**Ok, today is January 9, 2014. This is Patrick Callaghan with the Westchester Public Library in Westchester, Illinois. Also present is Ryan Flores, a reference librarian here at the library. Today, we will be speaking with Mr. Gerry Masterson who served in the United States Marine Corps Reserves for six-years, including two tours in Vietnam. And this interview is being conducted for the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.**

**Ok, let’s go ahead and get started, Gerry. Why don’t you just tell us where you were born and a little bit about your family when you were growing up?**

Ok, excuse me, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, where most of my family is from. We—I was born in Brooklyn. Grew up on Long Island. We move to Chicago in the summer of 1964 about two-weeks after I graduated from high school. My dad was a doctor, and he was an obstetrician-gynecologist, and he had been offered the position to be the chairman of O.B.-Gyn at Strich Medical School, Loyola University’s medical school. And so we moved out here. I was young. Seventeen. I had only turned three-months before I graduated high school, so I was real young in my class. My brother, Bill, was two-years younger. He was fifteen, and then we had a two-year old sister. So we moved out here in the summer of 64. I started college down at Loyola. That lasted about six-months, and at the end of the first semester I left. And I knew right away that, ok, I had not taken good advantage of going to college. I was going to be spending the most of the rest of my life working my ass off since I had kind of goofed up that opportunity like that. So I ended up getting a job downtown with a brokerage house as a runner. Bates and Company down at 140 S. Dearborn, and in my time there, I ran into a couple young stock brokers. They were pretty successful, but they had spent time in the Marine Corps, and, you know, they made it sound pretty intriguing at the time, and there weren’t a lot of other significant things going on in my life at that time. So, I thought, you know, I could do worse than going into the Marine Corps. Plus, my dad had been in the service, and, you know, there had always been a little bit of a mystique or an aura about the Marines and stuff like that, and I thought, hell, if I can even make it just through boot camp that says something, you know, like that, because I was tall, like six-two, six-three, but I had always been really skinny and stuff like that. And so, it was one of those things where you sign up and enlist and you go, “What did I just do?”

**Right.**

I was like, “Oh my God.” So I enlisted just before Christmas 1965. Back then, you used to go down here to Clark Street and Congress Parkway downtown in the city. That was like the induction place, if you will. So I went in on the second or third of January 1966, got sent to boot camp in San Diego, California, went through boot camp for, you know, eighty or ninety days or whatever it was, and then went to Camp Pendleton after that for infantry training. Went home on leave for a couple weeks, got sent to Camp Lejeune because my MOS ended up being supply, which was 30-41 and so I was kind of a gofer and a scrounger for people and stuff. After I got done with supply school at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, that summer of 1966, I was sent back to Camp Pendleton, and I was assigned to this unit called First Armored Amphibian Company. It was kind of a bastard outfit because we were a company operating like a battalion, and there was only two companies like that in the whole Marine Corps. There was one at Camp Pendleton, and one at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and what they were was—I don’t know if you know what an amphtrack but it’s can on land and in the water and stuff, you know. Looks like a tank but it can go in the water with big metal tracks and the front plate would drop down and we’d go in and out like that. But ours was different because we had 105 Howitzers mounted on the top of them. And so we spent the summer of 1966 putting the company together. As a matter of fact, when I was assigned there, I was, like, among the first dozen people in the company. They were just building this company from scratch. And by the end of September, they had gotten, I guess, everybody that they wanted get in the company, and we left for Vietnam. And it’s funny because everybody went out the night before—the night before it goes into Oceanside California—everyone gets drunk, comes back, you know. And we had a squad bay that had about forty sinks and thirty toilets, you know, they were all lined up, like that. And, we figured, well, it’s probably three o’clock in the morning. Why don’t we get a jumpstart on shaving? We’ll just shave now. That way, we don’t have to mess around in the morning and stuff like that. So, I’m there trying to shave, and I have a buddy of mine on either side of me, both of whom had about as much alcohol as I had. He starts, “Gerry, let me help you out.” So they end up coming up the sides. The next morning, we fall out for formation in the platoon sergeant says, “Masterson, take off that cover.” I took off my cover. I had a Mohawk that was one-inch wide going down the whole top of my head, and there was nothing else. They had shaved the rest of my head bald. And it took all the time till we get to Vietnam and beyond for my hair to grow back again.

