

# Chuck Meyers

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Cohen: Good morning. Today is April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, I'm here at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library with Chuck Meyers. Chuck fought in the War of Vietnam, he was in intelligence, and we are very glad to welcome you here today.

Meyers: Thank you.

Cohen: So, we'll start off with very—begin—begin with very easy questions. So, where and when were you born?

Meyers: I was born in Chicago, 1944. So I'm not a... I'm a war baby. [Laughter] And I lived—lived in Chicago for, almost until I was— I went to Vietnam.

Cohen: Where was your father during the war?

Meyers: My father—my parents were married in 1940. My father could not be drafted. He had trifocals in one eye and bifocals in the other. So he spent time in the Illinois National Guard, guarding what was at the time was called Orchard Field, which was a small... wasn't quite an airbase... but it was a small series of strips. Orchard Field, ORD, O'Hare [International Airport] today is Orchard. It's where it got its name. And to the day he died, he had his National Guard card with him. He—he wanted to be in the military, but he couldn't. So, he was very patriotic, he was very supportive, and when I made the decision, initially to go into ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], he was entirely supportive of it, even though he realized there's a possibility to go to Vietnam. But I think, I was in some ways, I was his voice.

Cohen: That you were able to do what he, of course, was not able to do?

Meyers: Yeah. Yeah. Right.

Cohen: Can you talk a little bit about your childhood and what was it like growing up? Any siblings?

Meyers: Sure, sure. I grew up in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago, it was an immigrant neighborhood. People that come to the United States at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we were essentially second generation kids in a very diverse place. When I was six, the Korean War started, and I remember very distinctively taking my little red wagon, and my mother sent me on an excursion into the neighborhood. She actually went with me, but the object was to collect metal, and the metal was going to be used for the war effort. Aluminum, iron, anything that was metal. And then across the street from us, there was an open space, and there were liberty gardens in the space. So on one side—my school is across the street—so we used to collect stuff in the afternoon. On the weekends, we'd go to the liberty gardens and make sure things were planted properly or we'd harvest them. That was 1950—1952, when I was just beginning school.

Cohen: So you were aware, of the war in Korea, from a very early age onward?

Meyers: Yeah, yeah. I'm also—because my father was of the first people on the block to buy a television he was—he loved boxing. So there was the Friday night fights and the Monday night fights, and he bought this old Silvertone television, and... because I was an only child, my parents were still more or less living together—they were divorced—but we used the television every Saturday morning, they had a show about World War II or Korea, depending on what was on at the time. And I watched it, and it fascinated me. The world of the Cold War, the world of Korea, that form of television, I was immersed in it. And by the time I got through elementary school—graduated in 1958—I was convinced that there was going to be a communist takeover of the world. That big red blob that you used to see on the screen, which was expanding all over Europe and grabbing Hungary and Poland and the Baltic states—was going to spread and I was going to be part of the trap.

Cohen: So you were highly immersed, maybe even more so because of having a television?

Meyers: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Cohen: Television...

Meyers: Television was... my parents were kind of odd in that respects, especially my mother. Most parents in the neighborhood thought television was—was evil, and that if you watched too much, you were going to rot your brain. My mother thought that if we watched television together and we watched the news, it

would give us something to talk about. So we used to sit down at dinner and watch television. [Laughter] I still do.

Cohen: Was your mother also patriotic as your father was?

Meyers: No. No, my mother was... about as far from being openly patriotic as you can get. She was—was very egalitarian, she was very open minded, she... one of the principles she lived by was that you can't just think about something, you have to do it. So if you believe that the people around you were your fellow people, then you had to act like they were equals. So, from an early age, her understanding of civil rights was very different from the understandings of other people in the neighborhood. She believed fully in the power of equality.

Cohen: Out of curiosity, was she involved in—in any movement or ideology that...?

Meyers: No. None at all. None at all. The single most important author that she read almost until the end of her life, was Khalil Gibran and she was fascinated with his philosophy. So, I think that was her world. My father's world was a very different world, probably the reason they got divorced. But by—by 1958, I was very clearly being primed for the military. I didn't know it then. I used to play war with my friends.

Cohen: Would you say this school also had a role of informing students like yourself of the Cold War or the Liberty Guard [i.e., gardens]? Did they encourage it?

Meyers: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. We had to have two years of history. One year was... No. We had to have one year of history, I'd happen to have had two, during the second year, which was primarily American history. There was a lot of time spent with World War II and Korea. Not so much with the precursors. I learned most of that in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. But there was a great deal of time spent on World War II, Korea, and the evolution of the Cold War. Since it was the late fifties, we still had that kind of Russian/American tension. And the war I was clearly, my classmates were getting, is that there's a war for the hearts and minds of people, and we have to win that war. We can't lose it because if we lose it, democracy is fragile and it's going to be eradicated. So this notion of fighting for principles and fighting for the wellness of the country was part of my growing up. From the time I can remember, the beginning of the Korean War to the time I left for Vietnam.

Cohen: When you were in high school, did you continue to be aware of other things like the war in Vietnam or the US advisers sent to Vietnam?

Meyers: Not very much. Because I was watching television a lot, I was familiar with—with the deployment of—[President John F.] Kennedy’s deployment of the advisors in the early sixties. It was also a time when kind of the ideology of freedom, as I saw it, the defense of freedom, began to translate into something that Kennedy said—and I started thinking about this because I started college in ’62—when he [said], “Ask not what you can do for your country. [i.e, what your country can do for you] Ask what you can do for your country.” I said, “So what am I going to do for my country.” You know, I’ve been talking to myself for a long time, but what am I going to do. And in the year, he was killed, I was right on the verge of going to college, and I was looking at the program. There was an ROTC program, and I said, “I think I got it.” And that was the transition into the military.

Cohen: So this was...

Meyers: It came from Kennedy.

Cohen: From Kennedy. So this way, you yourself can be active and doing and not just talking and thinking.

Meyers: Yeah. Exactly.

Cohen: What did you choose to study and where did you go to college?

Meyers: Well, I told you I was born and raised on the North Side of Chicago... because I’m an only child and my parents were divorced, I was, to some degree, her source of support, financial support, as well. So I couldn’t go very far. I applied to DePaul University, I got in, worked at the downtown campus for two years. It was across the street from where my father worked. So I worked with him to raise money to help my mother. It’s kind of an odd situation. [Laughter] They wouldn’t talk to each other, but they would talk to me. So I was down at the downtown campus for two years and at the Lincoln Park campus for two years.

Cohen: Was your tuition paid for by the ROTC program?

Meyers: It wasn’t in the beginning. I paid for my tuition through work in the beginning. When I became a junior; actually, the transition year from sophomore to junior year, talking about what does advanced ROTC look like and, by the way, you’ll get a small stipend for doing this. My mother’s sole support was... disability

[insurance] and me. So I said, “Oh, well, if I could make a few more dollars with this, why not?” I was going to do it, anyways, but I entered advanced ROTC for my junior and senior year with the understanding that we did get a small stipend.

Cohen: It gave you an extra push.

Meyers: Yeah.

Cohen: What was the—I don’t know how to put it—what was the ROTC’s requirements when you were in college and what was the difference between the advanced ROTC program?

Meyers: Well, when I arrived at DePaul [University], you had a choice. You had to have some sort of physical training. So you could of taken two years of what we used to call PhysEd [physical education] or you could substitute ROTC for it. And I decided to substitute ROTC. I thought it would be more interesting to me, personally. I mean, I had PhysEd all my life, they didn’t have to teach me to play basketball or exercise. I’ve been doing it. Never did—never did Army related things. So I went into ROTC, for the first two years it was very essential: how to march, how to salute, that sort of stuff. When I was on the verge of becoming a junior, they explained the advanced ROTC program to us. And it was more sophisticated. We were going to get into map rating, military history. We were going to spend the summer in ROTC summer camp, and then when we come back to finish up our senior year, the day we graduated, we’d be commissioned. And I said, “I’ve spent two years working to this point. It doesn’t make any sense to stop now.” I took all these factors into consideration, and I said, “I’m going to pursue it.” So between the stipend, the advanced training, the summer camp, all these thing put together, I kept going for another two years and was commissioned.

Cohen: What was the summer camp training like?

Meyers: [Laughter] We had—we had summer camp in Kansas at Fort Riley. Kansas was the home of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. I think they’re back there now. We were in a part of the camp called Camp Funston, which we would facetiously refer to as Camp Fun Town. We were in barracks. All college kids—guys, who were going into ROTC. We made great friends over the period of several weeks, six weeks—we were there for six weeks—because we were all doing the same thing. And we went into essential training: maneuvers, tactical history, things like of that sort.

And there was a survival program at the end. It wasn't much in compared to what we did in infantry basic, but they kind of showed us what we were up against. The people who were doing the training and were our opponents, were members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. [Laughter] So we finished this and we're getting a debriefing and these enlisted men, who are our torturers say, "What did you think about this? Did you learn something from it?" "Sure. You know, we're going to be okay." He said, "You better be okay because we're going to see ya' in Vietnam." And I remember very distinctly saying, "Oh, no you won't. I'm not going there." [Laughter]

Cohen: So this is interesting. It sounds like it was quite calculated.

Meyers: It was. Yeah.

Cohen: So when—when was your commissioning? Was it after your graduation?

Meyers: No. No. The day I graduated was the day I was commissioned. I wore my uniform under my cap and gown. So we went across the stage, I got my diploma, my bachelor's in history, went backstage, took my cap and gown off and stored it, came around again and when all the cap and gowns passed, they awarded us our commissions. There was about fifteen or so of us. So I was commissioned as a second lieutenant the day I graduated. [Laughter]

Cohen: Wow. Did you get to go home before your first assignment?

Meyers: Oh, yeah. Sure. I graduated in early June of 1966, and I wasn't due to go to Fort Benning [in Georgia] for infantry officer basic [training] until October. So I was home the entire summer, mostly working.

Cohen: How did you get to Fort Benning in Georgia?

Meyers: There were three of us in the Chicago area that were going together. My friend Joe Rala, who I'll speak about in a little while, a second, a guy who I can't remember, we took a car, Joe's car, and drove from Chicago to Louisville into northern Alabama down to Fort Benning. It took—it was a two- day drive. We stopped on the way through northern Alabama. Very dark. There were no lights in the forest. A car pulled up in back of us and then sped around us and then stopped. And... we had no idea what this was about. So, we pull up to this car, two teenagers get out, they look in the car, and we put two and two together and realize they're looking for black—black people in the middle of the night...

and they don't have them, they have us. [Laughter] So my friend Joe, who weighs about 225 pounds at the time, gets out of the car and he says, "Are you looking for something?" And these guys were terrified. They clearly did not know what they were up against. And they said, "No, Sir. We were just concerned that you were out on the road by yourself." And Joe says, "We are out on the road by ourselves, and I don't want to see you again. Get out of here." And these kids ran to the car and they took off down the road. [Laughter] And we just kept going back to Benning at about seven o'clock in the morning. [Laughter]

Cohen: So what was your training like at Fort Benning, Georgia?

Meyers: It was infantry officer's basic training. It was essentially training for ROTC officers. We weren't OCS [Officer Cadet School] officers. We didn't go through the transition program from enlist to... to 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants, we went through the designated course. And the course in—it was a more sophisticated version of what we went through in ROTC. Map reading, navigation, search and rescue, we went through the survival course at the end, which was an overnight course through the swamps from point A to point B. You had—you had a map and you had a compass and you had several people around you and you had no idea where you were. [Laughter] They just stuck you somewhere and you had to figure out where you were and how to get to the end of the program.

Cohen: Was the map very basic or how?

Meyers: It was a situation map of the area around the swamps. So it was very specific, and if you knew much about map reading, it wasn't hard to follow. You had to match the terrain to the map, and then you could guide yourself through the terrain. Fortunately, I wasn't the best at this, but I could follow the guy who was. [Laughter]

Cohen: So it worked out well?

Meyers: Yeah. It worked out well.

Cohen: I think you mentioned in the questionnaire, that after that, you went to the intelligence officer's basic training at Fort Holabird in Maryland. And I was wonder how you got into intelligence. Was this something you had chosen or they had chosen for you? How did it come about?

Meyers: In our—I think it was between junior and senior year. We had the opportunity to make branch choices. It was an open opportunity. If you wanted to go into armor that was your first choice. My first choice was intelligence. Intelligence officers would automatically go through infantry officer's basic. It was the pre-qualifier for intelligence school.

Cohen: Oh, I see.

Meyers: Because the work that we did as intelligence, as basic company grade intelligence officers, was with the infantry. So we had to have a pretty rigorous understanding of what the infantry did and what we were supposed to do so we can communicate together. So, I made the choice of going into intelligence. I knew I would not be a very good infantry officer. [Laughter] I have shin splints in both legs, I can't run very far. So that decision was made in my senior year. When I graduated and went to infantry officer's basic, my mother passed away. So I came back to Chicago for the funeral, this was in December, December 9<sup>th</sup>. Came back the Chicago for the funeral, went back to Benning because I had to complete the requirements, came back to Chicago for New Years, and then I took my car and drove to Fort Holabird, Maryland, in Baltimore. And that's where I started intelligence officer's basic.

Cohen: What was the—what was involved in that basic course?

Meyers: This was a course... the equivalent of elementary intelligence gathering techniques. So, for instance, they taught us on how to follow people, how to trail people, how to dress so we were inconspicuous. This is 1967. The Cold War was still going on. So much of the background training that we were exposed to, was Cold War training. One of the things we studied was the Soviet [Union] military establishment, the Soviet intelligence system because it was important for us to understand not [just] what we were supposed to do but what we were up against. I mean, the war in Vietnam is going on and we're not studying the war in Vietnam. Our map is Regensburg, Germany. [Laughter] You know, it's like Soviet tanks are going to come across the border, but it was more or less traditional intelligence war studies until the end of the six-week block when we got to Vietnam.

