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2 **B.R.**This is January 6, 1994. This is Beula Robb interviewing Michael  
3 **Royce** for the University of Washington (Tacoma) Oral History Project.  
4 **Mike**, I'm going to start out with the first question. Where did you grow  
5 up and in what kind of family? The idea is just to sort of get into the GI  
6 days and get a perspective on anything when you were growing up that  
7 you see as contributing to where you were as far as your political outlook  
8 while in the military.

9 **M.R.**Well, as a youngster I was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My father had been  
10 in the Second World War as an officer and he had been a lawyer before that.  
11 He had been a lawyer in the '30s. After the Second World War he was  
12 Assistant Council to the Marshall Plan. When I was one we went to France,  
13 and I learned to speak, my first language was French, not that it's helped my  
14 current ability to speak French. We lived there for two years while he was in  
15 the Marshall Plan, When I came back we went back to Milwaukee, Wisconsin,  
16 where his family had lived for. . . I think he was third generation German  
17 immigrants. They had done very well. His family was a banking family, a well-  
18 to-do banking family, although they had come over more as tailors and skilled  
19 workers. My mother had grown up in Chicago with parents who were  
20 Canadians initially. Then her father had become a naturalized US citizen.  
21 Actually her mother stayed Canadian to her death. My grandfather on my  
22 mothers side was a foundry manager. He managed a couple of foundries in  
23 the Chicago area and was an engineer by training. So, we got back to  
24 Milwaukee about 1949 and I grew up there for maybe six years, until grade  
25 school, through some of the early grade school years. In 1954 my father was

1 elected to Congress.

2 **B.R. So, how old were you at that point?**

3 M.R. I was born in '46, so I was eight in Wisconsin. In 1954 my father was  
4 elected to Congress. Although he came from a very conservative banking  
5 family that was Republican, because he went to Harvard Law School in the  
6 '30s, and was in Washington, D.C., in the early '30s, he was a liberal Democrat  
7 and ran as a Democrat. He ran for a number of offices between about '50 and  
8 '54, all of which he lost. Then he was elected to Congress in 1954 and stayed  
9 in Congress from 1954 'til 1982, or 28 years. He was throughout, a liberal  
10 Democrat, on the more . . . most liberal end of the spectrum. I grew up  
11 essentially in Washington, D.C., from 1954 to my graduation from high school in  
12 1964, at 17. The family I grew up in was an upper middle class economically,  
13 very intellectually oriented on both my mother's and my father's side. My  
14 mother had a Masters in economics before she married my father as a young  
15 woman. After her children were grown she went back to school and got her  
16 Ph.D. and taught economics at Federal District College in Washington, D.C., for  
17 about fifteen years.

18 **B.R. Was that an all-Black college?**

19 M.R. It was an all-Black college. She taught there. They didn't have many  
20 Ph.D.'s and she was actually head of the department. She was the only Ph.D.  
21 in the department until they (they were an unaccredited school initially) got  
22 more accreditation and attracted a number of Black Ph.D.'s. At that point a

1 Black Ph.D. took over, as it should have been.

2 **B.R. There must have been quite a bit of discussion in your family about**  
3 **your mother taking that position? Wasn't there in your family? Did it**  
4 **influence you at all?**

5  
6 M.R.No, because we were. . .now maybe my sisters, but I had left home. She  
7 didn't even go back and get her Ph.D. until her children were grown. So in  
8 other words she got her Masters at 23. Then went back to get her Ph.D. at  
9 about 45.

10 **B.R.A lot of students at the U could relate to this.**

11 M.R.Yeah, she essentially got her Ph.D. in about 2 or 3 years and then taught  
12 for 15 years until she was in her 60's. So I grew up in a liberal family in  
13 Washington, D.C., sometimes in the city itself. But it was back in the late 50's  
14 and 60's and it was a very segregated city. So when I say that I lived in the  
15 city it was White sections of the city and in the suburban areas. Then there  
16 were huge Black populations. So I left home at 17, went to Stanford University.  
17 At that point, 1964, I was liberal. I kind of assumed my family values that I  
18 thought that racial discrimination was wrong. See.... what would have been  
19 liberal values of 1964, you know that one should do something about poverty,  
20 that you owed an obligation to the society, and not a money orientation. In the  
21 sense that the most important thing in the world was to grow up and earn a lot  
22 of money was not part of the family values. It was more a question of service  
23 and a feeling that you really could be responsible for what you did. I also  
24 remember in my senior year I got enamored with existentialism which, the

1 basic theory was that you were responsible for your actions and you could do,  
2 not that you could do whatever you wanted to do, but that you were responsible  
3 for direction of your life. So, that's kind of my family background.

4 **B.R. Did your siblings have any influence on you at all?** (He spoke for a few  
5 minutes on how his sisters were younger and had had little influence.)  
6

7 M.R. I did have an older brother who was 3 1/2 years older than me who I  
8 looked up to in many ways but I don't think had a big influence in terms of  
9 those values at that point. In other words I think actually both he and I shared  
10 similar values which were kind of the liberal values we got from our parents.  
11 Particularly my father's politics were kind of traditional liberal Democratic  
12 values. My mother was actually much more, probably more progressive than  
13 my father. I don't think she had been that involved at that point, but later on  
14 she became very involved in things. But in terms of her values schemes, her  
15 set of values, it was very important to her, and I think she communicated to her  
16 children to what a meaningful life is. It is a life that resulted in some positive  
17 change for other people in our society.

18 **B.R. Sort of, "Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you  
19 can do for your country." The Kennedy sort of era?**  
20

21 M.R. Yes exactly.

22 **B.R. Ok. Well you brought me up to about 1964. Why don't you go on  
23 from there. When were you in the military, what year?**  
24

25 M.R. I was in the military, I was drafted in. . . I think I was inducted in  
26 September, 1969.

27 **B.R. So there was a good five years in between.**



1 M.R.Right.

2 **B.R.From you and I speaking in the past it seems like some of the things**  
3 **that happened at that point in your life probably had a big effect.**

4  
5 M.R.Yeah, I think that's more probably what influenced me in terms of the  
6 relationship with the military. Well, in 1964 I went to Stanford in my first year. I  
7 remember that there was a small group of people there that were  
8 demonstrating without any following whatsoever against the Vietnam War and  
9 we thought they seemed kind of nutty to us, these very long-haired dedicated  
10 students. In fact, some of them were even collecting blood for the NVA which  
11 none of us had heard of. So I began to hear a little bit about the Vietnam War  
12 in 1964, in September of 1964, when I started school out at Stanford. But it  
13 seemed. . .those people that were involved in it seemed to mainstream  
14 students a little bizarre and it didn't have much influence on me. Although I  
15 was interested in the war. That summer, though, something that was much  
16 more consistent with where I was, that summer of 1965, I'd read about the  
17 "Freedom Summers" where a lot of Northern students went down to help the  
18 *Civil Rights Movement*. I'd known some *peripherally*, or had heard of some  
19 people who had done it. And it just made very good sense to me that if I  
20 believed in civil rights and, you know, we had an apartheid system in the South  
21 that I should, and they were asking for volunteers, I should go do that. So, I  
22 got. . .let's see I went back to visit my folks in Washington, D.C., and then I got  
23 on a train and went down to Mississippi.

24 **B.R.Were they supportive of that?**

1 M.R.Well, as I remember, it's hard to reconstruct as an adult the interaction  
2 sometimes you had with your parents. Yet, it's certainly not like something they  
3 would have said that it was opposed to their values, so in that sense they  
4 weren't, would not be unsupportive. But also, just the dynamics I had with my  
5 parents, both healthy and unhealthy, was that I didn't really ask their opinion,  
6 nor did they give their opinion. I just thought it was the right thing to do. So I  
7 told them I was going to do it and it wasn't really a question whether they were  
8 going to say whether it was good thing to do or not.