**[Laughs]**

But anyway, this was very unusual because to go to Vietnam since we had our amphtracks the only way to transport those was on ships. So what they did was, they pulled up three LSTs—Navy ships—right to the beach at Camp Pendleton. Camp Pendleton was a huge amphibious base. It’s the largest in the world. As a matter of fact, if you’re on the Pacific Coast Highway in California, which is really a neat area, everything that you see for eighteen miles, from San Clemente to Oceanside is Camp Pendleton—on both sides of the road. Inland going towards the mountains and stuff. So anyway, they pull up these three LSTs to the beach. We drive the amphtracks on. It was the Caroline Kennedy, the Pitkin County, and the Blanco County, and it was the same experience that I heard someone else just listening. You leave the shore, and you’re just slowly backing away. All of a sudden, the reality starts to set in, and it’s like, “Ok, where am I going?”

**Right.**

“When am I coming back?” And, you know, not to mention the fact that, you know, you’re young and you’re full of yourself, but, in the same thing, you’re heading out over across five or seven-thousand miles. And I’m thinking, “God, that’s a lot of water out there like that.” So, these ships because of the nature of them being flat, relatively flat-bottom ships so they can hold the amphtracks are pretty slow, but, I must say, in the six-years that I was in the Marine Corps, that was the best food I had was on the ships going to Vietnam. The Navy cooks, they had pies and biscuits and fresh bread that they would bake every—that was the highlight of the day was eating there. That was the best food I ever had. So we left Camp Pendleton, and it was—I don’t remember the exact date, but it was the end of September of sixty-six—we saw nothing but water for ten-days. Pulled in, on the tenth day, we pulled into to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and none of us had ever been there. We were all privates and PFCs. Nobody had any money, so they paid us all twenty-five dollars, and we went out and spent the night in Honolulu and came back on the ship the next morning, expecting to leave because that’s what we’d been told. We were going to leave the next day. Except we didn’t leave for three more days, so we were in Hawaii for three-days. After three-days, we all got back on the ship again, and we pulled out of Pearl Harbor. We didn’t see anything but water for seventeen-days now, and that’s how long it took us to go from Hawaii to Guam, and we got to Guam just before the Marine Corps birthday. I think we got there at, like, November 8th or something like that. In the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps birthday is a big deal, November 10th. I mean, it’s a really big deal, so they decided to stick around for four-days, until we got to the Marine Corps birthday. And then we left Guam a day or two after the Marine Corps birthday and sailed through the Philippines, and ended up in Da Nang sometime before Thanksgiving in 1966. I thought our total time, from the time we left Camp Pendleton in California until the time we got to ‘Nam was, like, forty-seven days. It was a pretty long time.

**So, this is—what you’re describing now—is you’re embarking on your first tour, is that right?**

Right.

**So maybe this would be a good time to ask then—you said, you don’t know if your grandfather was in the service, but your dad was, and he was a doctor.**

Right.

**Did he have an opinion one way or another on your situation, or the fact that you enlisted?**

I think he was disappointed that I didn’t finish school, that I didn’t do well in college, but he was proud of the fact that I was a Marine.

**Ok.**

And, you know, he actually, he acknowledged that a number of years later—and I mean, quite a few years later. My mother said something to me several times that my that my father was proud of that because—our family wasn’t a big touchy, feely, huggy family or anything else like that, unlike mine and with my wife and kids. I’m just the opposite of that. Different generations of people, you know, do things differently. I don’t think there’s a right or a wrong, but, you know, it was just different like that.

**So, they let you know in your own way that they were proud of you for being a Marine.**

Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, that actually came up, you know, twenty-years afterwards. We were actually out to dinner one night, and it was my mother and father, my wife and I, and my brother and his wife. And my father actually ended up getting very angry with my brother because he perceived my brother as saying something disparaging about the military, which my brother would never do. That’s the way my father processed it. My brother and his wife ended up walking out of the restaurant, and left, and went back to Oak Park and stuff. And I don’t think spoke to my father for like five-months or something like that.