Cohen: When... you mentioned before that there was advanced courses as well for the intelligence officers at Fort Holabird. So I'm wondering how that differed or if you were looking at other types of information gathering?



Meyers: The advanced course at Fort Holabird was the counterintelligence course. So my—I listed a number of military occupational specialties.

Cohen: Yes.

Meyers: 1542 is my infantry officer's basic, 9300 was my intelligence officer's basic, and 9666 was my counterintelligence MOS [military occupational specialty]. Counterintelligence school was solely devoted—there's several branches of intelligence. There's air intelligence, intercept, signal intelligence; counterintelligence is actually a defense against penetration. So you're gathering information to keep the enemy from penetrating your resources. So much of our work was—was aimed toward, "How do you protect yourself?" One of the courses we had, and I remember this very distinctly was a course—we had an areas studies instructor. Areas studies was a euphemism for what we would call spying. I mean, it's not a very accurate term, but he came in with a doorway, and it was just the frame of a doorway. And it had several different type locks on it, including a katy bar on the other side. And his challenge was, "How long do you think it would take me to get to the other side of the door?" And here, a bunch of guys looking at each other and saying, "The guy is nuts. I mean, he's got like five different types of locks on there and... like an hour. Never." [Laughter] So he says, "I'm going to show you some essential pieces of equipment. He had a lock pick and a credit card and a small piece of—oh, he had a screwdriver—and he said, "Here we go." The essential lock that we have on front doors, he picked. Immediately. No problem.

Cohen: No problem. Right.

Meyers: No problem there. There was a bolt that fit into the sleeve of the door. He used the screwdriver to get into the molding of the door and pushed it so it receded back into... [Laughter] And then he went from one lock to the other, and when he was finished, he used a screwdriver to remove the molding around the door and pushed the door and the katy bar fell in. [Laughter] He kicked it from the inside. And then he said, "Did anybody time this?" We're looking at our watches and looking up and saying, "This is like three minutes." He just did this. And then he turned to us and said, "You are never safe. If someone wants to get something, they wasn't to get you, they want to get materials, they will. It's only a matter of how much you can do in order to protect yourselves in your environment, that'll make a difference."

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: And that was the essence of counterintelligence for me. So when we talk today about hacking and penetration and the work we do to try to counteract that, that—those weren't common terms at the time—but that's what we did.

Cohen: During your training period, were you also—I don't know how to put it—learning like technical methods? Like later on you mentioned in the war itself they're using devices to track the seismic movements and—and I believe there were some other techniques—I guess I was wondering, whether you were trained to do some of these things, as well at—at this point in time?

Meyers: Very little. I can't remember very much about specific training. Most of it was on the job training as it should've been because everything was changing and it was changing very quickly: methods of surveillance in Vietnam, electronic surveillance, especially. All of that was changing quickly. When I left Holabird in April of 1967—yeah, '67—I was sent to Omaha, Nebraska, to do security clearances, and I was there for about three months. I wasn't a particular good soldier in that office. I got called into our Denver, [Colorado], office, and I conducted security clearances in Denver. Although I lived, I had temporary duty in a hotel in downtown Denver. [Laughter] It was the best part of my assignment. I reported to the Denver office, which was our regional office, and at the time, offices were being prepared for riots in American cities. In fact, I was on call for Detroit, [Michigan]. One of the places that they were gathering information was in Denver. So they took two of us—an enlisted man and myself—and they said, "You're going to become part of the demonstration the next day. You're going to march in the demonstration." So we're looking at each other, hair about as long as mine, and this is 1967. There's lot of long-haired people, men. So they gave us two pieces of equipment. One was a camera, and that didn't work properly. Oh, excuse me, the camera worked properly. The other piece they gave us was this. A wire. [Laughter] We were strapped on the inside—he was strapped on the inside of his shirt. He carried the wire because he was the camera man. So he had this wire around him and it had a microphone attached. So he could stand in the middle of a crowd, and he could hear everything, and he could hear the people around him so he could position himself to hear some conversations between radical groups. My job was to pick up information, and some of it, because they were handing out flyers, but we were wise enough to understand that this rally on the steps of the Denver state house, was being attended by people all over the country. And one of the groups that was attending was a Revolutionary Action Movement [RAM], which is a leftist movement. The government had them under surveillance for a long time.

But part of my job was to find out more about the movement. So they taught me how to pick pockets. [Laughter] And sure enough, I come across a person with a flyer sticking out of his back pocket. So, [phew, noise] out it goes. And I'm looking at his baggage because I want to know where he's from, and he had flown in from San Francisco, [California], so I said to myself—you know, I can remember this. I had a pair of scissors and I cut the baggage tag off. [Laughter] And I took the stuff back to the office. We came in the next morning. The pictures had been developed, and they said, "You did a pretty good job of collecting this information; however, I want to show you something." The guys in the office were laughing at this point. He said, "Here's a picture of the demonstration. See this guy? FBI. See this guy? Denver Police. See this guy?" We were taking picture of all the other intelligence officers at the demonstration. [Laughter] We were taking pictures of us. I mean, it was very funny.

Cohen: Circular, oh, my. That's funny. So while you were in Denver and before that while you were in Omaha, you said you were doing security clearance, so I was wondering of whom? Were these people who were enlisting in the Army or were being drafted into the Army or...?

Meyers: Both.

Cohen: Both?

Meyers: Both, yeah. When they went through the induction center, which is just on the street in Omaha, one of the documents they had to sign, was an acknowledgement that they'd never been a member of any subversive organizations. There was a list of a hundred of them, maybe more. So they had to go down the list, read them all, and then sign and say, "I've never been a member." Periodically, somebody would go down the list, especially somebody who didn't want to get into the military, they had been drafted, or they enlisted, but they didn't know what they were getting into. So they would check off the name of an organization. In most cases, they didn't know what they were doing. They just said, "They'll look at it. They'll see that I'm a leftist or a rightest, and they won't take me." So... the induction center brought up a young man, probably nineteen or twenty years old, and he said he was a member of the Lincoln Brigade... I knew what the [Abraham] Lincoln Brigade is from studying history at DePaul. So I said, "Tell me more about this. What's the Lincoln Brigade?" He said, "Oh, this is an organization. Very patriotic organization that has kind of fallen by the way with the US government." And I said, "Really? Why

is it name the Lincoln Brigade?" He said, "Well, the organization began during the Civil War, []." And he's giving me this absolutely nonsensical story. So I said, "Wait a second. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade fought in the Spanish Civil War [which took place between 1936 and 1939] it was a collection of American leftist, who volunteered to fight in the war. And they came back, many of them are communists, they came back... the war... the Spanish Civil War, they lost. You know, the Lincoln Brigade was decimated in some cases, there were subunits from different places in the United States. It ceased to exist as people died away from it, and it's legendary. Absolutely legendary. You said you were born in what year?" [Laughter] And he said he was born in '57, I think. No, excuse me, he was born in '47. So he would have been twenty at the time. I said, "You are far too young," I mean, this is 1937. You weren't born until ten years after they fought. I said, "What are you really here for?" And he said, "I don't want to go into the Army." And he was in tears after he said this, and I said, "Look, I've gotta take you back. I've gotta report you. But tell them the truth and... see where it can go from there." And that was the last I saw of him. They took him back to the induction center. But that was a piece of the work we did.

Cohen: Did you do work with other demonstrations as well?

Meyers: Not in Omaha. We were preparing for demonstrations in Omaha. I got to do liaison with the police department in Omaha to determine how we could work together. The police department had a, an equivalent of a civil disobedience program, where they would put police on the streets, barricades, use helicopters to conduct surveillance, tried to determine who the groups were and what they're capable of, weaponry and things like that. So we had to do liaison with the police to know what they were doing so they could know how we would help because we're also a collection agency.

Cohen: What were your own political views of the protesters and protest movement at the time?

Meyers: It's a little bit convoluted. I didn't agree with the protesters. I agreed with their right to protest. I mean, I wasn't upset about that but because I was such an ardent patriot at the time, I said, "You got the wrong idea here. You know, you're protesting against what I think is a legitimate war; we're going—we're at war to protect the South Vietnamese from the North, we're there to provide democracy. You know, all the right ideas. So this protest is only going to weaken our participation." That's what I was thinking at the time. The year before I

graduated, there was a representative from an organization called W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs, it was an early anti-war organization, civil rights, too. There was a debate on campus, which the History Club sponsored, I was a member of the History Club. This is 1965 and they're already saying, "This is going to be a disastrous war. We're not prepared. We're there for the wrong purpose. It's an immoral war." And they go down a tick list, and most of us are shaking our heads and saying, "Huh? Are we thinking of the same war here?" By the time I left Vietnam, I'm shaking my head and saying, "I should've listened to them."  
[Laughter]

Cohen: It does seem very early to have that kind of thinking?

Meyers: It was. I mean, the first—the first American military unit arrived in Vietnam I believe in June or July of '65. Otherwise, there were advisors and small units. I think the first Marines arrived first and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry not long after. But whole division units, combat units, didn't arrive until '65 and after. So...

Cohen: Where were you based after Denver?

Meyers: I went from—I got my orders for Vietnam while I was in Denver. I was called back to the regional office in Denver in August for what they call retraining. [Laughter] My wife had driven—my wife and father had driven out to Omaha to be with me and I said, "Bye. I have to leave on Monday morning." They were thinking of staying for a week. So I flew back to Denver, I got my orders for Vietnam while I was in Denver. And for a long time I thought it was because I had been a bad boy in Omaha that they were sending me to Vietnam. It wasn't the case.

Cohen: I am a little curious, why were you a bad boy in Omaha?

Meyers: Well, there were four of us in the office. Two of them were retired... intelligence operatives from the forties and fifties. They had transitions from the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] into the... into military intelligence, and they retired. So they worked in the office as retirees. The third person was—was a young man, he's a specialist first class, who had been assigned to the office, he was—he had a very... undependable social life [Laughter] for an Army person. I mean, he was... he was into alcohol and sex and a lot of things that were in dubious to an intelligence person because we were very strictly warned not to do anything for which you would be—you could be compromised. He passed bad checks, and I warned him about this, but it didn't stop him. He called the captain in the Denver

office, who was coming to stay with him—he was doing liaison in Omaha, rather than wanting to stay with me, he wanted to stay with this guy. The captain had a family, but there was something going on between them. I never found out what it was, but that was the source of some of the animosity that was coming out of the Denver office toward me. I made—I was doing two things. I was doing liaison with the police, and I was also doing the security clearances, which involved health information. I had—I had both a badge and a card that I carried with me. Identified myself, went to the hospital, I said, “I don’t want—I don’t want hospital information. I want payment information because the person I’m concerned about, wasn’t paying his bills. His medical bills.” So, I got that, submitted it... several weeks later they said, “We understand that you went to the hospital asking for doctor’s orders.” I said, “No. I didn’t do that.” They said, “We understand that you messed up liaison with police.” And is said, “Where are you getting this information?” And I said—by that time I was in Denver—and I said, “I think it’s coming from, you know, specialist so and so from the office.” And he looked at me in astonishment and said, “How could you believe that?” And I said, “I believe it because he has a history of this.”

Cohen: Yeah.

Meyers: “And he would be the only other person, certainly, I wasn’t going to tell you this because I thought I was doing the right thing. He would be the only other person who could communicate this to you.” And [Laughter] being the—being the person I was at the time and still am—I looked at my commanding officer and I said, “Well, Colonel, if you choose to believe this, I have to tell you my specialist 4<sup>th</sup> class is a son of a bitch and if you choose to believe me you are too.” [Laughter] I did not make friends in the military. I received my orders shortly thereafter. They were not connected. But I wasn’t promoted to first lieutenant on time.

Cohen: Do you think that was...?

Meyers: Oh, absolutely. My proficiency report was very poor. They tended to go from bottom to top. It was like a rollercoaster. [Laughter]

Cohen: Okay. [Laughter] So you find yourself in Vietnam, I think you were telling us before how you arrived there and how in particular, that was also a story?

Meyers: Yeah. Yeah. We had been told in intelligence school we were going to go to Germany to relieve the crew there that was either transitioning out of service or

staying on other assignments. That didn't happen. We were all sent—my entire counterintelligence class was sent to Vietnam, and I had my orders with me... I've done a lot of, as I've said before, I've done a lot of... writing... but I'll hold them up. [Laughter] [Shuffling papers] Did she take them? I think she did.

Cohen: Oh, maybe they're on a counter.

Meyers: Oh, the might be. I'll just go through them. So there are eight of us on my orders, all from the intelligence class. I'm on the back. A man by the name of John Dunn is out in front, we're both lieutenants. When I arrive in Saigon, there was a collection of us all with the same orders, we were sent the 525<sup>th</sup> MI [Military Intelligence] detachment. We make our decisions on the roof of the detachment, very democratic. They ask us where we want to go. We all four select where we want to go, three of us want to go into second corps, middle of the country and mountains. I missed the plane to Pleiku, they say, "Sorry, three choices taken. You get to go to this one only, Kon Tum, up there." John Dunn went to Da Lat, which is an absolutely beautiful area in the bowl of the mountains, very tranquil. He was captured in March of 1968 on maneuvers, taken up the Ho Chi Minh Trail, spent—spent the next four years at the "Hilton" in the North Vietnam in Hanoi, and was released in February of 1968. *Time* Magazine covered the release and his pictures are on there. So I had the... the opportunities seemed to come off the plane, and on my orders, his date of capture is his date of release. And I kind of tracked where he went from there. He was a career... career officer. But I said to myself and I still say to myself, "Had I gotten to Pleiku on time and had I the choice of—of—of duty stations, I might have chosen De Lat, and I might have been captured. And I might have spent time in captivity for four years." [Laughter] So, you know, you asked, but for the greater... source of whatever go I. so there I am. [Laughter]

Cohen: That was meant to be. Wow. So when you went to Kon Tum, you were the intelligence advisor at that point?