9 **B.R.Blessing or no blessing, you were going, uh?**

10 M.R.Yeah, but I think they probably were generally supportive. I don't have  
11 strong memories of it but I'm sure they were. That was quite a transforming  
12 experience in my life because for one thing living in an upper-middle class  
13 family, largely in White neighborhoods in the North, which, despite having  
14 liberal values, we didn't really open our eyes and see that where we were living  
15 was racially segregated based on economics. The public schools I went to  
16 were largely white. I had had one close friend who was Black all through high  
17 school. So I didn't have much acquaintance outside of an idea, rather than as  
18 a reality kind of intercultural experience, or what it really meant, to work with  
19 people of different cultural backgrounds. But I believed it was right, so I went  
20 down there and it was quite a shocker. For one thing I lived in Black  
21 communities in the South which were very poor. I got off the train in Jackson,  
22 Mississippi, and went to the Freedom Center. They said, "Yeah, great. We're

1 walking down to the courthouse tomorrow to demonstrate for freedom." So I  
2 went along with about 500, several hundred people, and we were all arrested  
3 within 3 blocks for criminal syndac<sup>i</sup>alism. I remember specifically I had been  
4 standing near the front, which was a failing of mine, and James, gosh, one of  
5 the leaders of the Urban League, it will come to me. Well, he much later  
6 became head of the Urban League. He was leading the demonstration and the  
7 cops came, the Mississippi Highway Patrol came to throw us in the paddy  
8 wagons. We all laid down and I remember, because that was what we were  
9 supposed to do. I remember him saying, "Oh, shit, I'm going to walk." and  
10 walking into the. . .getting up and walking into the police car. And I remember  
11 thinking, "I wonder why he did that?", until the police picked me up and  
12 slammed me into the side of the truck. I said, "Oh yeah!"

13 **B.R.He'd obviously been through this before, eh?"**

14 M.R.He knew what he was doing. So, you know, I spent the next two weeks in  
15 the Jackson County Industrial Fairground with several hundred other people,  
16 including Stokely Carmichael. And eventually they would do things like, you  
17 know, the cops would come in and kind of push us around or hit on us, not hit  
18 on us in a sexual way, I mean hit on us with sticks at meal times. So this was  
19 quite a sudden education for a. . .I was 18 at the time. Then after that, we got  
20 out. Some magical thing happened.

21 **B.R.Attorneys?**

22 M.R.Some attorneys who we never saw, filed some writs that we never saw,

1 and after two weeks they let us go. As far as I recall. . . maybe we all pled  
2 guilty to disorderly conduct or maybe the whole thing was dismissed. Nothing  
3 ever happened. Well, I never went to court, so presumably, unless the lawyers  
4 pled us guilty with us not being there nothing ever happened about that one  
5 except that we spent two weeks sleeping on concrete. Then I went up to West  
6 Point, Mississippi, and it was. . . in one way, for a young person a very exciting  
7 life, doing something I really believed in. Living in. . . we rented a house, a little  
8 shack for \$5 a month. The Klan or some disorganized racists burnt it down, but  
9 fortunately after we left. I worked with, I was teamed up with Handsome Eddie  
10 Brooks, a Black guy, young Black man from Chicago who was a member of  
11 the, actually he had been a member of the Black P-Stone Rangers and claimed  
12 he was a professional wrestler although I could whup him without any problem.  
13 But he was very attractive and so our organizing consisted of me getting up  
14 every morning and walking these dusty streets in the Black community trying to  
15 get people to sign up to register to vote. Then we had a Freedom School. It  
16 was very fascinating because I was the only White person in this Black  
17 community and the kids were really fascinated with the different racial features  
18 of my hair and eyes. It was very fun. Handsome Eddie Brooks, on the other  
19 hand, would just get on the phone and call all his girlfriends in the different  
20 communities and get them to do the voter registration and, of course, got much  
21 more done than me. So, I spent the summer doing something that I felt  
22 intensely about, that was for a young person an intense experience. We were

1 shot at, I was arrested for various things. I was beat up in the jail, thought I  
2 was going to get killed, they shot up. . .well, they burned the house that I lived  
3 in down and they shot up one of the other Freedom Houses in an attack at  
4 night. We integrated the library. We demonstrated for equal access to jobs at  
5 the stores that sold in the Black community that still just would hire White  
6 cashiers. So we helped organize a boycott to try and put pressure. In fact we  
7 got Black people hired as the cashiers. During one of those demonstrations the  
8 police attacked us. They had Handsome Eddie Brooks down on the ground,  
9 kicking him, and thumping on him. So I said, in the way an 18 year old would  
10 say, "Well, if he's resisting arrest, so am I." So they beat me up, too. So I  
11 learned a lot that summer. (Both laugh) Then I went back in the fall to  
12 Stanford. By then the Vietnam War had really become a different issue. I  
13 mean, people were understanding it more broadly. A lot of people like myself  
14 who had been radicalized, at least in the sense of taking action in your beliefs,  
15 even if not in a more ideological way, had been radicalized by the experience of  
16 the South. There were a small handful of us who had gone to the South and  
17 worked in the South, but there were a much larger number who knew people  
18 who gone to the South or had brothers or sisters who'd gone to the South  
19 because we were seeing it on T.V. now. So, when I went back at that point the  
20 consciousness of the Vietnam War was changing. . .actually it was changing  
21 just a little bit at that point.

22 **B.R. What was that, '65?**

1 M.R....'65. It was still largely the Civil Rights Movement. Suddenly, the  
2 experience had been so searing in the South, I became very disaffected with  
3 Stanford. Stanford in '64/'65 was a . . .now this was view at the time, maybe it  
4 wasn't true, but my view after my experience, was a college like any Ivy League  
5 College, very privileged. The boys all tended to be athletes and 4.0 students  
6 and the girls all tended to be cheerleaders and 4.0 students. It was fairly  
7 homogenous. So at my Sophomore year I lived off campus in East Palo Alto,  
8 which was the Black ghetto near . . .across the tracks from Palo Alto, which is  
9 one of the richest communities in the United States. And we worked with four  
10 other students and we had a sympathetic political science professor that led us  
11 in "independent study".

12 **B.R.And we know a few of those** (chuckles).

13 M.R.That's right. The good guys. Good women and men that allowed students  
14 to grow. Anyway we were working with street gangs. Gangs, if you think of  
15 our present context, it was gangs of boys that would run together and they  
16 would get into fights. There weren't any Uzi submachine guns back then, at  
17 least not in the hands of street kids. So, I did that. By the end of that year I  
18 was totally disgusted with Stanford and had decided to . . .and got a call from a  
19 friend who asked me if I wanted to work in the South, this time in Appalachia,  
20 as a VISTA. Actually he'd been an old wrestling coach of mine in high school.  
21 So, I agreed to do that and worked there for a year and a half.