**Wow.**

Yeah, I mean, so it’s—I’ve learned a lot of lessons in like and one of the biggest ones is being right is highly overrated, ok? I’d much rather have a relationship than be right, and as a father and a grandfather and a husband for forty-five years, I’m interested in being there for the long-haul like that.

**I hear you. So, back to what you were saying before. You said it was forty-seven days until you actually got to Vietnam. So you went to Guam to the Philippines, is that right?**

We didn’t stop in the Philippines, but when you’re in that area, Philippines is all island. Anyway, we went past Philippines to get to Vietnam.

**Ok. So when you’re there, what was your experience like? What was it like going from Chicago to California to getting on a ship, and—as you said, a lot of water—to ending up in Vietnam?**

Well, you know, we had all been trained very, very well, but it’s like everything else. You can practice something. You can read it in a book. But it doesn’t ring the same until you’re there. And I don’t even think the first couple days—although I remember being in a foxhole on guard duty, my first night and it was rainy and crappy and muddy, which was the way it was everyday for the next thirteen-months. I remember jumping in this bunker, and there was like some little small snake in there. At that point, I didn’t know whether to shit or go blind, you know. It was like, alright, I’ve been in this country twenty-four hours, alright, and I’m already encountering this stuff. But anyway, I got through the first couple days, and then sometime within, our company was in a compound on the other side of Hill 327. We shared a compound with First Tank Battalion, and it was a rocket attack sometime in the first week or so. And I remember we had like kind of a wooden screen hooch, ok, that we were staying in. and I dove through the screen into the sand doing the doggy paddle into the bunker, you know, outside of our hooch. And then after fifteen, twenty minutes—they used to have this thing, we used to call it Puff the Magic Dragon, ok. It was like a fixed wing plane that had Gatling guns on it, ok. So, sometimes when there’d be attacks they’d send Puff up. And to give you an idea of the firepower—you’d have to check with some military historian, much better than me—you could put a round in every square inch of a football field in three-seconds, or something like it. I mean, it had incredible firepower.

**Wow.**

Or maybe it’s every square foot in three-seconds. And so they’d send Puff up, and all you could see was solid stream of red, and to appreciate what that means, in an ammo clip, ok, or machine gun clip, ok, there’s only a tracer every fifth round. That’s so you could kind of get a sense of where the rounds are going, ok. So, if you’re looking at a plane up here, and you’re looking at the ground, all you see is a solid laser of red, and then think about that there’s four non-red rounds between every tracer round, you know what I’m saying?

**Yes.**

You know, the firepower was extraordinary. But what frequently would happen is, they’d send Puff up and the next morning we’d go out and we’d almost never find bodies because a lot of the things were set off with old BA-30 batteries, which would be the equivalent of like a flashlight battery. That’s why we would never discard anything, ok—any metal, any half-assed used batteries or anything because the gooks could use anything for a firing device and stuff like that. What would frequently happen, you know, they would have rockets but they might have had them on some kind of delayed fuse or because it was really kind of primitive, they really had no clue when they were going to go off, ok. Frequently, there weren’t—even after sending Puff up—because maybe these were set-up the day before, a day-and-a-half, two day, or something like that. So, that wasn’t an uncommon thing. But our platoon, our company, rather, had three platoons and they kind of split them up. One platoon stayed in the compound. One was up on Marble Mountain. And one was up at Dung Ha at the mouth of the river, along the DMZ between North and South Vietnam. And that’s actually where we got our first KIAs just before Christmas, and the first KIAs were actually—were an accident. They had a short round—105 Howitzer round—hit a PRC ten radio antenna and exploded and two guys from our company got killed. I mean, that wasn’t even incoming, that was just a pure fluke accident. I mean, I saw something in the paper yesterday, said there was a Helicopter off of Maryland or Virginia that went down, with four or ten people got killed in it. This was just a fluke accident. So, you know, in my MOS in supply, ok, you know, my job was to get everybody what they needed, whether it was ammunition, clothes, everything, boots, you name it and it goes through supply. In Da Nang, there was a CB base there. CBs were the Navy construction guys. These were the most talented guys in the world. These were guys who had been construction guys and engineers and all these things in civilian life before they came into the service, and they could build anything, but they needed stuff, too. So I’d go over there and trade. I’d bring them clothes and they’d build me this and they’d build me that, and we would just trade. It was like the barter system. It worked really, really well. Often times, our company, because of the nature of it, we’d function in support of other ground troops, you know, that would be in engagements on the ground and stuff like that. So our guys moved all over Da Nang, Phu Bai, Con Nam, Cam Lo, Cam Xuyen, Dong Ha. In Vietnam back then, most of what they referred to as the I Corps, which was the northern third of the country, or northern quarter—

**What was it called? The I**—

I Corps.

