

Transcription: Thomas Morgan

Today is Thursday, April 17, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this afternoon I'll be interviewing Mr. Tom Morgan. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Morgan is at his residence. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us. The first question I always like to start off with in these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Thomas Morgan: Okay. My childhood was born and raised in Port Arthur. However, my mother is from here in Matagorda County where we're currently residents. She was actually born here in Bay City in 1918. But suffice all that to say, it was . . . My parents knew that . . . Taking nothing away from Port Arthur, but it's more of a blue-collared neighborhood and both of my parents were blue collar city. And both of my parents had to work. During the summertime I would spend a lot of time here in Matagorda working for an uncle who had several ranches throughout the county. He was foreman on them. Plus, we had some of our own acreages that belong to it. I'm actually fourth generation. Matagorda County. It goes way back. But anyway, went to Thomas Jefferson High School in Port Arthur and graduated there and left Port Arthur. This was in the summer of 1963 and _ out in Junction, Texas. And then went to A&M that fall. And like a lot of Aggies, I crammed a four-year course into five years. I actually was commissioned out of A&M. That's one of those things that people say sometimes that really sticks with you. General Westmoreland was the commissioning speaker and he said, "Look at the guy to your right and look at the guy to your left and the one in front of you and the one in back of you, and only one of you is going to come out of Vietnam alive."

He actually said that in his remarks at your commissioning?

Thomas Morgan: Right.

Wow.

Thomas Morgan: It's a little sobering. But that's the reality of the time. This was back in 1968 when this was going on. Again, that was very much a reality of what happened.

What was it you think made you want to go to the Corps of Cadets and then later be commissioned? Was it a family tradition?

Thomas Morgan: No, it wasn't a family thing. We lived . . . My dad was a Navy veteran out of World War II and purchased a house. He was from south Louisiana. I'm not trying to take a thing away from anybody by saying some of this stuff, but it's just a reality of the times. He left school after the completion of the third grade, and was working as a supervising foreman for a longshore crew that was loading ships out of Texaco terminal. And wasn't making a whole heck of a lot of money, thus my mother having to work all the time. Basically, I saw a way by which I was hoping that I could escape some of the poverty I grew up in. I have trouble explaining to my grandchildren now that we did not . . . Although living in Port Arthur and Bay City, we didn't have air conditioning until I was a senior in high school, and that was actually in the living room. For guests. You know, we actually had to get up and change TV channels and all the rest of it. And, of course, and today they go, "What?" So that's one of the multiple reasons that I chose

A&M. I was the first . . . I'm sorry, I was the second of a whole generation of cousins that have actually gone away to college. And I knew that for me to become more than just . . . That's when you could actually make a semi-middle class income working at the plant as just a quote, quote, laborer or sub-foreman type of thing. And I didn't want that. I wanted something different and I knew that I had read enough, and knew that the only way to be able to do that was by going into the . . . You know, getting some education. And we couldn't afford it any other way so that's why I went into the military in ROTC through A&M. It was kind of impressed. I went up there with . . . I didn't know it was freshman orientation but I was going to go up to either A&M or Texas which it wasn't as complicated to get into. My grades were not that bad in high school. Matter of fact they were pretty darn good. But I got on the road and hitchhiked. It was a Friday afternoon. I talked to my teachers at school when . . . But that was a good idea. So I went off and started hitchhiking and ended up . . . If you know where 290 goes on to Austin at Hempstead or goes Highway 6 up to A&M.

Yeah, I do.

Thomas Morgan: I was there at that split hitchhiking and someone came through taking their seniors and they were actually from Beaumont, and those two guys had gone to South Park. So anyway, they picked me up and I ended up finding myself at A&M on an orientation week. And I just thought it was really cool. And you could go and you could . . . Well, tuition, that's when the state still subsidized higher education. And our tuition was about 125 dollars a semester.

Yeah, you can't beat that.

Thomas Morgan: Not per semester hour. I mean it was . . . A&M always has been and was at the time a very . . . You know, it's a poor boys' college. And when I went in '63 girls had just . . . They were just beginning to open the doors a little bit and allow some girls in. I think we had 30 on campus by my sophomore year. But A&M now graduates more per year or per semester than it used to have in the entire university.

Sure. When you were at A&M, what was it that . . . Now I know you went into the ROTC program, but did you have a . . . You had a choice then of what branch. Was there something that attracted you to the Army? You could either go in the Army . . .

Thomas Morgan: Yeah, we could either go in the Air Force or the Army. I went into the Army because it was . . . I don't know, it was kind of just right there and it turned out to where . . . This is when they still had . . . They've got it back up again. They had 3rd Brigade, okay, in the Army. And as I went and began to look . . . My initial major at A&M was pre-med. And I was all gung-ho until I ran into organic chemistry. That kind of, you know, changed my mind. We had a professor that I swear was 110 years old, but we were on the third floor lecture room for organic, for the lecture portions, and of course, the labs were monsters too, but he made the statement at the beginning of the semester that we would have a mid-term exam if when he came crawling in the window. Little did we know about six, seven weeks later, he had maintenance go put up a ladder and he came in the window and he went over to his desk and pulled out a pop mid-term. And people, people crashed and burned. You know, it was just . . . It was brutal, you know. I did pretty good out of 48, you know. And he wasn't going to curve it, you know, and etcetera, but . . .