22 **B.R.Was that through Peace Corps or something?**

1 M.R.VISTA was the domestic form of. . .

2 **B.R.Of Peace Corps?**

3 M.R.Yeah. So, I decided that for impeccable academic reasons, my girlfriend  
4 was in New York, I decided not to go back to Stanford. So I went to NYU after  
5 I finished a year and a half in the South, in Appalachia. There I'd been working  
6 on broader community organizing, but I'd mainly been working on helping to  
7 develop craft cooperatives to help find marketing and support for the  
8 indigenous crafts of the region, as well as doing other community organizing,  
9 which was again very educational for me. Six of the ten poorest counties in the  
10 United States were in the area where I lived. It was very poor. Most young  
11 people left to work in the steel mills or factories of Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago.  
12 The biggest employer in which I lived was welfare. The second biggest  
13 employer was the school system. So that also I think radicalized me, giving me  
14 a better a sense of the disparity of wealth and power in the United States. So I  
15 went back to school in 1967 to NYU, the fall of 1967. The anti-war movement  
16 was in full swing. In fact SDS, which had been kind of a left/liberal organization  
17 when founded, I think the Port Huron Statement was about 1964. By then I was  
18 radical. . .still wasn't really revolutionary, but was radical. The statement, it  
19 talked about imperialism and things like that. My experiences over the last  
20 three years had prepared me to consider myself radical. So I immediately got  
21 involved in the anti-war movement. We kind of punctuated taking over the  
22 President's office in opposition to the war and in support of civil rights on

1 campus. So that's what I spent most of my two years at NYU doing and came  
2 back and was a regional leader of the Peace and Freedom Party, which  
3 actually had come out of California. I joined SDS, was active in SDS, Students  
4 for Democratic Society, in New York. As things progressed I grew. . .you know,  
5 there were different strands in the student movement. I suppose some people  
6 would drop out, but many more people were coming in and there were people  
7 that were more into the cultural aspects, drugs and rock and roll and good dose  
8 of sex, too, I suppose. There were others that were more into individual acts,  
9 anarchy, terrorism. There were others, like myself, that were more drawn to  
10 Marxism. I remembered I'd actually first met somebody who said they were  
11 Marxist when I was in the South working with VISTA.

12 **B.R.Oh, that's interesting.**

13 M.R.It was the first person I met who identified themselves as a Marxist. In  
14 fact, they were somebody I admired. They were community organizers that  
15 were very successful and they asked me and some other people to come to a  
16 meeting. I thought, "Well, it sounds good to me. Community organizing." In  
17 fact, I brought Ray Fugate, a guy who lived in one of the hollers in the county  
18 with me. So we drove up. It was about three hours away. We drove over  
19 there. They started talking about Marxism. It didn't matter to Ray. He wasn't  
20 really following that. After a while I just thought it was ridiculous, so I jumped  
21 up and said this was a lot of bullshit and left. Although later on I got to liking  
22 him. In fact I apologized. I said, "Well I shouldn't have said that." It was



1 bullshit, but I shouldn't have said it.

2 **B.R. Were they your generation or a little older?**

3 M.R. No, they were a little older. Again, I was 18. They seemed a lot older but  
4 they were probably 25. Nice, they were dedicated people. They had just come  
5 to certain conclusions that I in fact came to, but they came to earlier. But that  
6 was really my first contact with it. In the hothouse of New York politics in SDS  
7 a lot of people were beginning to study Marxism. We tried to get all of our  
8 history professors to let us do independent study. I mean some of the courses.  
9 . . ."Russian Revolutionary Literature in the Late 19th Century." So an ample  
10 opportunity to read Marx and Lenin. So I considered myself Marxist by the time  
11 I graduated from college. So my career choices were. . . I had a scholarship to  
12 study at Princeton.

13 **B.R. Your parents must have really been negotiating with you at that**  
14 **point.**

15 M.R. . . . a Woodrow Wilson Scholarship, as I recall or, in fact it was a full bore  
16 scholarship. . . . to be a dusty old professor in some boring topic. Or (reflecting)  
17 . . . would have been a great idea Or, that didn't. . . however didn't really  
18 sound like a great idea. Or, go out and work and be a labor organizer. So that  
19 sounded pretty good. So I went out to California where everything seemed to  
20 be popping and got a job at. . . mainly by looking big and saying I wasn't a  
21 college graduate, got a job in an iron foundry and worked there for about four  
22 months and was active in the labor movement.

1 **B.R. Now what year was this, Mike?**

2 M.R. This would have been, gosh, 1969, June of 1969. And. . . I think I may  
3 have been when I went in. I think I went in 1970. Yeah, June of '69. So I  
4 went out. . . well, that's when I graduated. Then I went out and I worked in a  
5 glass plant for about four months organizing for worker rights and making glass.  
6 I worked in a plastics plant for a little bit then I worked in a. . . actually I worked  
7 the glass plant for about eight months. Then I got drafted because when I  
8 graduated I no longer had a deferment.

9 **B.R. Student deferment?**

10 M.R. I wasn't going back to school so I didn't have a deferment. It was a time  
11 in life where a number of my friends had stayed in school, were in school, had  
12 joined the Resistance, which was an organization mainly students and people  
13 opposed to the war that were burning their draft cards and refusing to go in and  
14 making statements about this. That's what I would have done if my thinking  
15 hadn't changed and I hadn't seen myself as a Marxist and hadn't been engaged  
16 in. . . my background had been mostly community organizing or organizing  
17 factories is what I'd been doing rather than student organizing. Although when I  
18 was at NYU I was active as a student organizer. So it made sense to me. So  
19 my choices were to try a get a deferrment based on some class-privilege basis,  
20 but actually, once my draft came up I think that was out, although I could have  
21 gone in as an officer by signing up for another year or something or burning my  
22 draft card which, if they'd caught me two years earlier, that's what would have

1 happened for sure. . .or go in and organize. And so I thought, well it made  
2 sense for me to go in and organize. It wasn't very clear in my mind what that  
3 meant, but it seemed to me it was like working in a factory and organizing. You  
4 talk to people and. . .I didn't really have a clear concept of the difference  
5 between the military as an organization. . .

6 B.R.(chuckles) **You hadn't gone through basic training yet.**

7 M.R.I hadn't yet gone through basic training. But anyway, that seemed to me  
8 to be the right thing to do. So, because of a good combination of stupidity and  
9 self-confidence I said that's what I was going to do. I didn't contest the draft  
10 and went in. The physical was in Oakland, which is a real zoo. There were  
11 people running around naked saying they were crazy and doing all sorts of  
12 things to get out. But I went along with the program.

13 B.R.**Did they do any investigation on your background at that point?**

14 M.R.No. They didn't know anything about. . .you know?

15 B.R.**They didn't inquire or anything that you're aware at that point?**

16 M.R.No, I'm pretty sure they, because I know they did later on. And it was  
17 dramatically different. So, I went into the Army. I was in the basic infantry, well  
18 basic training first. And we took some tests and I did too well one of them and  
19 they offered to let me become a warrant officer. And I said, "No thanks." So,  
20 uh. . .

21 B.R.**Where did you do your basic training at?**

22 M.R.At Ft. Lewis.

1 B.R.**Ft. Lewis?**

2 M.R. It was an interesting experience. I made contact very early in basic  
3 training with an anti-war coffee house, called the Shelter Half. And I don't know  
4 how I did it. I think I called from a pay phone, there were phones in the  
5 barracks.

6 B.R.**Now, where was the Shelter Half located?**

7 M.R.They were in Tacoma. I don't even know how I knew they were there. I  
8 must have known vaguely that there were such groups beforehand. So, I got  
9 their number.

10 B.R. **I know there was newspapers that were put out underground I think**  
11 **at that point, too. Is that a possibility?**

12  
13 M.R.Well, they had put out a newspaper called *Fed Up*. I may or may not have  
14 seen it. Somehow I knew their number, whether I got it before or I certainly  
15 wouldn't have asked anybody in the Army so I<sup>tm</sup> assuming I got it before. I knew  
16 probably through the paper. And I called up and I said, "Hey, here I am and  
17 I'm a GI. . . I<sup>l</sup> may be confusing parts of basic training and advanced infantry  
18 training.