**I Corps?**

The I Corps—was pretty much all Marine turf back then, and the bottom two-thirds was more the Army controlled and stuff. And then, you know, obviously, you had the Air Force people flying missions from air bases there. The Navy had pilots flying missions off of air craft carriers. You know, as many lives as we lost in Vietnam, if you think about this, how much worse it could be. We had total air superiority. The gooks never had one jet, one helicopter, nothing. If we had had to contend with them coming at us from the sky, like they had to contend with us coming from the sky, think about how many people would have—although, maybe we would have been out of there sooner. But, I mean, think about that. We had total air superiority. I mean, and the pilots, when I was in ‘Nam the second time, I was in Mag 13 down in Chu Lai in the—we were, like, near the beach and the Army’s Americal Division was all around us. The pilots, these guys were good guys, but they were insane. In Mag-13, we had Phantom Sky Hawks, Intruders. We had pilots that would come back with leaves in the tail hooks, ok. Do you know how low you gotta be flying to come back with a leaf in a tail hook, ok?

**Wow.**

You’re not going to find that in any manual anywhere or anything else like that. I mean, they took what they did really, really seriously and stuff. But, you know, I think about that once in a while, about the air superiority. No one really talks about that. Because, you know, we had the helicopters, we had the jets, we had all of that stuff. But I mean, Vietnam was the first place, though—war sucks period, ok? And anyone else who says anything other than that is full of shit. War just sucks, ok? You can act honorably, ok, but war itself sucks. And, you know, Vietnam was I think the first place or first time where—in all the previous things, there was always a front. Like, if we want to call ourselves the good guys, ok, we were here, and then the bad guys were over there, ok, and so you’re advancing toward the front or you’re retreating from a front. Vietnam was the first place—and this is it’s turned out to be in the Middle East and Afghanistan and Iraq—where the war is going on all around, kind of.

**Ok.**

And there’s different hot spots. So, that kind of amps up the stress level right there. I have a lot of empathy for the guys in Afghanistan because, you know, we had a lot of improvised bombs that our guys would, you know, booby traps and things, guys would encounter from time to time, but—what is see in Afghanistan is it’s there’s almost no place, other than right in your CP there, where you’re safe. Anywhere outside, you’re not safe.

**It’s just war everywhere.**

Yeah. Exactly

**Potential. Potential for war everywhere.**

We had places in ‘Nam, though, where we would go into. I can show you pictures. We’d go into a village during the day because we’d go out on medical missions and stuff, you know, just supplies and helping people. We’d be in through rice paddies and stuff, and everybody would be all kissy-faced during the day, and then at night there would be incoming fire from the village and stuff. Because the Viet Cong would go in at night and threaten people and everything like that. So what had been a friendly village during the day became a hostile place at night. And that wears on you after a little bit. It’s like, ok, you want to be empathetic and sympathetic, but then you got people getting—you don’t know who, it’s like you can’t tell the players without a scorecard, ok, and you don’t know who’s who. And that’s when some squirrelly things start happening, like that.

**Wow.**

You know, I was always proud to be a Marine, and I’m proud of every day of the six years I was in the Marine Corps. I always thought it was an honorable thing then, and I think it’s an honorable thing today. My wife was in the Marine Corps, actually. Cathy. When I got back from Vietnam the first time it was around Halloween in 1967, and I got station back in California at Camp Pendleton. And in typical fashion, Cathy and I met at one of the clubs she’d worked in on the computers at base headquarters. And she had actually gotten her first job—she as actually born in Champaign-Urbana—she was working at the University of Illinois, Champaign when she went into the service. Her dad had been a career Army officer. And I think her and her parents weren’t getting along too good, and so her dad said, “Hey, you gotta make a choice,” and she says, “I’m going,” like that. So we went on our first date the 28th of May, 1968. We got engaged the 28th of June, and we got married on the 28th of September. So, from our first date until the day we got married, it was four-months. And last September, we celebrated our forty-fifth wedding anniversary.