Let's talk, sir, a little bit about the Army. So you get commissioned. Where do they send you at that point? Do you go to . . .

Thomas Morgan: Okay. I got commissioned and had asked for armored and got approved. So I ended up . . . They sent me about two weeks later, September . . . I did some research and it was actually September the 7th of 1968. They sent me to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and I drove up there and, you know, got on post, and this is where we had what was called Armor Officer Basic. And I had actually been to basic basic, a modified basic, because while I was at A&M, the reserve unit in College Station and Bryan would actually assist you with . . . For drills and stuff like this. But you had to take one summer and go to Fort Polk and take a modified basic AIT. Kind of rolled into one. So that was also a lot of fun. That by itself was a real challenge, but . . . So anyway, I went to Armor Officer Basic course and those were where they begin to teach you tactics. They taught us, you know, what does it mean to be an armor officer? What does it mean to be an officer in the United States Army? And this type of thing. Our final was we had to go to . . . I think there was 17 different stations over a ten-mile course. And you had to run in between. And you would go on and it was gunnery from an actual tank, and shooting a caliber 50, stripping down a caliber 50, putting a caliber 50 back together, and doing all those things that you had been taught. Map reading etcetera, and like I said, it was quite interesting. You really learned quite a bit. I left there and was assigned to Fort Hood. But that's while it was . . . I initially was to go to Korea, and I had met a young lady before I went to Knox from __, Texas, and so I had . . . She was going back to The University of Texas and I figured that going to Korea would not assist in that relationship, so I decided . . . And so I went __ because you could pick where you wanted to go, and Fort Hood and Austin weren't but about 90 miles apart. So I did, and she did, and we eventually got married in 1969 and have been married ever since.

That's great. So when you got to Fort Hood, you had to have known then, pretty good likelihood that you would get sent to Vietnam at some point soon, right?

Thomas Morgan: Oh sure. Yeah, we knew . . . All of us knew. What they tried to do with the lieutenants, because they were losing so many of them . . . That sounds brutal but it's the truth of the matter. Is they would send you to a basic course. There for a while, I think until probably about the '66 Tet, they would send a lot of folks straight out of their officer basic, and the attrition rate was, I think __.

Yeah, it was really bad.

Thomas Morgan: They sent me to Fort . . . To 1st Armored Division in . . . I had been a history major and a studier of cavalry. That's where I wanted to go and sure enough I was lucky enough to get into the 3rd Squadron 4th Cav, 1st Armored Division at Fort Hood, and became a platoon leader, and had some great, great guys. Some absolutely tremendous platoon sergeants who taught me a lot. You know, if we have time for one story, I . . . We were to . . . the Armored Cav unit, all of the vehicles in it with all the drain plugs and everything else waded us in the water that __ floats, okay? And they're known for that. And we were to prove that as a demonstration for, I don't know, the Secretary of the Army or somebody. Anyway, somebody was coming down and we were going to do that. And my commander at the time was a first lieutenant by the name of __ Smith, and he looked at me as a second lieutenant and said, "Okay, now Third Platoon, are you ready to do this?" And I looked over at the platoon sergeant and said, "Sure." He nodded his head and I said, "Yes sir, we're ready." So we finished the meeting and what we

were going to do, planning what we were going to do the next day. And so I went immediately to the motor pool and, you know, just got underneath the vehicles and I began to . . . Just to make sure that we weren't missing anything. And about the third vehicle I climbed underneath, who was I bumping my head with but the platoon sergeant. So funny. He looked at me after he crawled out, he says, "You mean you don't trust me?" I said, "Platoon sergeant, you didn't trust yourself." So anyway, it was one of . . . We had a . . . He taught me more . . . You know, my first FTX, so I decided I was going to play Patton. So I had a Swisher Sweet cigar and I had my map out and we were going and the wind caught my map and the next thing I know is my platoon sergeant, over the platoon net says, the call sign, he says, "We got it. All call check." So which is the checkpoints. So anyway, that was a very, very fantastic individual who really, really, in the garrison . . . You've got to admit the . . . The sergeants actually run the garrison situation. But anyway, he was great. And so tremendous and, you know, we've _ so he passed away I guess it's been 10 years ago. So anyway, real outgoing nice guy. Those are the things that as young lieutenants and stuff you need because you can really . . . I guess nothing prepares you for the reality of what you're doing. We've all had this situation about school and training are absolutely necessary and a must but they do not teach you the real world unless you've got somebody to kind of guide you through the ups and the downs. And there can definitely be some, both that are just absolutely horrendous at times. But anyway, it was great. We had a tremendous time until I left in . . . Left there in 1969, actually. Judy and I decided to get married. That's my wife, obviously. And then we decided to get married and made that decision. I asked and she accepted. Matter of fact we were on the lawn of the capitol. That's when you could do a lot. Again, the world was a whole lot more relaxed than it is now. But, we were actually having a picnic on one of these beautiful summer days in April that Texas has at times. So we were out on the lawn and stuff like this. And I proposed and she accepted and so I immediately made a request for leave. Matter of fact, we still have the note from the lieutenant colonel that said . . . Written, not to me, but to my troop commander saying, of course, he would like to see me get leave to get married, but I must understand, as a young lieutenant, that sometimes the needs of the service override it.