19 B.R.**The first six or eight weeks I think you couldn't have any contact, but**  
20 **after that you had another period of intense training but you were able to**  
21 **make some contact?**

22 M.R.Well, that's true. Except, somehow in basic training. . . I may be confusing  
23 basic training with advanced infantry training. So, anyway I did somehow, even  
24 in basic training even, before I got off on a pass, I think there were like four  
25 months. . .the first month you couldn't get off at all. Then basic training was

1 like two months and then the second month you could get a weekend pass. . .

2 **B.R.If you were good?**

3 M.R.If you were a good boy or something like that. But anyway, I managed to  
4 call the Shelter Half and say, "Hey, you know, here I am and I'd love get some  
5 stuff." I believe they really were kind of surprised. "I'd love to get some papers  
6 to pass out to my troops." So, they said, "Ok, we'll have somebody drive  
7 through and throw some papers out. Be ready, you know in a paper bag, be  
8 ready to pick 'em up." And. . .you know, at such and such a time. So, I was  
9 there, car comes speeding by, throws out this bag of stuff. You know, it was  
10 about. . .maybe right after dinner. Just some period of time where we had a  
11 little break. Yeah probably right after dinner right before we went to bed. So I  
12 grabbed this paper and I started back and some drill sargeant who had seen  
13 this happen got all the troops in this. . .and it wasn't my company I think it was  
14 another company. Anyway, he commanded all the trainees in his company to  
15 surround me, about twenty of them. He thought it was drugs. So they kind of  
16 frisked me down and he looked in the bag and was really surprised because he  
17 thought. . .I mean he was talking to me about drugs! He looked into it and saw  
18 it was papers so he confiscated the papers. But anyway. . . the next day my  
19 first sargeant made me go see the captain. The captain must have been,  
20 looking back, 25, 26, 28. . .a college graduate. His heart wasn't really in it. So  
21 he basically tried to be gruff. But basically what he said was, "Will you try and  
22 be good?" So I said, "OK, I'll try and be good." And that was the end of it. I

1 didn't even face Article 15, no punishment.

2 **B.R. Didn't even get any Article 15 or anything?** (Article 15 of the Uniform  
3 Code of Military Justice allows a commanding officer to dispense penalties  
4 administratively rather than going through a judicial proceeding.)  
5

6 M.R.No punishment. The only thing that happened is that my drill sargeant  
7 remembered about a week later we were. . .he was lovingly referring to us as  
8 scummy maggot pukes which was the way he talked to us. And he was having  
9 me do push ups. And he said with this hurt tone in his voice while I was doing  
10 these push ups, he said, "Royce, are you really a communist?" I mean it was  
11 like his feelings were so hurt by this. So anyway, I don't remember just how I  
12 got any other papers delivered to me during basic training.

13 **B.R. So, obviously that went throught the ranks of the military?**

14 M.R.Yeah.

15 **B.R. . . even though you were a little naive at that point, I think, maybe to**  
16 **what was going on?**  
17

18 M.R.Then, the Military Intelligence did start interviewing me because friends of  
19 mine from Oakland said. . .the husband and wife I had lived with both were  
20 interviewed. Guys I'd worked with in the factories were interviewed about me.  
21 A Chicano guy I knew was interviewed. So they. . .

22 **B.R. Started an investigation?**

23 M.R.They started an investigation. So in basic training since I didn't have any  
24 papers my main activity consisted. . .when you were supposed to sing anti-war,  
25 you know I mean pro-war jingles, they were called Jodies, you know things like,  
26 "I wanna go to Vietnam, I wanna kill ol' Charlie Cong". You know it's, good

1 things. So we'd substitute anti-war slogans as we ran away from the officer.

2 But then I was sent to advance infantry training, so I was in an infantry unit.

3 There I did have some more freedom on weekends and I did get newspapers

4 then and gave them to my various <sup>a</sup>collegues. Towards the end of that it was

5 clear that we were going to Vietnam, our troop. I think that was a lot harder

6 for me. I mean it was one thing to organize in the military, which I was

7 beginning to understand was a little bit more complex than I thought it was. . .

8 **B.R.Than a glass factory?**

9 M.R.Yeah, than a glass factory. But it was another thing to be in a situation

10 ~~where~~ shooting at people or being shot at, where I felt war was wrong and that

11 the Vietnamese and North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong were the. .

12 .doing what I would do, I agreed with them.

13 **B.R.So what year was that Mike?**

14 M.R.That would have been in. . .it was I think September, '70, I went in. I was

15 wrong when I said '69. September, '70. So that would have been early '71.

16 **B.R.So, that was after Tet in '68?**

17 M.R.Yes, it was after the Tet Offensive. And so, it was. . .things were not going

18 for the US military but it was still foreborn. . .

19 **B.R.Escalation was still going up. . .**

20 M.R.Escalation was still going up.

21 **B.R.I mean there was a lot of troops going. . .I mean they were rolling 'em**

22 **in.**

1 M.R.Yeah, Ft. Lewis was a big staging area with 50,000 troops training and  
2 they were still sending lots of people over there. And my unit in fact did go  
3 over.

4 **B.R.Your unit did get. . .?**

5 M.R.Yeah.

6 **B.R.What was the sentiment among GIs and what were you making as far  
7 as observations around who were these GIs?**

8 M.R.Well, it was very interesting. They were. . .I was 22 when I was drafted,  
9 so I was 23 when I was in Advanced Training. The average of my company  
10 was a little under 18, which means that more than half of the people of the  
11 company had signed. . .their parents had signed (not sure) early to let them in.  
12 So they were young, 17, 18, 19. I think at 23 I was the. . .I think there was one  
13 other person in. . .I forget what a company is. . .280 people, that was older than  
14 me.  
15

16 **B.R.You were the old man in the unit.**

17 M.R.I was the old man of the unit. The other older guy, Otto, was a college  
18 graduate that had for some reason gotten drafted. For young boys a lot of  
19 them didn't have much experience in life. They didn't really know anything  
20 about the Vietnam War. Some of them were scared about what was going on.  
21 Some of them. . .a lot of them were macho, but there was a heavy  
22 indoctrination. I mean the people that were our teachers. I remember when we  
23 were at one of the training. . . I think about Claymore mines. I remember the  
24 instructor telling us with the utmost seriousness, I mean he was trying to be



1 helpful and again he was a sargeant who was maybe 24 or 25, been in  
2 Vietnam, about how if you see a kid coming up to you in Vietnam don't trust  
3 him, shoot him, because they're indoctrinated to maybe be carrying a bomb  
4 under their (shirts) and blow you and them up. In other words the definition of  
5 the enemy was the Vietnamese people. Some of the young were receptive to  
6 ideas. So a lot of the people in the unit, particularly the ones that did drugs,  
7 would be sympathetic with the ideas I was saying about what the war  
8 represented. But similarly, kind of resigned to the fact that they were being  
9 sent over. I resolved the dilemma about. . . I just didn't see how I could. . .

10 **B.R.Go?**

11 M.R.. . .go over and fight. I wasn't a pacifist. I didn't have any problem with  
12 shooting a gun. I just didn't want to shoot at somebody who was doing the  
13 right thing. So I declared Conscientious Objector. It was more of a lying (a)  
14 tactic. I said that I was opposed to unjust wars and I considered this an unjust  
15 war. Didn't mention God at all in my application. So it probably wouldn't have  
16 gone too far but, by the nature of having filed that stopped me being sent.