**Wow.**

So, I’m very fortunate and grateful.

**So, is this the timing, then? Your first tour went from sixty-six to sixty-seven. And then you came back to Camp Pendleton, and you met your wife and got married?**

Yeah, we went to ‘Nam in September of sixty-six. Came home around Halloween in sixty-seven. I went home on thirty-days leave or twenty-days leave—whatever it was—was reassigned back to Camp Pendleton. I worked in G-3 plants and operations in the base headquarters on the general staff. And about six or seven-months later—six months later after I got to Camp Pendleton—I met Cathy, my future wife. Her and I get married in September of sixty-eight. Our daughter was born the next summer. And New Years Eve afternoon of sixty-nine going into seventy is when I found out I was going back to Vietnam. This was really weird because I worked in G-3 in plans and operations, so, I had gone to the community general and chief of staff’s office to pick up some papers or something like that. And there was a woman Marine staff sergeant that worked in there and she said, “Hey Bat” —because everyone called me Bat for Bat Masterson. That was the only time I had ever been called Bat was in the six-years I was in the Marine Corps. Before it’s always been Gerry and since then it’s always been Gerry. But when I was in the Marine Corps it was always Bat for Bat Masterson. So she said, “Hey Bat, I didn’t know you were going back to ‘Nam.” And I said, “What are you talking about?” So she says, “Well, I just saw your name on a set of orders on Colonel Randall’s desk.” Colonel Randall is the Chief of Staff. I said, “Get those freaking orders and bring them back here.” She brings them back. Sure as shit, “Sergeant J. G. Masterson 2204978,” that was my service number. “Report to FMF Westpac,” by the end of February. Well, back at that time—I actually found my order the other night. If you saw FMF Westpac, if you were a Marine and you saw FMF Westpac that was the short way of saying Vietnam because what the FMF stands for is “Fleet Marine Force Pacific.” And the only place the Fleet Marine Force Pacific was then was in ‘Nam, like that. So, what was even stranger, so I walk back down the passage way, and I walk into my office, ok, and there used to be a civilian secretary by the name of Nancy who worked there, and she was on the phone. And I didn’t pay any attention. So, I said, “Holy shit, Nancy, I’m going back to ‘Nam.” She was talking to my wife Cathy on the phone.

**Oh my god.**

That’s how Cathy—

**Found out?**

Found out. Now, this is New Year’s Eve afternoon about three-o’clock in the afternoon of sixty-nine going into seventy. Needless to say that was not our happiest New Year’s Eve, like that. So we ended up staying at Camp Pendleton until the end of January. At the end of January, we moved Cathy back to Killeen, Texas, which is where Fort Hood is, a big Army base because that’s where her mother and father lived. They had retired near Fort Hood in Killeen, and we got Cathy an apartment there. As a matter of fact, Cathy didn’t even drive when I went back to ‘Nam the second time. I would always do all the driving. So here I am leaving to go back to ‘Nam. She’s in Texas, doesn’t even have her driver’s license. Mary Jean, our daughter, was like seven-months old or something like that. So, when I hear sometimes people whining or complaining about tough things and separation, I’m thinking my wife doesn’t even have her driver’s license, I’m going back to ‘Nam. We’re separated for thirteen-months after only being married for thirteen-months. It’s like—

