FINAL REFLECTIONS:

NC: Well Mike, I, this has been an INCREDIBLE story, and I have to say probably one of the best that I have had yet, and I mean that from my heart. Got one last question to ask you. If you were to be talking to a young person right now at this moment who's really thinking about joining the military, now you're not drafted anymore, people have to come in on their own as volunteers. And we've got a terrible political situation going on world wide, there could be more wars and more chances of combat deployments. What would you say to this person today?

MC: I'd tell them to get as much information as you can about the situation of the world, get as much information as they can about the branches of service, so that they can make a decision that would suit them better.

NC: Yes, especially if they are thinking of staying in for maybe a career or longer time than one deployment.

MC: Yeah again, when it comes to mortal combat, I didn't go through as much as some did, but I always wanted to help as much as I could.

NC: And I think that theme comes back over and over again in the stories that you've told today. Well Mike, thank you so much. This has just been an incredibly informative and from the heart interview. I have to thank you personally for your service and for the growth that you've done to make sense of it all and to share it with us. Thank you.

MC: OK