17  
18 **Second Side**

19 **B.R. Mike, I want to go ahead and go on with what you were saying but I**  
20 **wanna get a little bit back in terms of what you were saying earlier about**  
21 **the GIs. You talked about them being really young and that you were**  
22 **more or less the old man in the unit. But I also wanted to get a little bit**  
23 **better idea of what some of their ethnic backgrounds were, you know,**  
24 **where were they from? Were they from all over the country? What were**  
25 **their class backgrounds? Maybe you could talk a little about that.**  
26

1 M.R. Very working class poor. That is because of the nature, the average,  
2 being so young and maybe I'm wrong when I say 17 1/2. Maybe I'm wrong,  
3 maybe it was even 18 1/2. But that would put. . . mean that a lot got their  
4 parents to sign in to allow them to go in at 17, which means that a large  
5 number weren't high school graduates. All except very few were 17 or 18.  
6 There were again out of 280 just a small handful of college graduates, which  
7 was very disproportionate. . . and again this was not officers' training. This is  
8 the infantry, that's why, because college graduates either use class position to  
9 get out of the military, deferment or other means or went in as officers. So. . .  
10 . . . people were from all over, a number of Southerners. I was struck by the  
11 number of Southerners. In terms of ethnic composition, a number of Black GIs.  
12 . . . 10, 15%, maybe, Chicano GIs. The minority population of my unit was above  
13 the minority population of society but not like 50%. It was more like 30%, or  
14 25%. But mostly working class or poor youth and young and all over the  
15 country and without a whole lot of life experience to kind of counteract a lot of  
16 propoganda that they heard. You know it's quite a. . . psychology of training,  
17 and I'm sure psychologists studied this and recommended it, is the  
18 depersonalization. You come to Basic Training. You're told you can get basic  
19 haircuts, two of which look horrible, but at least half-way decent, and one is  
20 absolutely to your skin. Then the drill sargeant tells you, "You gotta choice.  
21 You can have one of these three haircuts. Of course, if you choose B or C  
22 your life will be a living hell." So everybody gets a buzz cut. And suddenly you

1 all look alike. I mean I couldn't recognize some of the. . .I came up on the bus  
2 from Oakland with this really handsome, tall Black man with an Afro and after  
3 the first day I couldn't find him. It was only about a week later I realized that  
4 this gawky, awkward-looking, tall Black kid with no hair was the same guy,  
5 Ernie Fudge.

6 **B.R. So they take away your personal identity?**

7 M.R. So they take away your personal life. You get up. . .they get you up at  
8 4:30 in the morning, eat breakfast and then you run with the pack for an hour  
9 and then you get in a hot room and listen to machine gun training. There's no  
10 back talk . . .no questions. Instructors are all telling you things from a certain  
11 way. There's a glorification of. . .well like the Jodies, which are. . .it was kind of  
12 the propaganda songs you'd sing as you'd run. The Jodies would be things  
13 like, "Your girlfriend back home, is gettin stolen by your best friend. So, screw  
14 the people back home." They were sexist in terms of things about women. A  
15 lot of Jodies were about the excitement of killing Communists, killing Cong,  
16 Vietcong. As you do your bayonet training they'd shout, "The spirit of the  
17 bayonet is to kill, Sargeant, to kill." Then you'd have to shout it louder to really  
18 show that you were really into the spirit of things. For young people without  
19 much life experience this is really like in a concentration camp. There is an  
20 overwhelming pressure to change your thinking.

21 **B.R. In that context, were people very receptive to your kind of thinking?**

22 M.R. Yeah, actually people were amazingly receptive. Again, I'm not sure if I'm  
23

1 thinking about Basic Training or Advanced Infantry Training. It may have been  
2 more in Advanced Infantry Training than Basic Training. But, you know, during  
3 the spare time we had. . . I mean people probably viewed me as a little odd  
4 duck. But again I was older. I was older at. . . at 22, and I had gone to college.  
5 So, I had some experiences that some of the others didn't. So I liked the  
6 people I was with and generally I think that I had a lot of good friends there.  
7 So, both people could be open to the war. . . I mean open to what they were  
8 doing and still feel open-minded about it and also. . . be enthusiastic about, but <sup>[,+]</sup>  
9 also be open-minded to the questions I was raising. But there wasn't anybody  
10 who said, "Yeah, I'm a complete convert. I don't want to have anything to do  
11 with this war, either." Although there were some, there was one or two guys  
12 who had also been kind of influenced some, by the anti-war movement before  
13 being drafted who were very receptive. But it was more afterwards as. . . I  
14 received letters from some of my friends in Vietnam. A couple of them were  
15 killed. I heard about those from others. But when as the realities of the war  
16 came in, I remember particularly a guy from the Rocky Mountain States who  
17 was sent up to the Northern part of South Vietnam in some fire camp and who I  
18 got a couple of letters from him. He was pretty demoralized about what he saw  
19 they were doing, and scared.

20 **B.R. What year was that then?**

21 M.R. That was early 1970. I spent my whole tour of duty which was September  
22 of 1970, it was 18 months, because at the end of my tour of duty they were

1 trying to draw down the Army.

2 **B.R.Transformation?**

3 M.R.They let a lot of people out early so I got out 5, 6 months early after 18 or  
4 19 months. But after I got caught with the papers they started doing this  
5 investigation on me and after I applied for Conscientious Objector on the basis  
6 of being opposed to imperialist wars they. . .actually what happened is Military  
7 Intelligence called me in and told me that I needn't bother applying because I  
8 had a security flag on me and they weren't going to send me anywhere  
9 anyway.

10 **B.R. Pressure's off, huh?**

11 M.R.The pressure was kind of off. My whole tour of duty I was under security. .  
12 .I was deemed an unreliable, which I was. I was under a security flag and  
13 wasn't sent anywhere. Although the Army is such a Bozo institution that after I  
14 got out of Advanced Infantry Training my whole. . .I'm under a security flag, my  
15 whole unit goes off to Vietnam, they assign me to a Military Intelligence unit.  
16 In Washington the computer just spit me out as a clerk for Military Intelligence  
17 unit. So, I'm doing my job, they made me a typist, which I didn't even know  
18 how to type but I could spell. So I was getting along famously with the Captain,  
19 typing up everything that needed to be typed up as a company clerk until one  
20 day about four weeks later he said, "You know, we've just been notified that  
21 you aren't supposed to be in this unit." So I got booted out of there into a  
22 supply unit, where I spent the rest of my career at Ft. Lewis. Ft. Lewis was a

1 huge staging ground for the military. And there were maybe as many as  
2 50,000 troops there. . .

3 **B.R.In training?**

4 M.R.In training. . .40 to 50,000 in training or demobilization at any time. And  
5 once I got out of Advanced Infantry Training I started working more with the  
6 Shelter Half. I had to be very careful because it was a military crime to  
7 distribute unauthorized literature on base. So I could have a court martial and  
8 go to jail for six months. I had to be careful not to get caught and I was more  
9 successful than I was in Basic Training. But I'd get. . .well, we could legally,  
10 given free speech rights, we could distribute on our own time papers and so  
11 we'd, with the Shelter Half we printed this newspaper. And I was. . .most of  
12 them were ex-college kids (referring to the Shelter Half people) and I think  
13 there was one vet, there were a couple vets that worked with them. . .