Meyers: I was intelligence advisor—I was attached the 24<sup>th</sup> Special Tactical [Zone Intelligence] office in Kon Tum. It was the—it was the intelligence section, which advised two South Vietnamese intelligence battalions: the 41<sup>st</sup> and the 42<sup>nd</sup>, and we were advisors for what I believe was the 42<sup>nd</sup>. It may have been the 41<sup>st</sup>, I can't remember. But we shared an office. The Americans were in one part of the office and the Vietnamese were in the other part. And the Vietnamese commander, who sat very close to us, very early in my tour said, "Don't give

them any information because we—I feel,” and he’s speaking only for himself, “I feel that this unit has been heavily infiltrated either by South Vietnamese intelligence people, who wanted to know what we—that they thought they weren’t telling them, or the Viet Cong themselves.”

Cohen: Was that—can I just rephrase that just so I make sure I understand that? That you say, the southern Vietnamese felt the Americans were not sharing all the information about the Viet Cong and North Vietnam, on one hand?

Meyers: Well, that’s a piece of it.

Cohen: What’s the other piece?

Meyers: Well, let me describe the building. The building looks like... it’s a long narrow building. It almost looks like what we inhabited in ROTC summer camp. It’s a barracks.

Cohen: Is this the command building?

Meyers: Yes. It’s divided exactly in the middle. Americans in one side, Vietnamese on the other, South Vietnamese intelligence officers on the other side. Ideally, we’re supposed to share information. So when we got our radio intercepts, we’re supposed to share with them, they got their agent reports and were going to share with us. So we have this—this stream of intelligence shared between us. When I arrived there, I was told by my colleagues, by the guy I replaced, “Don’t tell them anything.” [Laughter] And I said, “Why not?” He said, “We’re very suspicious of the information that’s going out of their office, and it’s going to end up in the hands of the Viet Cong because we think it’s possible they’ve been infiltrated.” Their commander told me the same thing. He said, “I don’t entirely trust the guys in my office.” And they had a new recruit, who introduced himself and explained to us what he was going to do. He spoke very good English and... and Major Khan said, “I don’t trust him either. He was sent to us from Saigon. He’s a new guy. We have very little background on him. I only trust who I know and I don’t know him and I wouldn’t—and I wouldn’t tell you to... to trust him.” [Laughter]

Cohen: That’s funny.

Meyers: It was messy. [Laughter]



Cohen: You mentioned something that was also puzzling, at least for a civilian. You mentioned that there was some kind of understanding between the North Vietnamese and the—and the—and the command—like somehow—to somehow overlook things that they could infiltrate but, on the other hand, North Vietnamese could gather some information? So could you explain that a bit more, please?

Meyers: It sounds bad doesn't it?

Cohen: Well, I think as a non-military person...

Meyers: Yeah. Let me explain the geography first and it may make more sense. If you look at a map, Kon Tum Province is at the northwest corner of II Corps. It's on the border of Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia come together roughly at the western edge of Kon Tum Province. So... we're the—we're kind of the western edge at that point. The Ho Chi Minh Trail came down the near-eastern side of Laos and Cambodia, and came in on a number of places into Vietnam, infiltration routes. One of the major infiltration routes was in Kon Tum Province, and it passed through Kon Tum, where it went south or east from there. It was large unit infiltration, major north—this is 1968, just before [the] Tet [Offensive]. It's large group, North Vietnamese infiltration. For most of the sixties and into the mid-seventies, rather the mid-sixties, there was kind of a working agreement that we would monitor them and they wouldn't—wouldn't attack us.

Cohen: The North wanted the use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but they wouldn't actually attack the... the American soldiers?

Meyers: Right. We knew exactly what was happening on the trail. It wasn't a mystery to anybody. You know, the idea that we couldn't count units and didn't have the proper resources—I'll get into that in a moment, but we certainly did. Whenever a unit infiltrated into Kon Tum, we had the resources to track it, and to some degree, we had the resources to determine what they were up to, as well. In order to continue having those resources we had to make sure we were safe to use them. So we didn't bother the infiltrators. We tracked them, but we didn't necessarily bother them. We weren't—the South Vietnamese had a small infantry presence in Kon Tum, between the two battalions, there were only a thousand people all together, maybe. And it's a large province. Most of it was un-inhabitable, and most of it was infiltrated—it was jungle. So we continued all the work that we did. They continued infiltrating—infiltrating into Kon Tum and

then south and south and south. When we understood where they were and whether they were ready for battle, we would come in contact.

Cohen: So what were the resources you had to track their movements and check on their infiltration?

Meyers: There were a number of resources. There was a... and this a complete mystery to me I have to tell you... there were eight—I think eight Americans in our office—six officers and two enlisted men. Three enlisted men, I'm sorry. Five officers and three enlisted men. I could account for every one of us. I was in order of battle officer, my job was to track battle units, know where their commanders were, what their intentions were—that sort of thing. There was a guy in our office named Paul Simpson, who was—he was the area studies operations officer. He was working with—with agents in the field. He was an agent handler. So the intermediary was the South Vietnamese intelligence person, who was then working with the agents in the field, and Paul was the American person. So there would be kind of a nexus between all these people. I was never sure if Paul was actually in the Army or not. The CIA had a presence in Kon Tum Province, as they did all over the country. After the war, there was a long period of time when it had no interest in knowing where anyone else was because we were all assigned separately, in the late eighties, we started to get in touch with each other again over the internet. And we all found where we were. One guy was in West Virginia, one was in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, I was still in Chicago—southern Indiana, but where's Paul Simpson? Nobody could find him. We had a guy in Georgia, who was an expert at this. He could find a needle in a haystack. He couldn't find Paul Simpson.

Cohen: So his own role was a bit shady, as well?

Meyers: Well, ultimately, what a couple of us agreed on was not only Paul wasn't a member of the Army, Paul Simpson wasn't his name. It was a nom de plume he was using as his cover for the military. Now this is all speculation. I never knew what the real circumstances were, but it was guess work.

Cohen: But just in general terms, was Paul Simpson working with agents? Were the agents informers basically of...?

Meyers: Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah.

Meyers: Yeah... recruiting agents is always... South Vietnamese agents is always very tricky kind of a deal. Now, I didn't do it and wasn't always privy to the ways it was done. But sometimes names were given by village... village chiefs, dependable village chiefs, "I have a man here who is willing to work for you." And that person will be the equivalent of what we called vetted. [Laughter] We didn't just take anybody to be an agent. So we would have to have somebody who could speak for him or her. In other cases, there were people who had come to us because they knew where we were. There was a program called the Chieu Hoi Program, which was a... people were encouraged to leave their units and surrender to us. And it worked with the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong Chieu Hoi were asked to back into, not so much the area they came from because it was suspicious, but they'd go to other areas and then embed themselves in the culture and feed information. So it worked in a number of different ways.

Cohen: So in your work in detecting the order of battle—was that—how did—did you use like radio interception and how does that work?

Meyers: Yes. We used agent reports, electronic intelligence, which were generally radio intercepts. We used to get a list of all the—we'd get a coded list of them, almost every morning from radio research units out in the field. And they could track, because they had frequencies that intersected with North Vietnamese radio frequencies, they could intercept information. Not so much the actual things that were being said, it was very rare, but they could track the position of the radio.

Cohen: Like if their radio frequency clashed with the... Northern Vietnamese...

Meyers: No. They actually intercepted the frequencies. They were on the same frequency.

Cohen: Oh, I see.

Meyers: They could hear what... they could hear what was going on. Not always very clearly. But they could track the point where the transmission was being heard. Or sometimes it was being heard, sometimes it was just being made. We weren't quite sure where it was coming from. We were tracking units, by that time.

Cohen: So were you mapping these points?

Meyers: Yes.

Cohen: And from that you could assume how many units there were and where?

Meyers: Yes. Yeah, we had the Ho Chi Minh Trail staked out on our map and then we had, we had little red dots on the map, depending on the unit. We had to use—as I remember, I’m not entirely sure of this—for every dot we put on, rather than identifying as a suspected unit, we had to use a code on it because the South Vietnamese in the other room would walk in, look at the map and say, “What’s this?” [Laughter]

Cohen: With the different groups suspicious of each other, how did people communicate? Like were Americans who knew Vietnamese or French or did some of the Southern Vietnamese know English? You know, how was communication worked out?

Meyers: We could communicate with the... the command major, the South Vietnamese command major who spoke very good English. He once invited us to his house, where we had water buffalo... Tastes just like steak. [Laughter] But he was—he was very eager to communicate with us. As I found out some years later because I found my commanding officer in Alabama, and I talked to him on the phone for almost an hour, and he said, “You know that the... the Vietnamese name,” which we always used, we never called him Major Khan. His name was Tuta? He said, “You know, Tuta Khan? was a Vietnamese officer in the early fifties?” “Really?” He said, “We always believed he was an honorable man, there’s no reason that he wasn’t.” But he was an operator. He sometimes played both sides of the fence, and we were never entirely sure that he was giving us good information. We were certain he wasn’t a member of the Viet Cong. He was... we knew far too much about him, but we... we could trust him enough to be honest with him. There was a second Vietnamese officer, Lieutenant Key, who was my translator. He spoke perfect English. He spoke French, English, and Vietnamese, and when we went out on interrogation, he would come with me. I would ask him the question, he would ask the question, information back. You know, it was a three-way conversation. And I trusted him—completely.

Cohen: Had you picked up a little bit of Vietnamese along the way or had you have a little crash-language course at some point?

Meyers: No. We were being sent to Vietnam so quickly that they didn’t have time for it. If you wanted to extend and go to the Army language school, you could do that.

You could pick up Vietnamese, bring it with you, and do whatever you needed with the language. But you had to extend a year, and I wasn't going to do that at that point. So I had to pick up whatever Vietnamese I could just from listening to people. And it was very, very little.

Cohen: One of the things you said earlier that sort of puzzled me a little bit—I think you were saying about this General [i.e. Major] Khan or Tuta Khan?

Meyers: Major Khan.

Cohen: Major Khan, excuse me. And you said—it sounded like on the whole, he was trust worthy, but he was also an operator. I guess my question is, what would have been his interest not to share all the information with the Americans? What wouldn't have been their interest to collaborate as much as possible in the name of defense?

Meyers: I was never suspicious of him. You know, I was—I'm looking for a picture of him, which I have — I always found him as a trustworthy individual. His office—his desk wasn't very far away from mine so... it was very easy to talk with him. And he was a very friendly man—that's not it. [Shuffling papers] Every time you think you know exactly where something is, it turns out to be somewhere else... Okay, I know I have it here. He was always easy to talk to, so I never had a problem with that. It was my commanding officer, actually, his commanding officer who was suspicious. But this is a man who trusted nobody.

Cohen: Nobody, right. That's just his mindset.

Meyers: Ah... This is... my orders for Vietnam. John Dunn's name is there, and this is John Dunn getting off the plane from Saigon after he was released from the north in 1972.

Cohen: Wow. Very thin.

Meyers: This is **Newsweek** of February 1973—I'm sorry... Yeah. [Shuffling papers] This is him in prison in North Vietnam.

Cohen: Oh my goodness.

Meyers: So that was kind of an interesting side story to all of this. The... I have pictures of the entire unit. I'll find them in a moment, but I have pictures of the entire unit,

including—including Major Khan—oh, there we go... The boys in the band.  
[Laughter]

Cohen: Oh my goodness.

Meyers: That's Paul Simpson. [Laughter]

Cohen: Do you want to say the names of the other people?

Meyers: If I remember them... This is me, this is Specialist Hayes, who was one of the enlisted men... it's going to take me a while to remember the others.

Cohen: That's okay. That's okay.

Meyers: John Patron, who sat next to me—also a battle officer... Another picture of John, I'll pass on that one... That's Major Khan.

Cohen: Oh my goodness. Wow.

Meyers: And you could see form his military barring there... [Laughter]

Cohen: He's a serious man.

Meyers: He's a serious man. Another picture of him. I liked him, and—and I think he liked me, as well. We got along very well together.

Cohen: Interesting. Yeah. One thing you answered in the questionnaire that was very intriguing, you said, "Despite the best efforts, you felt that... that it was impossible to get a good read on what was really happening with the... with the Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese. Other than the tact that your group had anticipated the Tet Offensive. So I was wondering, why you felt the read was never sufficient?"

Meyers: You know, we always said that we had the best possible intelligence. You know, we had electronic intelligence, we had modern techniques, we had all went through intelligence school, we studied the Vietnamese, we had all that stuff. The one thing we lacked, which was the greatest deficit military forces lacked, we didn't know the territory. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese did, especially the Viet Cong. So, when they wanted to do something, they measured the situation. It would take them a long time to plan, but the preplanning stage was so meticulous that by the time things actually happened, they had a much higher degree of certainty. We had a much higher degree of speculation. So, I'll

give you an example. About two weeks before—I think it was the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, I'm not exactly sure of this—but the 57<sup>th</sup> Attack Helicopter Company was stationed at the Kon Tum airbase, the airfield. The wire around the airfield was penetrated by a group of what were called “sappers.” They were essentially... people who were—who were going to plant explosives inside of the airfield. They attack the 57<sup>th</sup> Attack Helicopter Company. They had pieces of dynamite and C4, which is a plastic explosive, and they just put them on helicopters and the trucks. One after the other. And an alert went on. Several of these young men were killed. I had to go out because I wrote the after action report for the unit, and these were young people, and we said to ourselves, “How in the world did they get on? This was pretty well protected.”

Cohen: So did they studied where the wires...?

Meyers: They studied the wire, they studied the timing, they studied the changing of the courses throughout the day, they studied the people on the other side, they studied where the trucks and helicopters were and what time they arrived. By the time they started this—this attack on the base—they knew exactly what was happening. And these were young man who were willing to die because there was virtually no chance they would get out, and many of them did.

Cohen: So, not exactly a suicide bomber, but...