**You just had a baby, too.**

Yeah. But, you know, you learn to do what you need to do and stuff, and you appreciate what you have and what you get and everything like that. I learned, you know, I met a lot of honorable people, learned a lot of lessons, and had good teachers. We were actually married in the San Luis Rey Mission, which is one of the oldest missions in Southern California. There’s a whole chain of about nineteen, twenty, twenty-two missions from San Diego all the way up to San Luis Obispo, and we were married in the San Luis Rey Mission, which is really, really pretty church there, like that. When I went back to ‘Nam the second time, I had to fly from Texas to San Francisco, and I was waiting—the Navy had a place on Treasure Island in the middle of the San Francisco Bay. It’s almost like being in Alcatraz. It’s like you can see the city, but it’s like you don’t have the money to be doing too much there. But anyway, I was waiting to get a flight out of Travis Air Force Base back to Vietnam. Well, I ended up having to wait four or five days—and, as it turns out, I didn’t get back in-country, into ‘Nam, we stopped in Okinawa, then in country—well, I didn’t get back into country until the second or third of March. And this time I was in the air wing, and, like I said, we had all the jets, the Phantom Sky Hawks, Intruders, and stuff like that. well, at the end of September they said all those who had an RTD date—and RTD date means rotation tour date. From the day you get to Vietnam, everybody knows how many days they got left. If you got there three days ago, you know you got 266 days left. I mean, everyone has a short-timers calendar. From the day you get there, you know. And we used to always refer to it when we’re going back to the world. Nobody ever said the states. This was some other world, and we were going back to the world. You would never hear of somebody going back home. No, I’m going back to the world, that’s what we would say. That’s just the way we referred to it.

**Wow.**

But anyway, at the end of September, they said they we’re pulling my unit, Mag-13, out of ‘Nam and going back to the world. I’m thinking, oh, this is cool. But they said, you have to have been in-country prior to the first of March. I missed the cut-off date for going back to the world by one day, so they said, “Sergeant Masterson, you’re going to Iwakuni, Japan.” So, I ended up in Iwakuni, Japan, which was a joint Navy-Marine base, for like six-months before I could go home again. Which wouldn’t have been so bad, except, financially, it was just a disaster because when I was in-country you have combat pay. Which doesn’t sound like—it was like sixty dollars a month—well, when you’re only making two-hundred dollars a month, sixty five dollars is a lot of money.

Right.

Because, we had a one-bedroom, furnished apartment for a hundred dollars a month. That’s what we were paying. I mean, life was pretty simple and good back then. Had a Triumph Spitfire British Racing Green. We’d get on the Pacific Coast Highway on Friday with fifteen-bucks and wouldn’t come back until Sunday, you know. So, I was getting combat pay in Vietnam. Plus, when you’re in a combat zone you either don’t pay income taxes or don’t pay social security. One or the other. But anyway, I didn’t need any money in Vietnam expect if I could find an occasional beer and cigarettes were ten-cents a pack, you know. So I sent all my money going home to Cathy. Well, I got sent to Japan. My living expenses quadrupled and my income went down. It was horrendous, ok. I lose my combat pay, start paying taxes. It cost me four-times as much to live, and I tried to do it on less money, like I could not wait to, you know, to be done. So I finally left Iwakuni, Japan, got back to Camp Pendleton, had about ten-months left—then months left on my enlistment. Did that there, back on the general staff at Camp Pendleton, and got out at the end of 1971.

**That’s when your service concluded.**

Right. Because I reenlisted about—Cathy and I were married in September of sixty-eight, and I reenlisted about three-months after that. I had been in originally for three-years. I enlisted for three-years, and, you know, Cathy—we hadn’t really figured out what I was going to do when I got out. So, I figured, well. Cathy, she grew up as an Army brat, so she was used to being around the military and kind of the permanence of it, the security of it, knowing this is happens or whatever. So I said—[sneezes]—“Alright, I’ll reenlist for three-years.” So, that’s why I ended up going back to ‘Nam again because back at that time, in the Marine Corps anyway, you were almost guaranteed to go every two-years or something like that. You know, I don’t remember exactly when it started, but I think it started in sixty-three, sixty-four. And went to, what, seventy-four or something like that? So, if you were in the Marine Corps you were almost guaranteed to go every twenty-four to thirty six months you were going to be going back and stuff like that. But, like I said earlier, I always thought it was an honorable thing to do. I thought that then. I thought that now. Obviously I have a little different perspective as a father and a grandfather on war in general and stuff like that. We have a lot of issues we need to address here at home and stuff like that, but if there was something where it was legitimate or something like that I wouldn’t have a problem with my kids, but I don’t want to just see them, you know, going somewhere for some dumb political reason or something, you know. I think the country would benefit from having the draft again. I see a lot of young people today that somehow don’t think that this is the greatest country in the world. I happen to still think this is the greatest country in the world. I know kids are coming out of college with eighty-thousand dollars in debt, and we’ve had a bad five-years with the economy, and everything else like that. I’ve travelled all over the world. You know, lived in Japan. I’ve been to been to England, been to Austria, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, down in Mexico. America is a wonderful place. A wonderful place, and the opportunities here—and the very fact that some people don’t like that some people don’t like the military, don’t like the service and can burn a flag, then they should appreciate that they’re in an incredible country. Go do that in Somalia. Go do that Russia, and try some of these other bullshit acts and see where you land in those countries. That’s if you would be fortunate enough to make it jail and not just flat-out be killed or something like that. So, people need to always appreciate the liberties that we, you know, that we have. And we have them because people made decisions that they would die for what’s right. Next to my family, my country’s the most important thing.