14 **B.R.Vietnam vets?**

15 M.R.Vietnam vets. And I was one of the few GIs. . .I mean some GIs would  
16 come to the coffeehouse, but not too many. But anyway, we'd published Fed  
17 Up, and then we'd go to the gates going into and out of the fort and pass out  
18 the newspaper. Lots of GIs, particularly as they were coming out of the fort,  
19 would take the newspaper. And so I worked with them.

20 **B.R.What was some of the content of the paper? Can you give me sort of**  
21 **a picture of what some of the issues were that you summed at that point?**  
22

23 M.R.Well *Fed Up*, I think it was more kind of Fuck The Army attitude. It wasn't  
24 really. . .the military was wrong and it was doing horrible things. But it was

1 also. . .it didn't distinguish as well between a lot of counter cultural stuff, semi  
2 druggy stuff, that goes along with counter cultural. For instance one of the big  
3 activities we did is get Jane Fonda to come up and we did the FTA Show,  
4 which was either Free the Army or Fuck the Army, depending on. . .

5 **B.R. Who you were talking to?**

6 M.R. Who you were talking to. And, you know, like Don Sutherland was there  
7 and a whole troop of media. . .got a place in Tacoma and hundreds and  
8 thousands of soldiers came because there was rock music. So the counter  
9 culture stuff was quite a draw and they loved the idea of Screw the Army. But  
10 it was a fairly, in a way, fairly low level understanding. . .

11 **B.R. Understanding?**

12 M.R. Content.

13 **B.R. So the main thrust of it was more or less just rebel against. . .**

14 M.R. Rebellious.

15 **B.R. Authority?**

16 M.R. Right. Yeah, and that what the military was doing was wrong, but, rebel  
17 against authority. I was in a different place than that. I thought it was great to  
18 rebel against authority, but I was opposed to the war, by then, for fairly well-  
19 thought-out reasons and I thought it was a war of. . .I believed in. . .that there  
20 was such a thing as imperialism, that it was a war made for imperial designs of  
21 US domination of the world and that people were suffering horribly in Vietnam  
22 because of this concept. And that it was important to communicate this to GIs

1 and arm them to make them to make choices. Not to cooperate as much when  
2 they realized how they were being used. So there was another group there in  
3 town (referring to the town of Tillicum and the group called the G.I. Alliance)  
4 called the *Free Press* (the paper of this group). They also put out an anti-war  
5 newspaper. They had some vets or people who had been involved in the  
6 military including two officers who were anti-war, I guess who may have still  
7 been in the service. They were putting out this *Free Press* and, I guess,  
8 circulating it in some way the same way we did the *Fed Up*. But they were  
9 more receptive. We started working with them, they were more receptive to the  
10 idea of trying to build an actual movement of GIs based on an understanding  
11 that it wasn't just a cultural things of lifer vs. draftee or being cool and mellow  
12 or being a hawk, but it was question of fighting for the right or the wrong thing.  
13 (Mike talks about his marriage and moving off post after A.I.T.)

14 **B.R. Well, one thing I was thinking when I was looking through some of**  
15 **these books that I've gotten in conjunction with this work, one of them**  
16 **was, the title is Turning the Guns Around, and other one was Up Against**  
17 **the Brass. And it seemed like, when you're reading through those two**  
18 **books there's some sentiment that is different. Up Against the Brass**  
19 **seemed more to fall in line with what you were saying about the *Fed Up***  
20 **paper being rebellious, you know, the military is screwed up. . .**  
21

22 M.R. Counter cultural.

23 **B.R. . . that kind of thing. And then Turning the Guns Around seemed**  
24 **like it was much more, a little bit. . . taking it a little bit farther.**  
25 **Recognizing. . . it seems like a lot of the writing, a lot of these GIs around**  
26 **the country were starting to look at what the military itself was as**  
27 **representing imperialism in foreign countries. And it seemed like it was**  
28 **going a little bit farther than just this issue of rebellion. Is that what**  
29 **you're. . .**



1 .  
2 M.R.Yeah, that's . . .

3 B.R. . . **is that what you're sort of saying?**

4 M.R.That's exactly right. Well, the same thing actually happened in the student  
5 movement. I mean, there were a lot of people that were into the counter  
6 cultural movement that were rebelling against the society of their parents or the  
7 society but their rebellion mostly took the form of smoking vast amounts of  
8 marijuana. And that was a rebellion. But, it was a different one than people  
9 that were starting to say, "Well, why are universities as institutions collaborating  
10 with the military and why do they stand on the side of industry and corporations  
11 and not on the side of the people?" Or, "Why are we getting involved in the  
12 war in Vietnam?" So, yeah, it was a different. . .there was a different thrust.  
13 So, we (his wife and himself) mainly began to feel that the Shelter Half  
14 represented a more counter cultural strand and that wasn't really where we  
15 were at. So, we started working more with the *Free Press*. We began to get  
16 some other GIs. . .there were some other GIs, more vets at. . .involved, people  
17 who could talk to GIs. We felt it was important to build a movement of GIs so  
18 we built . . .created an organization called the GI Alliance. And particularly a lot  
19 of people, guys who had been to Vietnam, mostly guys, a couple of women, but  
20 mostly guys, who had been to Vietnam, and came back as vets, were very  
21 receptive to what we did. If you went to Basic and Advanced Infantry Training  
22 for 5, 6 months or 4 to 5 months and then you went to Vietnam for a year tour  
23 of duty, you came back and you had about 5 or 6 months where you were kind

1 of hanging around, doing KP and cleaning your boots and totally disaffected  
2 and didn't give a shit. There were people. . .and again there was a lot of the  
3 counter cultural stuff. Music. a lot of drugs, I mean people, GIs that consumed  
4 more drugs than <sup>[1]</sup> could ever conceive of people doing. One of the guys who  
5 joined the GI Alliance ~~and~~ actually started cutting down his drug consumption. I  
6 remember one day he dropped acid, did a little heroine, smoked marijuana all  
7 day, he'd done some speed and he did LSD. And this was in one day!

8 **B.R. Was he a Vietnam veteran?**

9 M.R. Actually, I'm trying to remember.... It was a Vietnam veteran I'm talking  
10 about. In fact this particular guy had got a Silver Star as well as having been  
11 wounded... So he's in a unit. . .I mean he's not going to salute anybody. He's  
12 only going to do what he wants. He doesn't really care. If they want to court  
13 martial him, throw him out of the military, he could give less of a shit. There  
14 were a lot of people like this that were very receptive to the. . .they were  
15 probably both receptive to counter cultural ideas, you know this kind of  
16 rebellion, but they were also receptive to the idea that, because they'd seen it,  
17 this is a wrong war, particularly a lot of the Black GIs. . .This was a time that's  
18 hard to conceive of. There were groups of Black GIs that were studying Mao  
19 on their own, were not college, you know, not college educated, but they felt  
20 things were so wrong, the racism they'd experienced through their life, the  
21 racism they saw in Vietnam against the Vietnamese people, that they were very  
22 receptive to different ideas. So we were very successful in involving large

1 numbers of GIs in our. . .in anti-war activities, in demonstrations, in passing out  
2 the newspaper. We at our peak we were running about 10,000 copies of the  
3 *Free Press* and distributing them all on the fort.

4 **B.R.Now, just for the record, where was the GI organization? Where was**  
5 **it located?**

6  
7 M.R.Initially, there wasn't a place, but then we actually got a place in Tillicum,  
8 which is kind of a GI slum outside of Ft. Lewis. We had a little storefront.  
9 We'd have functions and we'd have picket lines up in front of the entrance to  
10 the fort. Back then a lot of these people that were back from Vietnam what  
11 could the military do? Throw them out, court martial, I mean they just didn't  
12 really care because they'd been through something that was worse than  
13 anything else that the military could do to them.