Meyers: Yes. Exactly right. We would call that a suicide mission today. Yeah... So it was, actually, one of the earliest things that happened to me—this is two months after I arrived—one of the earliest things that happened to me to indicate what we're really up against—you know, as I told you before, I had this sort of idealized version of freedom and liberty and what I was going to Vietnam to protect—but when I looked at these young dead people and trying to understand what they had just done, what struck me was they're going to be there for the duration. You know, these are nineteen, twenty year-old people, and if they had to fight until they were thirty-nine, forty years old, they were going to do it. If they were going to be killed in the course of this mission, they were going to do it. I said, “I'm here for a twelve-month tour. They're here for the duration.” And at that point I said, “Something is not right here.” [Laughter]

Cohen: Yeah, yeah. So could you describe here the two instances that you said tipped you off to the fact that there would be an attack on Tet in Kon Tum?

Meyers: Yeah, yeah. One of the—one of the instances I just described, which was the incursion of the airbase. The destruction of helicopters and trucks, which we thought was kind of curious, in the middle of January. Why would they attack helicopters and trucks? Helicopters is fairly obvious. But why trucks? Trucks go up and back on roads. In retrospect, we thought they were attacking the trucks because they were carrying ammunition and supplies, and they could isolate the base that way. If they—if we have no trucks to use, we couldn't—we couldn't transfer ammunition and supplies that easily. If they have not helicopters to use, they couldn't fight back.

Cohen: So it would create sort of a siege?

Meyers: Yeah. Right. What they were trying to do was eliminate resources that we would find most valuable in a major attack. About two weeks prior to this, which would be the beginning of January, we had a small Red Cross operation. They had red trucks with red crosses on the side. One of them hit a land mine. The driver wasn't injured, but the side of the jeep was pretty completely destroyed. And we talked about this. Some guys who had been there a while had said, "It's very unusual that anybody plants mines in Highway 14, at this point because it's a major thoroughfare. And if you plant a mine here and somebody gets killed who you don't want to die, then it raises suspicions. And this Red Cross vehicle hit the mine and we said, "Why is there a mine there?" You know, "What's going on here?"

Cohen: There's a change?

Meyers: There's a change going on. Now, I have to mention before when I arrived, there was a major battle going on just north of us. A battle called Dak To. And it was one of the first times the North Vietnamese chose to fight on the field, rather than just withdrawing. They used resources, and it was very close in. And they not only did they choose to stand, but the casualty rate among Americans was very high. And I think this was one of their ways of raising the stakes in the conflict. They lost many more than we did, but I think there were a couple of hundred Americans killed. And that was a message they were sending to us. It was late November of '67. In late November.

Cohen: So they were becoming a little bit more emboldened?

Meyers: Yeah. Exactly. Again, in retrospect, what historians write about in these major battles—Khe Sanh, Dak Bla [River] —was American forces are being pulled out of



the Saigon area, north, to fight these open field battles and leaving the southern populated areas like Saigon open to attack. Now, all this is done in retrospect. We had no idea of what was going on. But we did have a very good idea at Kon Tum of what was going on because we monitored the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We had a unit, a special unit of special forces, who crossed the trail. They were... it was a highly classified unit, but they monitored the trail. They blew up explosives, they kidnapped, they rescued—they did those things. They saw traffic down the trail increase, they saw traffic around the Kon Tum area increase, the Viet Cong was becoming more active, and we began to track any large group that starts moving, leaves trails, they either leave actual trails of matted down grass or they leave bamboo that's knocked off to the side, they leave some form of—Kon Tum had a lot of rivers in it. There was a major river called the Dakbla, which was near us, there was small streams. Over a period of time we're starting to see trees that were felled over the streams, and it's fairly obvious that it becomes a crossing point, and they're coming closer and closer to Kon Tum. So we're saying, we got the intercepts, we got this, we got the precedent that's leading up to this. And our commanders in other places, mostly Pleiku and La Drang are saying to us, "This is what happens every year, Tet is a religious affair, the North Vietnamese will celebrate, the South Vietnamese will celebrate, then within a week the war will start again. And we're looking at this thing and saying, "No. This... this tracking was picking up in speed." And as we're getting closer to the 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> of January—we were on alert, they cancelled the alert the last day. That was the day of the attack.

Cohen: They cancelled the alert the last day?

Meyers: Yeah. Yeah, because we thought, "Tet was Tet, and nobody would attack." We said, "Forget it." The alert was cancelled for the entire unit, and we were only a piece of that unit. And we said, "Don't do this because... this is not an ordinary year. There are too many things going on right now that we could see—what we did see, that give a sense for what's happening." And they said, "Oh, no. Don't worry about it." I was the night duty officer on the 30<sup>th</sup>. We were attacked one day early because there was no communication between some of the North Vietnamese units. Everyone thinks Tet was so well planned. It wasn't all that well planned.

Cohen: Oh, I see.

Meyers: So, you have a units going toward Saigon, you have units going attacking the border cities. We were one of the first cities attacked, but we had more or less issued a statement to our commanders down the track not to wrap up for Tet. Stay on alert. And at two o'clock in the morning, we're hearing explosions, and we thought they were fireworks, initially, because Tet's a holiday. And then... they get louder and closer and we hit the alert siren, and that was the beginning of Tet. After it was all over—we got liberated by an American tank battalion—a tank company. We were more or less surrounded for three days. And we're liberated, we have the opportunity to look back on all of this, and write the after action report. So, I'm one of the principle writers of the after action report, and in that report, we said that, "We thought that we had anticipated the attack, and we were preparing for it. The attack was essentially—we were called off, and the attack occurred." We sent the report up, and what I didn't know, I only learned this, maybe five years ago, and it was in my notes because I had interviewed my commander, was that we became—then an investigation was started in our unit under the—with the question, "How did they know what they knew?" You know, everyone else is under the suspicion that Tet isn't going—that the New Year would be celebrated the same way it always was. And we're saying, "No. It won't." And they're saying, "How do you know?" [Laughter] It's like, "We were embarrassed by those whole thing and you said, 'It's going to happen,' and we didn't listen to you. Now, who do we have to answer to?" [Laughter] You know, it looks like an American failure.

Cohen: You know, I read a source that was published in '68, I've forgotten the title off hand—so again, this is the after the after—there they sort of say in Kon Tum there was sort of an acceptance of the report and that they tried to increase the wire around the airport or mines. They didn't let everybody go back on vacation, but at like fifty percent. So, I was kind of wondering... but it seems like from what you're saying that at some point they just... stopped the alert, nonetheless. Now perhaps they had done some of these things?

Meyers: Yeah. Well, I mean, because there wasn't any real action, there wasn't any real fighting in those days prior to Tet, that was kind of a trigger to the... to the commanders that something was going to happen. They were certain something was going to happen, it was a matter of timing. And they couldn't believe the way Tet had always been respected as a holiday wouldn't be the same as it would in '68—that it was very dependable, many members of the 41<sup>st</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were local. So, they went home. Their homes are within ten miles. It was easy for them to leave and come back after Tet was over or toward the end

of Tet. So, they demilitarized part of these units. And the same thing was true even some of the national units, who were part of the reinforced organizations. But that was a common understanding.

Cohen: Yeah. So, what was it like for you during those three days? Were you strictly in the same building? Were you involved in the radio interception? What were those three days like?

Meyers: This is a picture of me in front of the command bunker. The command bunker was entirely surrounded by sandbags. The thing was impenetrable, it was like being underground. My job was to monitor radio—radio transmissions because we're still getting intercepts. And some of the... communication, which normally would not have been in the clear, was being done in the clear. The South Vietnamese units were intercepting live conversations, and they were sending them forward. So we were receiving—we were receiving information that we thought was—was on task information. It was live information, and there were unit numbers we were very familiar with, they had fought at Dak To, they were fully reinforced and coming our way. And then there were numbers that they were predicting would be coming down the trail because as Tet was increasing, the numbers were increasing, and the second day—and we're pretty much cut off from everything by that point—the organization, which I remember was called the Ho Chi Minh Division, which was the division that fought at Dien Bien Phu, was designated for movement south and, you know, I'm sitting at the radio and I was surrounded by commanding officers—I'm sitting at the radio and saying, "Oh, god. If this is what's coming down the trail, we're in big trouble." I mean, it was bad enough that we were surrounded, but it was an omen of bad things to come. As it turned out it didn't happen. But all of these rumors are spreading because we are in the middle of conflict.

Cohen: Wow. Was there a contingency plan for you in the intelligence and others? Like in other words, if you were to be captured, was there kind of a contingency plan?

Meyers: Not that I know of. No. you know, in most cases, we never expected that to happen. You know, in most cases, we didn't expect that to happen. It's a nationwide attack, there are other battles going on in the far away provinces, infiltration is increasing, but we don't know the end game, there, exactly. We don't know how planned or poorly planned it's going to be. You know, talking about knowing the territory, we—there were times we were tracking units, and

we—we could pinpoint the units. But we had no idea what their intentions were. So, here's a unit; it goes from here to there from here to there, and we're waving our hands going, "What are they doing?" [Laughter] So, you know, it took all of our resources, finally to determine what they were doing. The city, Kon Tum City is liberated first I think, we were liberated slightly after, we're not far from the city at that point.

Cohen: How did you know when you were liberated? Was there US forces that overtook the area?

Meyers: Yeah. I, you know, I have a lot of... a lot of information with me, but I'll leave this with you... [Shuffling papers] This is... I had this on slides, but I put it together. There's no narration on it. It's all pictures, but one of the pictures on here... Well, it's one of the pictures in here. It's a picture of a tank from the 69<sup>th</sup> Armor [Regiment] coming down Highway 14 passed us, and it was the first sign we were liberated... You could keep that. I have a couple of different copies.

Cohen: Thank you. Thank you.

Meyers: But that was—that was a great day. [Laughter] So then the next question is... What happened? Because we were very isolated and we couldn't go anywhere. So, it's 1968, what's the key to success? The body count. We did the counting, the South Vietnamese did the burying. So, there are bodies all over the place. So we're trying—trying to figure out how many are dead North Vietnamese, Viet Cong bodies there are in this area. And we come up with a number of about nine hundred. And we submit the number. None of us really knew what we were talking about because we're depending on a lot of people counting. And the commanding officer in Nha Trang says, "That's impossible." So we send the people out again and said, "Count a second time." And we come up with about 825. "That's impossible." [Laughter] So they send the counting people... [Laughter] This is like...

Cohen: Absurd.

Meyers: The theater of the absurd. Send the counting team, the counting team counts, and it's in the high seven hundred's. And that's the accepted figure. As I look back—and I think it's in literature—I think it's about 725 or something like that. [Laughter]

Cohen: So was it in their interest to have a lower casualty? To make it seem less aggressive? Was that the idea?

Meyers: Oh, absolutely. The interest was, our success compared to North Vietnamese, Viet Cong success was always measured in casualties. If we took a lot of casualties, something is going wrong. If they took a lot of casualties, from our perspective, something was going right. So the more bodies we can count that they lost, the more successful our offense or defense would be. That's why the loss of Americans was so crucial to the way the war was fought. In 1969, *Life* magazine published a... a picture—it was an article called, "One Week's Dead," and there was something like two-hundred, there was no print to this, there was no narrative. It was pictures and names, and hometowns.

Cohen: Yeah.

Meyers: And people were looking at this in 1969, and they're asking, "How long is this going to go on for?" The body count of Americans is increasing, increasing, and increasing. Those numbers are piling up.

Cohen: Were there a lot of casualties—American casualties? You know, around where you were in the city of Kon Tum itself?

Meyers: Not that I know of. There weren't that many Americans around, and most of them were stationed in our compound. We had the military advisors, the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] people, of which I was one. We had the 299<sup>th</sup> transportation battalion [i.e., 299th Brigade Support Battalion]. We had the 43<sup>rd</sup> Signal Company [i.e. 43rd Signal Battalion /181st Signal Company] which was adjacent to us. And then we had a special forces command unit, a B team. And we were all in the compound. There was—there were a couple of people as I remember killed in the 43<sup>rd</sup> signal, they were right on the edge of a field where there was... a frontal attack. We were in back of them. We sustained only one injury, one of the guys I worked with caught a piece of shrapnel in his eye and we said, "Larry, you're going home." [Laughter] He came back two days later and said, "They pulled it, they put a bandage on it, and they said, 'Go back.'" [Laughter] So there were very few casualties' right around us, but there was a lot of... a lot of fear.

Cohen: A lot of fear. Yeah, I could imagine. Yeah... Yeah, you mentioned in the questionnaire that it stays with you—counting all the bodies and the, you know. Yeah.

Meyers: One of the... the things that's always been difficult to think about is that—you know, we did the counting and the South Vietnamese did burying—well, for the most part in large kinds of situations like this, they didn't have the means to do it. It would mean using shovels. It's a very tedious process. So, in the field, next to the 43<sup>rd</sup> signal, which is adjacent to our command headquarters, there were many, many bodies. The armored... let's try that one again. The artillery unit had three cannons that lowered their muzzles to ground level, and they shot grape shot onto the field, and there were a lot of casualties. They had to be buried, so... We requisitioned the number of plows from the 299<sup>th</sup> transportation and the plows dug up big furrows and pushed the bodies in. And, you know, I think about this today... [Tears] It's been nearly fifty years... and I still have trouble with this. I thought I would be... it would be easy to get passed it but it's never been easy. You know, I'm watching... My view of the world had already been affected. You know, I was kind of on the verge of turning against the war at that point. After Tet, at the very end when we're burying these bodies and pushing them back into the graves, I'm saying to myself, "You know, I can... I can account for the people around me as Americans. You know, somebodies injured; I know where they're going, they're going to a hospital, they're going home. But we know where they're going. They're serving a year here, they're leaving. We could track our people. But when a young man left from his village in North Vietnam, they were gone, and they might have been gone for five years, ten years, they might have come back, but they're out of... they're out of sight. And the North Vietnamese units that were caught in the field outside of our compound, were being buried in mass. So, I'm saying to myself and, you know, I... I continue to say it to myself, "You know, you raise kids and you have high hopes for them. You want to see them go through life, become parents, and here are dozens of bodies being pushed into mass graves and their parents will never know where they are." [Tears] In Buddhism -- and I'm not a Buddhist -- so I've only been told this—but in Buddhism, it's very important to understand where the bodies are so you could track the spirit of that body because bodies carry spirits with them. If you don't know where the body is, you don't know where the spirit is either. So, it's lost.