**So your experience has obviously really kind of shaped your perspective on things along the lines of what we’re talking about with country and so on. Anything in training from training or your experience or anything that you learned that has helped you in your career or life in general?**

After I got out of the Marine Corps, I went to work for McDonald’s, and I worked for McDonald’s for about fourteen, fifteen-years, so I ran stores all around Chicago, and then I was at the corporate office. I was the publications manager. That’s kind of how I got introduced to the graphic arts. I left McDonald’s after about fourteen, fifteen-years and then was in the graphic arts in sales, mostly on the finishing side of the street for twenty-five years. In any branch of the service, things are successful when you maximize teamwork, and learning to subordinate self to the greater cause and the greater good and stuff like that, it’s like we’re all going to sink or swim together. I think the lessons that I learned in the Marine Corps in that regard and in Vietnam served me well throughout my business life and stuff like that. I’ve had a great kind of mentor and sponsor for many years, and he’s always taught me a few things. One is, he’d say, “Gerry, we’re here to serve and not to reign.” Ok, so it’s all about service and stuff. And the other thing he told me a long time ago, he would always say, “In order to get what you want out of life, help as many other people get what they want, and you’ll get what you want,” you know. And the other thing is, like I said earlier I think being right is highly overrated, ok. What good does it do to be right if everyone in the world think you’re an asshole and nobody wants to talk to you?

**Right.**

What’s the value in that? You gotta pick and choose your battles. You gotta do that in families, in businesses, and in countries. You can’t go to war, you can’t get into a pissing contest over everything. So, keep your ammo dry and save it for what’s really important. Let the piddley stuff go, and if you really, really, really think about it, there aren’t very many things worth going to war over, as a country, as a family, or as a husband-wife, or as a brother, mother, father, or anything like that. Most of it’s just stuff, ok. There’s a handful of things in life worth going to war over. You just gotta learn to pick and choose your places.

**Pick your battles, like they say.**

Yeah,

**Ok, I wanted to ask you then, was there anything else? Do you have any final thoughts or concluding thoughts? Anything you want to get off your chest at all?**

No, only that I’m glad the servicemen finally got their due after Vietnam. I think, you know, the service people, in general, got a bad rap after Vietnam, you know. Most of which wasn’t deserved. I mean, obviously, the war itself became unpopular the longer it went on. But again, at the time I went in at the very beginning of it—everybody always is a rocket scientist in hindsight, ok, but, you know, looking through the benefit of the rearview mirror. You know, it’s real easy to say that. But you know, I think most people that went into the service when I did and other people I know, you went in because it was an honorable thing to do. It was a normal rite of passage. I think a lot of young people today would benefit from a couple years in the service. Learn some discipline. Learn to subordinate the I for the we, for the team. Learn a level of self-sufficiency. Learn that your contribution makes a difference, ok, but you know, you’re one cog in the wheel and stuff like that, and things work best when all the cogs are going in the same direction and stuff like that. And I also think that all the branches of the service—whether it’s Marine Corps, Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard—all have their traditions, and traditions are important, you know. Families have traditions and services have traditions, and they’re of value. You want to feel your heart swell up? Go to West Point and watch the plebes march around, or go to the Naval academy—and I’ve been to both places, ok—and which the midshipmen march or something like that. Or, you know, watch the Marine Corps silent drill team, or—I don’t know, watch, be present at a military funeral and see a widow be presented with a flag. You can never pooh-pooh that stuff.

**Ok, well, Gerry, thanks very much for service and sharing your memories with us today.**

Thank you.