14 **B.R.Sort of nothing to lose?**

15 M.R.Nothing to lose. And so there. . .and there was a fire rage amongst the  
16 Black GIs who were members of the GI Alliance and it was quite an inter-racial  
17 organization. It had a number of Black GIs, and Chicano GIs, active in the GI  
18 Alliance and active on fort. We would do things. Several times around specific  
19 instances we had mass meetings on fort. We would pass by word of mouth  
20 and have 50, 60, 100 GIs show up at the PX and we'd have an anti-war  
21 meeting. And just because of the kind of timing, the military just didn't really  
22 want to do anything about it because it would have been an ugly riot. Well that  
23 number of people, or it would have looked very bad. There was a racist  
24 incident in one company I remember where some non-commissioned officers

1 were treating the Black GIs in a real racist fashion. We wrote an exposure of it  
2 in the paper. We held a meeting in that barracks, and we leafletted the  
3 barracks. And it really shook things up. It was so counter to the military, you  
4 know a sargeant thinks they can, or a higher officer thinks that they can just do  
5 things. But that wasn't the way it was going to be. People were quite  
6 receptive.

7 **B.R.What happened off of that particular incident? Do you remember?**

8 M.R.No, I don't. I remember us actually converging on this barracks. I was  
9 kind of along for the ride because the rage of the Black GIs was just. . .they  
10 were ready to beat the shit out of these officers. And I think nothing actually  
11 happened. But as I remember the conditions improved. I mean the  
12 harassment stopped. I think it shook people up. They knew that they couldn't  
13 do it with impunity. I remember one of our illegal mass meetings on base, a  
14 distinguished, older looking gentleman showed up and actually sat down next to  
15 me and was kind of listening patiently and then finally kind of said to me, "You  
16 know, I know about Lin Piao and Mao and all these things." And it turned it <sup>o</sup><sub>y</sub><sup>t</sup>  
17 was the two star general of the fort, General Bolling. And he never. . .we kind  
18 of dispersed and he never really said anything. And it was just. . .you know,  
19 this was gonna be bad PR for em.

20 **B.R.You think the inaction of the brass at Ft. Lewis was a reflection of**  
21 **what was going on internationally? It seems like it's gotta be connected.**  
22 **The fear of you representing the rock that they could drop on their feet.**

23 M.R.Well, that's right. I mean they weren't scared of us per se obviously. But,  
24

1 the US military was getting beaten in Vietnam. This was now end of 1971,  
2 beginning of '72. Large numbers of GIs were now feeling rebellious about the  
3 war, either on the lowest level of just being lifers vs. brass. There were a lot of  
4 stories and some of them certainly were true, of enlisting men blowing up or  
5 shooting officers or lifer sargeants who were particularly gung-ho in Vietnam. I  
6 never heard somebody directly admitting that they killed somebody. But I heard  
7 a number of stories about it happening in peoples' units overseas. So it was  
8 just an incendiary situation where the military, well at least the general at our  
9 camp, obviously decided that it would not. . .it would do worse to try and  
10 squash us <sup>or</sup> would just fan the flames. So they could have court-martialed me or  
11 a couple of others if they caught us doing something but it would have just  
12 been disadvantageous. We tried some of the other things. They were going to  
13 pacify the troops by having a rock concert on fort. My wife and two wives of  
14 some other, actually Vietnam vets, one of them was a military policeman, went  
15 there and grabbed, during a break, grabbed the microphone and started giving.  
16 . .this was on base, and started giving an anti-war speech, which was very well  
17 received, I might say by the thousand or so troops that were there, out in the  
18 hot sun. The military, obviously they thought they had to pacify troops by that  
19 time by having rock concerts.

20 **B.R. That says something.**

21 M.R. But, you know, the military police came and arrested our three wives and  
22 Francie was banned from the fort for a while. But then they gave in after

1 lecturing. . .they lectured me because they didn't have any power over her.

2 And then she still was given rights to go to Madigan, the hospital. I'm not sure  
3 if she could go to the PX. But anyway, outside of that, she wasn't allowed on  
4 the fort. And then one time we decided to challenge this military law that you  
5 couldn't distribute unauthorized literature on fort. During one of my breaks. . .I  
6 was working in a supply warehouse, so I told my sargeant, I said, "Ok, I'm out  
7 to lunch now. See ya in a little bit." And so I whipped up to the PX and met  
8 some of my friends and we had all smuggled some *Free Presses* on fort. No,  
9 not *Free Presses*, copies of the Declaration of Independence. And so we. . . .

10 **B.R.What day was this, Mike?**

11 M.R.It was just like a Wednesday, or something, middle of the week. So we  
12 started passing out the Declaration of Independence to everybody busily.  
13 Within 5 minutes the MPs came and promptly arrested us all. . .actually there  
14 weren't that many of us. There were only about 2 of us, but I was one of em.  
15 But anyway, they arrested us, and I remember as. . .just as they put me up  
16 against the truck and they were handcuffing me I said, "You know, you guys  
17 really don't want to do this. This is not unauthorized literature. This is our  
18 Declaration of Independence." But they were unconvinced. So as I was being  
19 hauled away I saw my sargeant who I'd just said goodbye to for lunch drive by  
20 and kind of look at me and his eyes got very big, and he was a very sweet guy  
21 actually, a staff sargeant, a lifer, a Black guy from the South. So, obviously I  
22 didn't make it back from lunch. So they take me to Military Intelligence. They

1 throw me in the jail and I'm saying, "Guys, it's the Declaration of  
2 Independence." Obviously they were talking with other people about what to  
3 do. So after about 4 or 5 hours grilling me about this unauthorized literature,  
4 they just let me go. So I showed up the next day at work and my sargeant  
5 never said a word about it. In fact, none of the other. . .the people working  
6 there were mainly civilians, none of them, except one of the women who  
7 worked there, whose son had been to Vietnam, she never directly said anything  
8 to me about it. But she knit me a little present or something and brought this  
9 present the next day. Everybody was very nice about it. So that was my  
10 experience with being arrested for passing out the Declaration of  
11 Independence.

12 **B.R.Did you guys do anything around that in the paper at that point? I**  
13 **mean obviously you must have as far summing it up yourselves?**

14  
15 M.R.Well, we tweaked the military's nose about it. Now that was more counter  
16 culture rebellion if anything. But we were young and it was fun. We put  
17 something in the newspaper. We were hoping to get prosecuted. But they  
18 didn't. . .showed some good taste.


19 **B.R.When you talk about being arrested and stuff, you do it with jovial**  
20 **laughter. Was there ever points during that time that you were actually**  
21 **fearful? I know when you were talking earlier about some of your**  
22 **experience down in the South to me it just struck me there's got to be the**  
23 **question of where are you at as far as your commitment in relationship to**  
24 **what you're putting on the line around it?**

25  
26 M.R.Well, young people think they are immortal, so. . .yeah there were times I  
27 was scared in the South. I was scared when I was in the police station being

1 beaten in the South and really. . . people were threatening to kill me. But in the  
2 military it wasn't so much acute fear. It was just long-term fear. I mean it was  
3 like being in a police state. You wouldn't be in a police state if you didn't have  
4 different ideas. If you were going along with the program, you'd say, oh yeah,  
5 it's great, you know, waking up, eating good food, doing a lot of push-ups. I'm  
6 gonna go out and fight the good war. But if you had different ideas it was like  
7 being in a police state. Skulking around, being in fear of getting caught. So I  
8 was scared, I mean getting caught, being prosecuted, and going to jail. But I  
9 wasn't really scared of. . . well, no, sometimes things would be scary. I guess  
10 I'm forgetting some things. You know, you'd be. . . particularly some of the  
11 racial tension was very fierce. You'd be scared that things would blow up and  
12 there'd be serious fighting. I mean when we went to that company I mentioned  
13 and we were trying to deal with things, I mean it was mostly Black GIs, but I  
14 was supporting them, and there were others supporting that there shouldn't be  
15 racism, too, but it was mostly Black GIs. You know, it was scary that things  
16 would get out of hand and people would get. . . would hurt each other.