Cohen: Right. Like no name. No identification.

Meyers: Right. And even up to a few years ago, there were parents, old people coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. [Tears] So... it's...

Cohen: It's hard. It's heartbreaking.

Meyers: You talk about what you carry with you. Tim O'Brien wrote a book called *The Things They Carried*—I think veterans still carry these things, whether they want to admit it or not, they're painful things to carry. So, Tet is over, the burial is over, you know, we're going through a relatively peaceful time, and I'm onto my next assignment.

Cohen: Yeah. That's right. So after—after Tet, were you still there? Or did you go to Catcher's Mitt? I was sort of not clear.

Meyers: Yeah. I got... My commanding officer said, "You're being reassigned." You know, I told you, I had my up and down career as a—as a lieutenant. By that time, I had been promoted to first lieutenant. And my... my officer's recommendation—my proficiency report—after Tet, was very good. And my commanding officer said, "I would consider making this a career." And I said, "You know, I'm not sure about that." Very tentative. His replacement gave me a very poor proficiency report. So, when I got my orders to leave the 24<sup>th</sup>... and report somewhere else, I said, "Good." You know, I don't like to leave the guys, but I don't particularly care about leaving this unit anymore. [Laughter] So my commanding officer said, "You are going to the 1st something not entirely organized yet." And I'm running through my mind, "Well, there's the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, there's the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne, there's the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry there's the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry—so which first am I going to? And he said, "When we're sure, you'll have your orders and you'll be out." About three weeks later, he said, "You're going to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. Pack up, you're going, now." So I said, "Now? Like today?" He said, "Now, tomorrow. There's... Your transportation is going to be here first thing in the morning." So, I've got, I'm in an old French billet, and I've got stuff. You know, I'm carrying my suitcase, I've got things in it: my civilian clothes. I had to leave about a half of it there because I couldn't carry it all. I got to be at. I had an allocation. So, I've got my military stuff, my uniform, my boots, and stuff like that. I get picked up. The headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was in Lai Khe, which is roughly forty miles north of Saigon. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry command headquarters. And what I learned—and I didn't know it prior to this—is that they had just created what's called the 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Intelligence Battalion. It's organized, specifically, to collect information, but our method of communication is electronic intelligence. That's the only thing that we're doing. There were a group of guys assigned to each maneuver battalion and each maneuver company and each maneuver and... excuse me, let me rephrase that. They're attached to each battalion, and the battalion oversees maneuver companies, and we collect intelligence. I said, "What is all of this about? I've never heard of this before." [Laughter]

Cohen: And this is purely electronic?

Meyers: It's all electronic. So, we had about four weeks of training in the middle of a Michelin rubber plantation and because it was such a classified project, we weren't allowed to be in contact with other units. So, we're cutting down trees in the middle of the Michelin rubber plantation. The trees are owned by the French government. And we have to pay the equivalent. Something like \$3,000 a tree. There were other trees. For each tree, there were about four trees per tent. They were large tents, six-man tents. So we were paying like \$6,000 to the government to cut down trees to pay to a country that's lost the war in Vietnam. [Laughter] It's craziness. So, we're cutting down trees, we're setting up the billets, and we train there for about six weeks, roughly. We train mostly in equipment handling and how to work with this equipment. There's a little side story here, which is a fascinating side story and it has all sorts of ripples. We came from all over the country. There were people from the north, people who had done work like this before. People who hadn't. There were about seventy- five of us, I'd estimate. Almost half officers and half enlisted men; six of us in a tent, and our tents are broken down by officers and enlisted men. So, there's six guys in a tent with me. One of the guys who's in the tent with me is a lieutenant, at that point he may have been a captain, named John Marasco [i.e. Robert F. "Bob" Marasco]. I think a picture of him is on the tape. I know I have a picture of him. Nice guy, he had been in intelligence for a while, he had re-upped [reenlisted] for another year in Vietnam. Bob's goal was to transfer to special forces, so I go into the field, I lose track of John; about two years later, I'm in graduate school, and there's an article in *Life* magazine with the commander of the 5th Special Forces on the cover, and an article about how a south Vietnamese double agent was shot and dumped at the South China Sea. And there are six special forces—they think six, my numbers may not be right—but they're being accused of doing the dumping, and the trigger man in Bob Marasco. They were all—they were all ordered to leave the service. Some of them were career military people. The reason they couldn't push this investigation any further? The CIA refused to give information. They squashed the investigation. So Marasco leaves, captain, or colonel—I'll remember his name in a second—they all disappear. I found the colonel years later in an Outward Bound program in Maine, and I communicated with him. And I said, "Do you know where Bob Marasco is?" And he said, "Yeah, I know exactly where he is. He's in New Jersey. He's an insurance salesman." So I say to myself—this is probably early to mid-nineties—I said, "I'm going to contact Bob." Never did. So, years later—I'm there for a family event, my son-in-



law's family—and we took a bus. I think Bob lived in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and I was going to stop and say hello to him. I didn't do it. And he died shortly afterwards. So, it's one of these lost chances.

Cohen: I see, yeah.

Meyers: I have his obituary. And his obituary said he was a distinguished citizen of the community, he sold insurance, he was parts of boards and this and that. And in a little, tiny, maybe two lines, it said, "And he served as an officer in Vietnam." Nothing else. [Laughter]

Cohen: [Laughter] Okay, Don't want to arouse too many questions.

Meyers: Yeah. Two books had been written about this. I mean, it was the source of a major investigation, which never went anywhere. And there's still speculation about it. [Laughter] Okay, so that's—we're in the middle of forest here, the rubber plantation. We're all assigned to units.

Cohen: So, where is this rubber plantation?

Meyers: It's just outside of Lai Khe.

Cohen: Oh, that's right.

Meyers: The 1<sup>st</sup> Division headquarters. So we're in the plantation, we finish our training, we're assigned to units, and the unit that I was assigned to, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, which has been out in what is called the "Catcher's Mitt." [Laughter] So, we take—we take trucks out. I have—I'm carrying a lot of classified radio equipment, and it's very expensive. We have our own truck and we have two tents and we have all of our equipment. We get to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 16<sup>th</sup>, we know absolutely nobody, and we pretend—you know, we're really smart about this, right—we have perforated steel plating that we're going to use for protection. We build this amazing underground structure, and we put perforated steel plating on top of it and sandbags, and we were absolutely sure that if they were to drop an atomic bomb on it, then we'd survive, right? [Laughter] This is—this is April into May of 1968, and the rainy season has started. And it rains twice a day, two inches a day, and our wonderful structure floods. [Laughter] I mean, we have a foot of water at the bottom and no one wants to go into it.

Cohen: So much for that. [Laughter]

Meyers: So, you know, in case of an invasion, duck under your bunk, which is a piece of material. [Laughter] So, you know, the smart guys—the smart intelligence guys were learning lessons very quickly.

Cohen: Were learning lessons quickly, yeah. [Laughter]

Meyers: One of the other lessons I've learned... where is it? I have all sorts of stuff. [Shuffling papers] Was from this man... and his name is Specialist 7<sup>th</sup> Class Phillips. He was the battalion medic, and his tent was right next to mine, in fact, in the picture, you could see mine in the background over here.

Cohen: Yeah.

Meyers: He had—he had been in and out of the Army several times, and he was on his second tour of Vietnam, about to be on his third.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: So, since he had been there for so long and was next to us, we wanted information about what this place we called “Normandy Two,” night defensive perimeter, was all about. And he's giving us information. He says, “You know why they call this ‘Normandy Two?’” “I have no clue.” [Laughter] He said, “They call this ‘Normandy Two’ because the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division,” which was part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, which is part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, “was the first unit to land at Omaha Beach during the Normandy Invasion. So we've taken on ‘Normandy Two.’” The motto of the unit at that point—and may have changed—was “first on the beach.” [Laughter] So, we have... one of my great confidants... I think his picture is in here... [Shuffling papers] This picture was taken on the way to our—to our...

Cohen: Oh my goodness.

Meyers: This is maybe a fifteen-year-old boy begging for cigarettes. [Laughter] But... this Sergeant Major Barron, who is the sergeant major of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, and he's wearing a scarf. The scarf—the word on the scarf is “rangers.” And I asked, “This is not a ranger battalion.” He said, the way they got the name—and this is not the name of the unit during World War II, it was changed in 1947—the way they got the name was that one of the—was that one of the sub units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rangers was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry and went ashore with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, and one of the commanders said that the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> fought like

rangers. [Laughter] That's—that's what we heard. Anyway, Sergeant Major Barron—and I can't use his language—he was the last briefer. We had in Saigon what is called a "five o'clock follies," but we didn't think it was so unserious.

Cohen: Sorry, what was it called?

Meyers: It was an afternoon briefing. It was always around four or five o'clock. So, the lieutenant colonel briefs first, then we went right down the chain of command on the intelligence briefer. Sergeant major is last, and this occurs every day—seven days a week.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: The colonel looks at the sergeant major and he says, "Sergeant Major, do you have anything to say?" And... I'll leave out the bad words. But he says, "Blank them. Blank them, Blank them all." [Laughter] And the colonel says, "Thank you Sergeant major... go home." He was in his third war.

Cohen: Oh, my god.

Meyers: He was in his third war. He fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. He was probably in his early fifties.

Cohen: Oh, yeah. He was going to say he doesn't look like a twenty-year-old.

Meyers: And he went out with the infantry units. He was the greatest inspiration in that unit because of who he was.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: But somebody gave him this lawn chair. [Laughter] And he's sitting in this lawn chair and received guests. [Laughter] He was a very funny but very serious man.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness. [Laughter]

Meyers: So, he was one of the people who inspired me. But Specialist Phillips was one of the reasons I became a teacher.

Cohen: So how did—how did each one specifically inspire you?

Meyers: Well, Sergeant Major Baron inspired me because of his willingness to take risks at an age when he didn't have to anymore. This is equivalent to the highest—the

highest noncommissioned officer in our unit. There's only one rank ahead of his, which is command sergeant major. He didn't have to go anywhere. He could have stayed and been a senior advisor. He didn't. You know, he said, "My troops need me in the field. I've been through this twice already. And I'm going to go out and give them confidence."

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: He didn't say that in so many words.

Cohen: But that was his attitude?

Meyers: That's what he did. And is said, "You know, the guy's twice my age, and he's still going out and fighting. So what does this say about being a career military person?" So today we talk about heroes, and I wouldn't call him a hero, but he was courageous. You know, he was taking risks every day when he didn't have to.

Cohen: In order to help?

Meyers: Yeah. Yeah. The troops rotated in and out of the unit regularly because they only served a year. So you had experienced guys out, new guys in—and he was the trainer for them. You know, he's the guys who'd say, "Stick by me, and I'll show you the ropes." So he served a lot of different purposes, but he was inspirational.

Cohen: You mentioned that the other one inspired you to become a teacher?

Meyers: Mmhmm.

Cohen: So why is that?

Meyers: Specialist Phillips, who had quite an interesting background—he had been to university, he had been in and out of the war... and remember, Robert Kennedy was assassinated at the end of June—he was on leave, because he had reupped again [reenlisted] for a third year. He was on leave and the org went to St. Patrick's Cathedral, had a press pass, and brought back pictures of Kennedy's funeral to us. And I said, "How did you get the press pass?" And he said, "I have connections in the org. Part of what I did when I wasn't in the military had to do with journalism." So, he had a press pass. [Laughter] So we understood this is a man that brought back lots of stuff. If you look carefully at the picture—and this is complete speculation—there's a look to his face. And you can see it in his face,

what we used to call the, “thousand- yard stare,” he looks like he’s not entirely in this world.

Cohen: Right. He’s... yeah.

Meyers: Sergeant major—rather, Specialist Phillips, because was a battalion medic, distributed medication, including morphine **syringes?** and our sense was that he came back into the military because he was possibly addicted. That was the only sense I can make of this, and I may be entirely wrong. But he was our mentor, he gave us some idea of what this world that we called “Normandy Two” was all about. There was a—and I have a picture of it—there was a tree that became a basketball... station. It was a backboard and a net. And members of the battalion...And companies in our battalion—there was always a company around the perimeter—they’d play basketball when they came off duty—into the late afternoon or early evening, they’d play basketball. When Martin Luther King was assassinated in the beginning of April, there was a distancing. The white troops and the black troops didn’t play together. Black troops played by themselves, white guys played by themselves, and I came into the unit and I saw this. You know, I asked Specialist Phillips, “What’s going on, here?” And he said, “After King’s assassination, there was an effect in this unit that was very tangible, and the black soldiers were starting to meet with each other and talk about what is this that we are we fighting for? In the aftermath of King’s—King’s assassination.” And Specialist Phillips—and this is virtually an exact quote, it’s a paraphrase, but it’s almost an exact quote—said, “The brothers now will believe that the real war, the real American war is being fought in the streets of America.” And that... they had not resigned from the war, but as I remember it, he did use that term. He said, “They’ll still fight. They’ll still cooperate. But they’re resigning from the war.”

Cohen: They had no longer believed in the cause of the war?