17 **B.R. This gets into another issue as far as the role of Black and, at that**  
18 **point you probably called them Chicanos, but Mexican Americans.**

19  
20 M.R. Right, they were Mexican Americans.

21 **B.R. Were they right out there up front? Were they pretty boisterous as far**  
22 **as their activity or was it pretty much active around the issue of racism, or**  
23 **was it broader than that? You mentioned this group of Black GIs**  
24 **studying Mao?** 

25  
26 M.R. Yeah. No it was amazing that Black GIs. . . particularly Black GIs, not,



1 more so than Chicano GIs, well the ones who were back from Vietnam, you  
2 know, who were wearing modified Afros. You'd see this army cap on top of this  
3 big Afro, (and they) just were not into saluting. There was just this strong  
4 cultural nationalism. Another thing was called the "dap", which was a kind of .  
5 .and the White GIs who were sympathetic would kind of adopt it, but a "dap"  
6 was a handshake that could go on for 5 minutes. Popping hands, and  
7 slapping and all of this kind of elaborate rhythm. And the Black GIs felt this, I  
8 mean it was an example of Black culture and it was a sign of stopping and  
9 saying, you know, "We're soul brothers. We have unity, cultural unity." And  
10 they'd like to do it, particularly in front of White officers and things. Or you  
11 know, I would see this a lot. And then, oh, it was a time of actually Muhammed  
12 Ali, and he had ceased being Cassius Clay, was now Muhammed Ali. He was  
13 fighting I think the Sonny Liston fight. It was very interesting. Now that was a  
14 very cultural. . .the Black. . .I mean it was almost Sonny Liston, although a  
15 Black man, was, you know, the great White hope because he was an "OK  
16 Black man". There was a strong cultural nationalism as well. The Black GIs  
17 were also very receptive to the concepts of how their understanding of their  
18 own oppression as Black people related to the war. You know, the line, "No  
19 Vietcong ever called me nigger", which I think was a . . .oh, that Black comic,  
20 \_\_\_\_\_. Generally the Black GIs cultural, counter cultural rebellion, their  
21 rebellion against the establishment wasn't so diffuse. It really had a more  
22 strong content and focus of Black pride and Black nationalism and also an

1 understanding of what the war meant, generally than the White counter culture.

2 **B.R. Was there much influence of the Black Panthers at that point?**

3 M.R. Yes, there was. And I'm. . . although the. . . I'm trying to remember the. .  
4 .there was but I may be confusing the timing on this. The Black Panthers I  
5 think were a little past their hey day by '72.

6 **B.R. Yeah, by the '70s, you're right.**

7 M.R. Yeah I think.

8 **B.R. More like in '68, '67.**

9 M.R. Yeah, '68, '69 and '70. But, I mean, there certainly was, you know, the  
10 symbol, the late '60s symbol, Huey Newton with a spear and a gun was part of  
11 the Black cultural nationalism. . . experience.

12 **B.R. If you were looking back on this experience as far as just reflecting on**  
13 **it, what kind of effect do you think that the GI movement as you**  
14 **experienced had on the military itself? You got out at the front end of**  
15 **that transition period where they were going from draft to. . .**

16  
17 M.R. An escalation to de-escalation.

18 **B.R. Yeah, to de-escalation and then shortly after, they started talking**  
19 **volunteer military. Some of the books that I've been reading and been**  
20 **talking about contributed quite a bit to the influence that the GI**  
21 **movement, in this country, had on the military apparatus summing itself**  
22 **up and how it functions. I was just wondering if to what degree do you**  
23 **think that whole movement had on the military in light of that?**

24  
25 M.R. I think the movement had a big impact. I think the organized part of the  
26 movement like the coffeehouses and the papers and. . . ours was one. .  
27 .actually one of the few mass organizations of GIs that organized on a fort that  
28 I'm aware of anywhere. In fact, I'm not aware of any other one. I'm aware of

1 other papers and coffeehouse led movements. But our's actually was a GI-  
2 base led movement. But those had an important effect. What they reflected is  
3 what was truly important, which is that the military and these vast numbers of  
4 drafted and enlisted GIs were affected by forces generally in society, counter  
5 cultural forces, the anti-war movement. The reason there were successful forms  
6 of organizations like the newspapers, coffeehouses and the GI Alliance was  
7 more a reflection of the widespread dissatisfaction in the military. Their .  
8 .soldiers weren't as reliable because. . .if you begin to disbelieve in what you're  
9 doing. And then you begin to disbelieve in those that are giving the orders.  
10 And the music of the counter culture, which all the GIs listened to, and the  
11 drugs was ~~a~~ subversive to the authority of the military. So I think the principal  
12 force that caused the US military to withdraw from Vietnam was they were  
13 defeated by the Vietnamese people. But a major supportive force was the  
14 social movement opposed to the war in the US and an important part of that,  
15 although not the major part of that. . .I mean the major part I think was the  
16 civilian activity. But a major, a significant part was also those social  
17 movements in the military whether it cultural, counter cultural dissatisfaction or  
18 more conscious organizing against what the war represented that smaller  
19 sections were doing.

20 **B.R.If you were looking back how do you think it actually affects the**  
21 **direction that your life took. How would you sum that up? Is that a fair**  
22 **question?**

23 M.R.Yeah. Well, I'm not as representative as others. For me, it would be, how  
24

1 did the experience in the civil rights movement and the anti-war student  
2 movement and GI movement affect my life. Basically that affected my life by  
3 making me question the and not pursue the path of class privilege that I'd  
4 grown up to. It made me think about things in a different way. I didn't awaken  
5 to the consciousness in the military, because of the experience in the military. I  
6 already had that consciousness when I went into the military. It made me. . . I  
7 certainly learned a lot in the military. I think what is more typical is a lot of the  
8 GIs that became involved in the GI Alliance and *Free Press*. What they knew  
9 from their experience was that they didn't believe in what they had done. They  
10 had some horrible experiences that. I know now as a middle aged man who  
11 meets vets as friends, or more often actually as clients, they're still suffering  
12 from things that happened, that they did, that happened to them. But I think the  
13 changes that that experience <sup>[had]</sup> was the breaking them from the belief in the  
14 American myth of, a just society, (where) everybody has a fair break. And that  
15 wasn't true. They saw that wasn't true. And I think as people became more  
16 active I think it. . . the experience of, say being involved in the *Free Press* or the  
17 GI Alliance would help them link some of their experiences to other things that  
18 were going on in society. The fact that if they were Black that what was  
19 happening to Black children in urban society, what racism in the North as well  
20 as the South. If they were White working class, you know, that the myth of a  
21 classless society, or mobility, just isn't true. That there are forces in our society  
22 that not only try and control the rest of the world but try to control the people in

1 this country. So I think my experience in that way was different. It was more a  
2 whole period of time which changed my thinking.

3 **B.R. Well, we're sort of coming to a close here. Is there anything you**  
4 **wanted to add, Mike?**

5  
6 M.R. No, I think we kind of covered it. I can't think of anything else.

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