Meyers: Yeah. You know, because we had *Stars and Stripes*, we had Air Force broadcasting, we had access to worldwide news. And we understood the aftermath of King’s assassination: rioting, civil rights, there’s a lot of turmoil—at the same time a war is going on. And black men in the Army are getting this from home. They’re seeing it on television, they’re seeing it, they’re getting letters from home, and there’s conflict. You know, “How do I fight for freedom here when the freedom we’re fighting for isn’t giving to us on the streets of America?” So that’s a piece of the story. When I left... I had my short-timer’s

calendar, I'm checking off the days. Day comes, at it's the middle of August of '68, and I had to rotate back to the unit, pick up all my stuff, out process—out process, go back to Lai Khe to Saigon and then out. And I'm about to get on a helicopter, and Phillips says, "What are you going to do with this?" So, I said, "What do you mean, what am I going to do with this?" And he said, "Who ya gonna tell?" It didn't make any impression on me, you know, I'm ready to leave. So... I get on the helicopter—boom, boom, boom—I'm back in San Francisco, [California], I land in Chicago during the Democratic Convention, and there's rioting in the streets of Chicago. [Laughter] I get to the airport, and I immediately go to the bathroom. I'm wearing a uniform, and I go to the bathroom, take off my uniform, and I stuff it in a bag, go home, go to graduate school, spend two years there, come out, and, I wasn't sure what my direction was at the time, I passed the civil service exams and thought I'd work for the government. My advisor at the University of Illinois in Champaign said, "Why don't you consider teaching and use it as a fall back?" So, I do my student teaching and I said, "This is it. This is my career." So, I started in public school teaching in 1970.

Cohen: Could we just back up a little bit?

Meyers: Sure.

Cohen: And could you just explain a little bit more about your role when you were in the... in the "Catcher's Mitt?" Like the nature of the work?

Meyers: Oh, yeah. I skipped over it. [Laughter]

Cohen: Well, there's a lot.

Meyers: Right. Right. You know, in the history of Vietnam, there were all sorts of efforts to try to collect information about infiltration. Robert McNamara, who was a data guy and always interested in numbers, proposed an idea. He wasn't the only one, but the idea was proposed to string a group of sensors along the northern border or South Vietnam, and the sensors could be used to detect movement. And as these sensors went off, you could determine where the troops were, how many of them there were, you could determine where they were going, that sort of thing. I think it went through an experimental stage, but it was never very successful. They figured, maybe they should take this inland. It wasn't working toward the border, but we'll give it a second try. Our job was to take these airdropped and hand implanted sensors, place them around an infiltration route, we had mortars around our night defensive position. The—

the—I wish I could describe this better, but outside we—we had two tents, one was a sleeping tent, the other was our work tent. Inside the work tent, we had a generator; there were lines from the generator that went to a big box. The box had lights on it. When they weren't lit up, they were monitoring the sensors. And every time a sensor went off, it sent a signal to the box and a light lit up. And we knew where our sensors were. So, sensor one goes off, sensor two goes off, and we watch the lights. And they're going bing, bing, bing; this is the direction that the Viet Cong are going. There was a supply station in that direction, not far from us. We knew what was happening, but we didn't know how it was happening.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: We see the light go off, we call into the mortar pit, "Shoot the sight." [Laughter]

Cohen: Oh, I see.

Meyers: Now, these are sensors. You know, they're all electronic devices. We have no idea what we're shooting at. All we know is that the lights are going off. [Laughter]

Cohen: Right. Right. [Laughter]

Meyers: So, we do our after action report. Periodically we found somebody who was dead or blood trail, we found water buffalo, we found—we found everything. [Laughter] I mean, it was a very inaccurate way of...

Cohen: Of locating the...

Meyers: Of trying to track the enemy. But we did this from—I did this, I should say—from roughly the end of May of '68 to rotation in the middle of August.

Cohen: Oh, 'til when you were free to go back to San Francisco?

Meyers: Yeah. I rotated back. When I left, I got two things from the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. One of them was... this. [Laughter] My lighter. I've never smoked in my life, but they gave me a lighter.

Cohen: Is this the insignia?

Meyers: It's the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Rangers, and that's the unit insignia. And then on the back... it's 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.

Cohen: Oh, wow.

Meyers: The other thing they gave me was a... it wasn't a commendation, it's a recognition of service. It's a plaque, which I still have at home. I didn't bring it. But it's a plaque with a 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Big, Red One on the background that says, "Combat, intelligence, battalion, provisional, May of 1968, September of 1968." The life of the organization was a little greater than that, and I understand it ended in October of '68. So this is an organization that only lasted approximately five months. Try to find it anywhere. I have no orders for it. None were ever cut. I can't find it anywhere in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division archives. I've got... with me somewhere—oh, it's over here... National Archives request. [Laughter] I'm about to start a Freedom of Information inquiry. Nothing can—I cannot find this unit. [Laughter]

Cohen: This unit. Well, you know, we have a wonderful reference librarian, Paul Grasmehr, I wonder if...

Meyers: I'd love to use it and find it.

Cohen: Yeah. Or maybe have some other ideas, that'll be a...

Meyers: Yeah. I've tried multiple listings. I keep on getting letters back that say, "Thank you for the key words. We've looked through our archives, and nothing." [Laughter]

Cohen: Nothing. Well—well, I assume that you were appreciated. It sounds like they are giving out... not awards—but some kind of acknowledgement that they appreciated the work that was being done?

Meyers: Yeah. I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did. Our official title with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> was Battalion Information and Control... Battalion Information Centering—oh, Command and Control. We were called the BICC. So, infantrymen referred to us as BICC. We were no longer intelligence. We were BICC. [Laughter]

Cohen: BICC. [Laughter]

Meyers: So we essentially gleaned the intelligence for the battalion, at least the electronic battalion intelligence. And the work that we did helped enable, I think, the survival of infantrymen because they could depend on us for shooting targets that might be of value to them; ultimately, who may have killed them. So a number of years ago, I wrote a—I wrote a—I did a little—I've done a lot of



writing. Most of this for myself, but... I wrote a—let's see if I can find it.

[Laughter] [Shuffling papers] I read this stuff so constantly that I put it in places I can never find but... yep. Nope. I'll find it in a moment. I'll just go through this as I'm speaking. I wrote a piece that I thought captured my experience monitoring these devices. They were supposed to be a monitor twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There were three of us.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness.

Meyers: And we decided after a while that that was impossible. That we just had to give ourselves a break periodically. So we monitored the devices, and then we spent about maybe two hours not monitoring the devices. It was always based on observation that there was no movement during those two hours. We could afford not to. So it gave us an opportunity to sleep, which we needed... I know it's in here. [Shuffling papers] Years later, I wrote a... This is driving me nuts. [Continue shuffling papers] I wrote a piece for... essentially, myself. It's called "In the Catcher's Mitt." And it ends like this. You asked about our value. It says, "We were the secret weapon. McNamara's wall gone south for an experiment with the grunts with straight leg infantry. The Battalion Intelligence Center that rode to victory. Green lights on, patrol in place, lock on and blow them—and blow them free. But water buffalo walk too and they don't read road signs. After action reports: buffalo limbs, hanging from the trees testify to that. We wasted our fire missions and messed up our sensing, prolonging the war. So, we saved our fire missions for special occasions or simply fell asleep, abandoning the night to Charles. We hoped that it would not play havoc with our pleasant evening. I was sixty years short and did not relish incoming..." I'll skip a paragraph. "I thought I had forgotten Normandy Two in the sun. The relentless rain." One of our guys is called... I call him "Fat Boy." He was a little large. "Fat Boy and the blankers?. Forget Snorkey, our shepherd companion he rolled about the soft floor under my tent at night making himself a finely covered dirt ball. He had appeared in the doorway at dawn, clean after a roll in in the puddles. Forgot the blistering, we took on my last night of touring in the field. Forgot the chopper that lifted me from Normandy and dropped me to another night defensive perimeter to wait until morning. Forgot Specialist What's His Name, who got a Bronze Star for having the nerve to accompany an ambush patrol to replace their hand and—to replace their hand implanted sensors. A funny war. Men died and received no award. Our job was medal for doing his job. Forgot the airborne captain, who taught me dominos while trying to learn the art of the sensor. Forgot my journey through the monsoon mud when General Goodpaster and his

aides found the ammo boxes that I had inconveniently lost. Forgot dinner with Lieutenant Gillespie who was dead... who was dead the next day when his track hit a mine, which blew him into eternity. The lines activated progressively, slowly, inexorably. We watched for minutes, hours, days, weeks. We thought that we could distinguish a dog from a grunt, a mama-san from an ammo hunter. We were wrong. We distinguished nothing from nothing. We created huge holes in the ground. Moved our sensors and called for more. We were the wizards of technology. Grunts prayed to us. We took their job and made them safe. Search and destroy became wait and destroy. Marvels of military science. Three guys in a tent watching green lights... three guys in a tent watching green lights while Charlie owned our world." So, we always advertised ourselves as a... saviors. But there was nothing particularly that was saving us. You know, we were—at that time, I had turned entirely against the war... It—it wasn't a war that we could win. And it wasn't a war that we could afford to lose, either. You know, it was truly a quagmire. And I was released from the military on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September to go back to graduate school.

Cohen: Had you applied while you were in Vietnam?

Meyers: I applied five times. [Laughter] I kept on writing—I wish I would have kept these letters. They were variations of the same letter. It said, "I'm due to be released from the Army on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1968. I'm rotating back to the United States, and I'll only have approximately a month to serve. Graduate school starts at the beginning of September. Please release me so I can go to graduate school!" [Laughter] And I got the same reply. You know, "Your orders require that you serve the entire tour of duty of two years. That's your obligation. You'll come back, we'll put you somewhere else for a month." Etcetera. Number one, number two, number three, number four; I tried a fifth time and they finally agreed to it. [Laughter] So I got back at the end of... end of August. I was officially dropped on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. I started graduate school for two years on the GI Bill. [Laughter]

Cohen: Okay. So it'll be a little bit—a little bit sooner. [Laughter]

Meyers: Yeah, exactly.

Cohen: So did you—when you went back to the States, where did you go and where were you released from? How did that work?

Meyers: Well, my fiancé and I were supposed to get married in August of '67. I got my orders for Vietnam. I came back to the United States end of August, and by that time we were already engaged. So our wedding day was set for the 20<sup>th</sup> of October. So we had about seven weeks roughly from the time I started graduate school to the middle of October. Meanwhile, I was looking for a job. [Laughter] History teachers were a dime a dozen in 1968. I couldn't get a job, in 1970, rather. So, I worked for an insurance company for six weeks and then there was an opening in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. I got a call from the History Department chair, she said, "There's an opening." I said, "I'll take it." I resigned from the insurance company after six weeks. [Laughter] And I taught in Elk Grove Village for the next four years.

Cohen: Oh. Okay, wow.

Meyers: That was kind of the career path, at that point.

Cohen: Yeah. When you were in Vietnam, did you write to your—not you wife at the time—but then your fiancé?

Meyers: Yes.

Cohen: Did you write to your father?

Meyers: I did. There were two ways to communicate. One of them was through letter. And she kept all of my letters. I kept all of her letters. And we have them in one of these old plaid suitcases. [Laughter] I mean, they're like six-hundred letters.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: Maybe more. I never really counted them. With my father, we had very small tapes, and I had a tape recorder. I recorded tapes, and they were always sanitized tapes. You know, so I would say, "We're eating very nicely, tonight. We're having wine and steak," which was true. And you know, my job is, "I'm safe and doing this and that." I couldn't tell them what I was doing but I would tell them I'm doing something safe. And we exchanged tapes. You know, he had to set of tapes, too, and he recorded them. And the thing I hated most is when I got the tapes was they were always recorded around the dinner table. [Laughter] So I could hear the clang of the forks and the knives and the plates. I could hear people eating. I'm eating—I'm eating, okay, but I'm not having steak every night. [Laughter] So I'm listening to these tapes, and finally, I say to my

father, "Please don't record tapes at the dinner table. I'm envious." [Laughter] So he stopped doing that. The one tape—and I have some tapes, in fact, I have lot of tapes, which are in storage—the one tape that I'm looking for and I cannot find it. It should be the easiest tape to find—is on the second day of Tet, things were not looking very good. You know, I'm hearing this rumor of these guys coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, there's a lot of action going on, we're being hit in the middle of the night by mortars and rockets, and it was desperate. And I was the night duty officer. So I come back to my billet, I take out my tape recorder, and I thread it and... the tape was destined for nobody. It was for me to keep and somebody to find. I wasn't going to send it to anybody. But... I think I may have it. It was a small amount of one tape left, but it... it was my last will and testament because I figured if I'm going to be killed, I want my relatives to know what to do. You know, what to do with me, what to do with what I still owned, which wasn't very much in the States. You know, when they send back the remains and the stuff. You know, do I want to be buried? Do I want to be cremated? You know, it was that kind of thing.

Cohen: Did you write your fiancé like more open letters?

Meyers: No. No. I never wrote anybody to tell them what I was, actually, doing. It was mostly chatter. You know, so and so got engaged or we had a delivery of lobster, tonight or... you know, I met some new guys. It was never really anything that I could really tell them. You know, not that I was always doing classified stuff, but I didn't want to send things where they'd start asking questions and the questions would lead to something I didn't want to talk about.

Cohen: That's true.

Meyers: I mean, one of the things that has... haunted me for a long time was the fact—my kids often ask me—I started speaking in schools in '82, and kids often ask me, "Did you kill anybody?" And my response always was, "I never saw anybody I killed." You know, I never shot at anybody, I never saw anybody, I saw remains of killing, but I collected information to give to people that resulted in killing. So, you know, you say, "I never saw them. But what did I do? I sent information that... reached the cockpit of a B-52 that was flying over our province and we had sightings in the field and they dropped a load of five-hundred pound bombs on them. And apparently it was pretty close to a direct hit that we did the after action report. And we could see the mess that we created. You know, the pilot had dropped them—I gave them the information. I gave them the information to

drop Agent Orange over the northern part of the province, where there was infiltration. To me, Agent Orange was just a defoliant. You know, I didn't know what it—it could ultimately do.”

Cohen: It didn't seem like you had too many choices, though, once you were already there?

Meyers: No. No. No. If I knew—you know, if I knew I ethically disagreed with something. And this is part of my “bad boy” in the Army. I would, generally, say it. But because there were times when I didn't know what I was doing, I mean, in the spring defoliant over jungles, didn't seem to be a destructive action. And I truly didn't learn about this until, probably, '72 or '73 when the first inkling of what defoliants were beginning to do not only the Vietnamese but on American infantrymen coming back. And it only got worse. So, do I feel guilty about it? I do. Do I feel like I could have done something about it? No.

Cohen: No. No. No.

Meyers: There's a degree that orders are orders. And if they're immoral, I knew I had an obligation to do something about it. You know, where's the fine line between what's immoral and what's your mission?

Cohen: Have you been involved in groups that discuss that? Or read books about it...moral injury?

Meyers: No. I've purposely avoided veteran's groups... no. The only person I could ever talk to about this... was a colleague of mine, named Joan Davis. She married a guy named Bill Davis. Bill Davis was one of the founders of Vietnam Veterans Against the War—the Illinois chapter. And I could sit down with Bill and talk to him. And Joan. They were married. Bill died very young, he was only in his fifties. I think he had cancer. And Joan survived him, I appeared in her class a number of times to talk to kids, but I could always talk to her because she—she knew the stories.

Cohen: From him?

Meyers: From him. Yeah... but we talked about whose safe to talk about... I never... I talked to my wife and she knows ninety-nine percent of what I did but periodically things would come up and I'd say, “Did I ever mention this to you?” And she say, “I thought I hear everything, but no.”

Cohen: Wow. That's... yeah.

Meyers: Never heard that. So let me go back to something here that's leading here. You asked me about Specialist Phillips and why I went into teaching.

Cohen: Yes.

Meyers: I never completely understood why I went into teaching. It was available. I was interested. I got the job. I spent—I stated speaking to kids in 1982, I still do. About 1986, 1987 I'm speaking in the—in the assembly hall at our middle school, and it's shaped like a Roman Coliseum. I'm on the bottom, the rows go up this way in a semi-circle and I'm taking questions from the kids, the kids are asking questions. Most of the kids, most of the question always come from the front because the really interested kids are in the front, and they really uninterested kids are in the back so they could get out first. [Laughter] So, here's a question from the back from one of my students, who I recognized. He was a kid with real challenges, and he asked me, "Why are you doing this?" Now, I accepted any question. I only told them, "Don't ask me personal questions." But he's asking, "Why I am doing this?" And I stopped for a second... and... you know, I can't remember what you call these things that are shocks to your system.

Cohen: I can't think of the word.

Meyers: It starts with a P. I'll remember it in a second. But... you know, I think about this and I say... This is what... this is what... I'm... Specialist Phillips is talking about. [Tearing up] What he says, "What are you going to do with what you saw?" You know, I said, "I'm not going to do anything. I'm leaving" And it takes me from... August on 1968 to May of 1987, we're talking about nearly twenty years... so, I'm standing on the stage, and... he—he—he asked me this question. And it takes me almost a minute to respond. And I said, "I want to tell you a story." [Tearing up] "That's the story." You know, some things—there are some things that are obvious, and some things that are painfully obvious, and some things... are mysterious, and some things are deeply hidden. When I said I came back in August of 1968, this stuff was receded, it was in deep memory. The only reason I started to talking in 1982 was that my kids are fourteen years old and my kids were fourteen years old. These were eighth graders.

Cohen: You felt that it was time to start to talk?

Meyers: Yeah. It was time to talk. But it was a reaction to the rage. Not to anything else. But when he asked me, “Why do you do this?” In 1986, 1987, he was starting to get into deep memory. And that’s when I had this flashback on stage to Specialist Phillips saying, “What are you going to do with this?” You know, when I talk to kids today, and I’ll be talking to a group, next week. But when I became a teacher, I went through the process. But when I knew I became a teacher, it became—it was because of a memory. And it’s him.

Cohen: Him. In a way, he said to go and do something with it, to communicate it.

Meyers: Yeah, exactly. It was easy to talk about. You know, here I can get emotional about it. But... the—the conflict was easy for me to talk about. I could distance myself from it. I was a historian. You know, I could put all the pieces together but the deeper meaning, kind of the underbelly of my war was not easy to talk about. So, I would skip it. You know, I would always search for something safer. I could always talk about a joke that I’d learned or the fact that we hand built our bar out of scrap wood. You know, all of these things are easy to talk about. It was much harder to talk about the deeper memories. And this... this young man’s question, as naive as it might have been. And I could hear some chuckles from the audience like, “We know who’s asking him the question.” But that was maybe one of the most significant questions that was ever asked of me in all the time I’ve been talking about Vietnam, So, it’s... as a teacher I’ve... it was clear from the beginning that there is no insignificant question. And sometimes, the kids who ask the most—the most important questions are the kids you’ll least expect from.

Cohen: From the most unexpected sources. Yeah.

Meyers: Yeah. Right.

Cohen: It does seem though that for many... there is [are] decades of—of quiet after a—after—after a traumatic event. I mean, they may decide not to speak at all, but some do seem to just have a period of... quiet.

Meyers: Yeah. You know, you see this... I’ve spent a great deal of time teaching and learning about the Holocaust, you see this after post—World War II... survivors, including... my wife was born in a displaced person’s camp. Hers parents are Polish survivors. They came and talked to each other, but they never talked to their kids. My wife had to learn the name of her diseased sister from me. Her parents never told her, her name. So, you go through this period of time where

there's silence. And the same thing is true of Vietnam. It really wasn't until 1985 when the nation woke up from this long sleep. And there was an actual march to recognize Vietnam veterans. It was about the soldier and not the war.

Cohen: Do you think there's a lot of shame about Vietnam veterans, initially, because it was such an unhappy war?

Meyers: I think there was a sense—there's certainly a sense of loss. You know, this was a defeat. It was the first war we'd ever lost, and you don't lose it by yourself. People, you know, people were pointing to the military people and saying, "See, you didn't fight hard enough." Or, "We were misguided. Our leaders misguided us. Or the media betrayed us." Or any number reasons. But it was a long period of shame... and we buried it. Nineteen eighty-five was the beginning of kind of the reemergence of why did we fight and what has it done. So, there's a—there's a march in Chicago. Big march. Nineteen eighty-five. And my wife is standing next to me. I meet—I met somebody who's become a lifelong friend who's an author, who's written about it. And we're walking down—down Michigan Avenue, and somebody runs out of the... the audience... [Shuffling papers] Yeah. It's all in one piece... Runs out of the audience and hands us this... Ah, here it is.

Cohen: Oh.

Meyers: "It's been a long time—forgive us. Thank-you for allowing us say thank-you, now." So you know, what I sometimes told my kids is that there's a Russian poet named Yevtushenko who once wrote a poem that said sometimes the train is slow but it'll eventually come to its station. And I think the war, as little as we talk about it today because we've been through Iraq and Syria and... and Desert Storm, these events linger. They don't disappear. The past is not gone, and when veterans think about this and when the public thinks about it... it... fifty years gets squashed [Clap] right like that. And this is my fiftieth year home.

Cohen: Fiftieth year home, yeah. But even though... looking at an individual's life... it's long but maybe in terms of how we remember things, it's short?

Meyers: Yeah. That's right. It's been two thirds of my life since I've returned from Vietnam... But it's never left.

Cohen: How many children do you have? And how - was it like talking to them about what you experienced?



Meyers: We have one daughter. And... it's not that it was difficult to speak with her. Sometimes, she wanted to know and sometimes, she didn't want to know. So, we just respected her wishes and when she came to us—we never pushed it on her. And that was pretty much the situation until she had kids. She's forty-two now, and her kids are eight and ten. Eight and eleven. Soon to be nine and twelve. And their parents told them that I was a Vietnam veteran, and they picked up on this. They call me every Veteran's Day and send me—send me messages, they send me pictures, and—and they say, "Thank you for being a Vietnam veteran." It's like it skipped a generation. [Laughter]

Cohen: Wow. Wow. I'm trying to think if there are other questions that I meant to ask. Oh, we'll go back to one. Is—you talked about one of them. But did you ever receive any other medals or special service awards? You talked about one of them but I was wondering about the others?

Meyers: I have them with me. I'm anticipating questions. [Laughter] I am... I have to tell you... I'm not particularly proud of this... now, here it is. [Shuffling papers] I'm not particularly proud of this, there are two parts of it. At the end of my tour... I was awarded the Bronze Star. There are two Bronze Stars, one of them is for valor, the other is for what they call meritorious.

Cohen: Ah, yes.

Meyers: I've always seen my Bronze Star as a thank you for being there medal. That it wasn't earned particularly. That I got them because I was there for ten months. There's a commendation that goes with it, and... you know, I've kept this in the basement for a long time. And periodically, I've trot it out and said, "Look. I won the Bronze Star." [Laughter] This is the commendation for it. And it has the same sort of thing, you know, 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant, meritorious service... so it's an acknowledgement in print, that I won the Bronze Star.

Cohen: Yeah.

Meyers: This is signed by Keith Ware, who is commanding officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. About... two weeks after he signed it, Keith Ware was killed. He was the first commanding officer to be killed during the war in Vietnam, and it was discovered that he was a recipient of the Medal of Honor of World War II. He was killed on November 20, excuse me, he was killed on September 13, 1968. This was signed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 1968. So, it is very possible, that I'm one of the last people who he recognized for the Bronze Star. While the Bronze

Star didn't... still doesn't have a whole lot of importance for me, it's the man who signed it that does.

Cohen: That does, yeah.

Meyers: Because I've met him. I shook his hands. And I was introduced, and I shook his hand, and I remember very—very—I still have pictures of it, as well. But it's... you know, it's a constant reminder of the loss.

Cohen: Of the loss, yeah.

Meyers: And... this is part of the loss... you know, Tim O'Brian's book, *The Things They Carried*... I still have them.... Any other questions or thoughts?

Cohen: You mentioned that you were involved with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's Society?

Meyers: I was but wasn't very involved. [Laughter]

Cohen: Okay. [Laughter]

Meyers: I joined it. I went to Cantigny to see the exhibits and sort of investigate the society. And then I kind of... disappeared. I didn't have much to do with it.

Cohen: Also, have you ever gone back to Vietnam or would you want to go back?

Meyers: Well, roughly about ten years ago, my wife and I started talking about it. Now, whenever I was assigned, I was always assigned by myself. So, would I go back with a group of guys I served with? I don't even know if many of them are still alive. So, if I were to go back, I'd go back by myself. And I would have to track myself back to Kon Tum, things may not exist. I'd have to do some research. So, we kept putting it off, putting it off, and putting it off—and about a year ago, we started talking about this, again, and I wasn't interested at that point. Not because I didn't want to do it myself, but she's not particularly in good physical condition. And it would be very vigorous trip because Kon Tum is up in the mountains, and for her to do any walking, it would be difficult. So... no. We're not going back. And even my interest in going back is diminished.

Cohen: Is diminished, yeah. What do you think younger generations could learn from your experiences?

Meyers: We've talked about this in class and I've talked about this with my kids. There are a number of things that can be learned. One of them... is that it's—it's

extremely important to examine your own beliefs. You think you know yourself. You think you know your own life pattern. But question it, and question it constantly: Am I doing the right thing? Where is it taking me? What are the consequences of my decisions? 'Cause sometimes we do things for the best purpose, purposes we believe in: democracy, we go to Vietnam to fight for the right reasons, and, in retrospect, we were wrong. There things we didn't know. Things we should've known that our government wasn't telling us. So be constantly reflective of your own—of your own belief system. Second thing, is when you confront something that you know is wrong... say something because in the long run, when that decision gets critiqued, and people point the finger at you and say, "Why didn't you do something about it?" It's all done in retrospect. You had the opportunity. You knew something should've have been done but you didn't do it. You can't do that. You know we... we can't do that anymore. I think "The Who" wrote a terrific song, and one of the lines in the song is, "We can't get fooled again."

Cohen: "We can't get fooled again." Yeah.

Meyers: So that's a second thing. Third thing is as we transition from young adults to adults and we're looking forward, to keep all your options open and use the past as a way of informing yourself about those options. You know, interview your parents and found out where they came from and who they are and what they stood for and why you are the kind of person you are today because it helps you move through your life and make decisions. And it helps you so you don't regret it later on. "Why didn't I ask my father about this? Why didn't I talk to my mother? Why didn't I learn more about the guys I served with?" So there's signs post along the way that we have to be conscious of.

Cohen: Be more of... be more reflective as we go along.

Meyers: Right. And some of this... I would hope some of this helps kids. One more thing and I know we're getting toward the end of the interview. In 1970, there were Congressional hearings into what were called the "Red Squads." The "Red Squads" were domestic units. Sometimes intelligence units. Generally, units that were comprised of police, military, domestic intelligence operatives. Their job was to monitor... civil rights units... leftist units. I did that work... in—in Denver. I didn't call it the "Red Squads," but I was doing the work nevertheless. In 1970, there was a Congressional investigation into the "Red Squads." It might have started in '69 and the chair of the committee was a guy named Sam Ervin. Sam

Ervin got involved a lot in Watergate, and this is in 1970. On December 18<sup>th</sup>, and it's not very good condition, I wrote to Senator Ervin and volunteered to testify before the committee and I detailed what I did. [Laughter] It's what, four—three pages long. I got a very long, nice letter from them that said, "Thank you for your concerns. We have enough first-hand testimony. If we need you, we'll call you." They never did. [Shuffling papers] I can't find this return letter, I know I have it, but it was that point in my live where I said to myself, "I can't be fooled again." And the country can't be fooled again. And this information, I hope, once it's known will help the public understand what the war was about. The Pentagon papers did it. His committee did it. And the more history that unravels itself—and we're still doing it. There's still books and new information. So, history—history is not gone.

Cohen: No.

Meyers: The past is hardly the past.

Cohen: No. I think... this is why it's important to do oral history, too, and creating other sources, as well.

Meyers: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. One last—one last comment. Are we pretty close to the end?

Cohen: I—I think so. Could you think of what are things that we did not mention? I can think of one or two more questions.

Meyers: Okay... sometimes my kids ask me, "Are there things you miss?" I say, "There's not a whole lot of things to miss about Vietnam." [Laughter] You know, do I miss the guys I fought with? Yes. Do I miss the good times? Yes. But one of the things that I miss... and it's one of things that's probably the most informative... to the way I live today... are kids. These two kids who are being cared for by a group of prostitutes in Kon Tum City because they had no parents. They were living in an orphanage.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: And these are the kids of Vietnam.

Cohen: They're really cute.

Meyers: Yeah. So, I think about this—you know, these children, had they survived the war, provided they were eight, nine years old, at the time, they were born a little before 1960... there close to sixty years old today. You know, what can they tell us?

Cohen: What can they tell us? Yeah. Yeah.

Meyers: So, you know, this is what I left behind.

Cohen: I don't know if this is connected to children, but it was something I was interested in. You mentioned that you had some artifacts that were crafts, such as the fishnets and baskets from the Montagnais, the mountain people. I was wondering, I know they are Indigenous people, but I was wondering, what was your connection with them? Who they were and so on?

Meyers: One of the things... all order of battle officers are responsible for collecting information, and you collect it from any source you can find: intercepts, agent reports, fly overs, whatever way you can do it. One of the best sources for information we had because of the area we were in were the Montangard tribes. And we talk about the Montangard as if we talk about American Indians. They're tribes, and the Bahnaric tribes was right next to us. So, we had regular trips up in the tribal areas to collect information. I traveled with two people with me because there were multiple translations.

Cohen: Why?

Meyers: There was—there was a Montangard who translated Montangard into Vietnamese. There was The Vietnamese who translated Vietnamese into English to me. [Laughter] So, you know, we had this chain of translations, and we got some of our best information from the Montangards. They were very trusting people, provided you breached the cultural difference. You know, if you appear to be superior to them, they'd recognize it immediately. There was no love lost between Montangards and Vietnamese. In fact, there was a Montangard liberation movement but because they were both under siege from the North Vietnamese, there was some cooperation. The North Vietnamese had a lot of difficulty with the Montangard because they understood where they were giving information and the infiltration routes were through their homelands.

Cohen: Okay. So they really knew what was going on. Yeah.

Meyers: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And they were one of our best sources of information. So, trying to break through the... the cultural barriers... we had people who came with us and introduced us to the village chiefs, important people in the community. We'd share rice wine, which is one of the rituals, very toxic stuff, and... they recognized that we were more than just combat people. We came with a larger mission, which was to understand them. And we got to know people and their—their life. One of the people in the—in our compound in Kon Tum was a doctor named Pat Smith.<sup>i</sup> She had been sent to Vietnam by Catholic charities very early in 1959. Pat had a hospital.

Cohen: Where was this hospital?

Meyers: Just outside of Kon Tum. And when I wasn't on duty I volunteered at the hospital. And her hospital had two major missions. One was to teach child birthing to Montangard women. And Montangard women often had children when they were fifteen or sixteen and had no way of understanding modern childbirth. So they were sent out to the jungle and would cut their own umbilical cord... children died very young. The chances of survival among Montangard children was probably less than fifty percent.

Cohen: Oh, my.

Meyers: Pat Smith taught child birthing to women in villages so that they understood how to give birth safely and understood what to do with the umbilical cord. And they understood nurses could come into the community and be accepted for this service that they provided. The other thing she did was work with tuberculosis victims. Tuberculosis was probably one of the most significant causes of death among Montangards.

Cohen: Was this a disease brought in by westerners?

Meyers: Yes. Probably. Probably. Montangards, because of their isolation, had built up very little immunity to—to... western diseases, including tuberculosis. And Pat had the kind of medication to teach habits of life that would, hopefully, prevent large-scale tuberculosis epidemics. The average Montangard only lived to be forty or forty-five years old. So she tried to... to lengthen the... their... their life expectancy. I left her in... '68, she left Vietnam in '75.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: Her... her... hospital area was attacked by North Vietnamese. And we were cleaning up her area, there was a gourd that I picked up and still have at home. I should have taken pictures of all this. I didn't. I could send them.

Cohen: Was her hospital for other people or was it just for Montangards?

Meyers: It's mostly for Montangards. Yeah. She had good American nurses. A string of American nurses, who worked with her. But she was the principal player there... After the war, after I'd been teaching for some time, I said to myself, "Wouldn't it be interesting if I could track down Pat Smith and see how she's doing?" And I found her.

Cohen: You did?

Meyers: She was—I knew she had come from the Seattle area. And I tracked her down to the, there's a couple of islands off the coast of Washington, and I tracked her there.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: And we had a very short correspondence. She passed away not long afterwards. She took two Montangard kids with her and adopted them.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: One of them is a dentist. And I can't remember what the other one is doing. But, you know, we talk about adhering to your beliefs. Her belief was, her belief was in rescue. And she rescued these two kids. She rescued nameless other people in Vietnam by providing services.

Cohen: Wow. Wow. Isn't that's something.

Meyers: You know, it's one of the things I often tell my kids that you could learn—you learn about the destructiveness of war, but for Pat Smith, you could about survival and rescuing.

Cohen: And nobility.

Meyers: And helping others. Others who you often don't know. So there are a lot of things we could learn. I thing I have... I'm not sure if I took it all with me. [Shuffling papers] I thought I had... not in there... Not sure if it's in here either... I

have odd relics. Like... I have my baggage tag from the plane. [Laughter] I may have something... no, that's not it.

Cohen: Did you also have to...

Meyers: Vietnamese currency. [Laughter] Propaganda leaflets?

Cohen: You also mentioned a camera. Was that a personal... camera or an Army issued camera?

Meyers: It's this. It's a Kodak instamatic camera.

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Meyers: And the hard case.

Cohen: Is this Polaroid?

Meyers: No. it's an old fashioned camera, expect, you could wind this one up. This predates digital.

Cohen: Right.

Meyers: So... these... these pictures were taken with my camera.

Cohen: Oh. Okay. So, this is your personal camera and you took pictures. Wow.

Meyers: And I took pictures up in the hills of the Montangard, too.

Cohen: Wow.

Meyers: So, that's part of it. There's all sorts of things in here. My 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division patch. I thought I brought other Montangard things with me, but apparently, I didn't

Cohen: That's okay.

Meyers: I have a collection. I'll take pictures of them and send them too you.

Cohen: That'd be great... So overall, what is your definition of the citizen soldier?

Meyers: I haven't thought about that very much. [Laughter] Today we have a professional Army. We don't have a draft anymore. When Kennedy talked about, "Ask not



what you can do for yourself but for your country.” It triggered this idea of what obligations for the life that we leave. You know, how could we repay our ancestors for creating democracy that we claim is ours? So, I try to sort through the... the possibilities. It was about the time, just shortly after the Peace Corps was being organized. And I said, “You know, is there a form of national service.” For me it was military. And it was payback for the life that I clearly had been given for up to that point. Personally, I think we still need these national obligations. And, unfortunately, you know, we talk a lot about Russia these days, one of the... one of the rites of passage in Russia, was after you got the equivalent of your high school certificate, you couldn’t go directly to college. You had to spend a year or two, doing some form of public service.

Cohen: Service, yeah.

Meyers: And then, you know, when you’re more mature and had a better vision of where you were going, you could pursue higher education. I think we could—we could still use that in this country. I think we could still ask people to do, not for yourself but of for your country. And military service is a piece of it and we still see people doing it... even though we have—we have a national Army. We still see people going into the Peace Corps and we see people go into the... there used to be a Domestic Teaching Corps. You know, those sorts of things. But I think one of the things you learn from them is a sense of gratitude for who you are today. So, if there is such a thing as a citizen soldier today, it’s person who understands that there is a debt to be paid in some sense and is willing to do it... That’ the best definition I could come up with. [Laughter]

Cohen: Is there something that you would like to talk about that we did not talk about? Or any...

Meyers: No. Not particularly. I have... Let me do one more piece of reading.

Cohen: Yes. Yes.

Meyers: Sometimes... sometimes I’m asked... what did it feel like to come home.

Cohen: That’s true.

Meyers: I wrote a poem... a long time ago. [Laughter] Where is it? it’s here. [Shuffling papers.] I tried to describe a sense of what it meant to come home. I’ll read the first paragraph and the last paragraph. “Twenty-three hundred hours 22 August,

1968, Tan Son Nhut Airport, Saigon. I was leaving. Nearly ten months of agony, fear, change, and loneliness left behind me, and I was leaving. Like an aging picture?, the last two hours of my tour are embedded in my mind. The bus from the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Company came to pick us up. Half the guys were already drunk in nervous in anticipation. I never made it a habit when something important was about to go down. Now would be no different. I wanted to savor every moment. Commit every detail.” And the following is just a description of the airplane, the people on it, what it felt like being with people who were like me. “And then I saw the blonde—the tall blonde stewardess,” they were still using civilian aircraft, “closed the door to the aircraft, the noise of the engine accelerated, belts were fastened by men who for three years—three days earlier, were dodging bullets. And praying for their lives in the final moments of their tour. I knew I would have no longer of fastened the seatbelt then... for the safety of a flak jacket. But the world was near. And this was the right thing. The acceptable thing. You were alive. And the rules and regs of civilian life affected you again. No more doping or drinking or punctuating every sentence with...” you can imagine. [Laughter] “The 727 lifted to the head of the runway and awaited at the runway for instructions for takeoff. Anxious faces, anxious faces looked out the window and savoring their moments of anticipating the life beyond the now. In those last... in those last fleeting scenes, the thought of turning back or crashing on takeoff created such anxieties that caused battle-hardened veterans to clutch their seats. Full throttle and the plane ran down the runway, tilting slightly at the head and thrusting itself into the air. Shouting, clapping, and smiles. We were alive. And... going home. In one last tense gesture, I looked out the window and saw the fleeing image of the Vietnamese coast line disappear. [Exhaling] For a few seconds, I held my breath. I could not cry. I could not laugh. I could not wonder why it ever was. Vietnam was gone... [Tearing] and... I was going home.” [Tearing] So... that’s most of this is writing. And that’s why I write.

Cohen: So... so it seems that the writing is really important?

Meyers: Yeah. It still is.

Cohen: It still is. Yeah.

Meyers: I mean, some of this is written three years ago. Some of it was written last year. When memory starts to emerge again, I reach the surface and... and they’re just difficult to stop. I wrote a poem about Lieutenant Gillespie who was killed a day

after we had dinner together. And... I wrote a poem to him, knowing that he would never read it. But years later I went on the internet and found his address, and I sent a copy of the poem with a letter to his parents. And I said I was... I may have been the last person to see him before he was killed the next day and this is what we talked about and this is how I found out and... I sent the poem.

Cohen: Would you consider collecting and publishing your work?

Meyers: Probably not. No. I'm afraid of publishing. [Laughter]

Cohen: Too much—too much publicity?

Meyers: Not so much publicity, but, you know, you ask yourself as an author, "Is this right? Is this true? Am I remembering it according to the way it happened? Or am I remembering the way I would like it to happen? Or the way I think it happened?" So, you know, I think about this and sometimes I sit and say, "Were they really yellow lights or were they green lights?" [Laughter] Am I missing, you know, as time goes by, I've just lost track of things. So I write and I preserve and then I come back and review and continue to ask myself questions.

Cohen: So you're doing the reflecting yourself?

Meyers: Yeah. I'm doing the reflecting myself. This is kind of a side note and take it for what it's worth. It's not a political statement. But about... fourteen months ago, I started writing about the election. The current election. [President Donald] Trump's election. And... it was a self-blog. I've never shown it to anybody. My wife sees me typing and she knows better than to ask me what it is about. I just finished my eighty-ninth addition. [Laughter] It's in a notebook that's now that thick. And I ask myself, "Well, why don't I read it to somebody?" And my response was, "It's yours." You know, it's yours to read, it's yours to create.

Cohen: Yeah. That's it...

Meyers: That's it. And sometimes I'll read it. You know, I read it today.

Cohen: Right. But when you chose or so on.

Meyers: Yeah, it's my option... So. [Laughter]

Cohen: So. [Laughter] Well, I am curious about two more questions. The first being, did you work with any... other non-Americans other than south Vietnamese when you were... when you were in Vietnam. Like were there any other nationalities?

Meyers: Well, the Montangards.

Cohen: The Montangards. That's true.

Meyers: And... the... [Laughter] it was only for overnight, but when I missed the plane to Pleiku and I didn't get my duty assignment on time. I had to sleep on a bench in the airport, and my bench mate was a Korean lieutenant and we discussed... and he was on his second tour, and we discussed: What do you do? What am I going to do? And I discovered from him that he was—that we shared a common mission. He was also an intelligence officer. So, I made the mistake of asking him, "What do you do with your captives?" And his response was, "We shoot them. [Laughter] We get as much information out of them, and we shoot them." And I said, "Okay, I have no other questions. I think I learned all I need to know." But there were other forces in the country: the Australians, the Filipinos, the Koreans -- I never had anything to do with them.

Cohen: The last question that comes to my mind, you talked about the distancing between the African Americans and the whites after assassination of Martin Luther King—but I was, in general, did you experience any other prejudice or racism or?

Meyers: There was some... there was some animosity about the Montagnards. The Montagnards and the Vietnamese don't share a common... religious, geographical, personal culture—they are very different. For the most part, the Montagnards come from the western Pacific, perhaps nine-hundred years ago, they began the migrations. They are dark, closer to south Asian Indians than to American blacks, but they're dark, short, men are short, some of the tribes are matri-linear, follow the female lines, some are matriarchal. The woman are the important people in the tribes. But for some of the people I served with, they were the other. They were not us. And they always didn't make that clear but because the Montagnards are here and we... ?? were here, they was distance between us. There was no real effort to get to know them. It was people like Pat Smith that did it.

Cohen: Really. Yeah.

Meyers: And because of her, she opened my eyes into what they were up against.

Cohen: On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, I would like to thank you for your time.

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<sup>i</sup> Meyers later that, in fact, Pat Smith did live on the compound but probably on the grounds of her hospital which was located outside Kon Tum City.