So they denied your leave to get married?

Thomas Morgan: No, he didn't deny it. He said he would approve it if our schedules so permitted. But I needed to understand that the needs of the service would override it. He did it very tongue in cheek, but I didn't know that at the time. It was like, "What?" But anyway, subsequently, have laughed about it several times. But anyway, it's been . . . Like I said, it's crazy, and . . .

When you went to Vietnam, how much advance notice did you have that you'd be going there?

Thomas Morgan: Oh, I had a couple of schools, one of which was jungle operations down in Panama, in the Canal Zone. And also jump school at Fort Benning.

Okay.

Thomas Morgan: So I had a little bit of, you know, pre-notice. I went, actually, to Vietnam in early December of 1969, and stayed until December of 1970.

When you went over there, were you assigned as a tanker?

Thomas Morgan: I was . . . You actually were assigned to a replacements depot type of thing. Again, like I said, if I had gone back through the orders and stuff this morning. I was looking at some of them. Of course, this is whenever was done with carbon paper, and all that kind of stuff. It was almost . . . In a sense you got the feeling like you were really just kind of cattle. I mean, you know, not only us commissions but I mean, the second lieutenant, you know. But anyway, we . . . Of course, at the time I was first because that's when you spent one year from a second to the first, and there was another year from first to captain. And then I spent right at nine years, I guess eight years, as a captain. Because that's when promotions slowed in Vietnam so much. Anyhow, we went there and I had been lobbying with my connections, my connections, some other lieutenants I knew, trying to get assigned to 25th Infantry Division out of Cu Chi. They were assigned to the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, which is another cav unit. Because I decided I didn't want to go pure tank and I decided that my boots weren't made for walking. I'm going to war but I'd like to drive there. So at least I arrived and I'm somewhat rested. So, hear me, I'm just saying this facetiously.

Sure.

Thomas Morgan: I don't know how much a sense of humor you want to have with this thing.

No, this is your interview, sir.

Thomas Morgan: And, so anyway, we had . . . I got assigned initially to Charlie troop of the 3rd Squadron, 4th Armored Cav which was organic to the 25th Infantry Division out of Cu Chi, and they flew in choppers. The officers, there was like six of us between lieutenants and lieutenant colonels and a couple of majors. Anyway, I remember it was looking out the window and as we were going into Cu Chi to land, it was amazing because I thought for sure that the base had been hit. You see all this black smoke coming up everywhere, and everything else. At the time where we were then, all the latrines were outside. And obviously, they would cut . . . They couldn't absorb all of that into the ground.

So they were burning the latrines?

Thomas Morgan: Yeah, right. They were burning. They would pull the 55-gallon drums out and they would burn what was in it.

That's a nasty job.

Thomas Morgan: It was. And we used it almost as a punishment.

Sure.

Thomas Morgan: Some of the younger guys would get in all kind of trouble. You would try everything in the world not to have an Article 15 or something that was part of that record because they can never get away with it. You didn't want to hurt 'em 'cause they got to fight with you. We had a number of different unique duties, shall I say, to the division we were assigned to.

Yeah, that's one of the worst.

Thomas Morgan: Right, that was one of the worst. So anyway, I got in country and found myself, about, less than 48 hours later out in the field, doing orientation with the lieutenant I was relieving. He was actually coming back to the States. And one of the stories, I used to be an avid deer hunter before I went to Vietnam, and we were there and we were out in the field and all of a sudden there was these little puffs of smoke in the dirt all around us and stuff, and I reached over to him and I said, “Bob, what are those?” He says, “Get down, that’s incoming.” And there was the VC shooting at us, and I kind of felt, “Gee whiz, this must be like the deer feels.” So actually I have not deer hunted since then.

Yeah, interesting, yeah.

Thomas Morgan: And you just saw that, and I went, “I don’t really like, you know, that,” but anyhow, Vietnam was one of those situations that it got active really, really fast. I was there with the platoon and I was taking over from for two days. He went back to go back to the States, and I picked up from there and started, you know, running the platoon. Then the lieutenant colonel that ran the squadron came and told each one of the COs that he wanted one lieutenant. A armored cav unit assigned to a division is a pretty unique __. It was an infantry squad, and infantry squads that were organic to the platoons weren’t ever at full strength so what he decided to do was each troop was gonna take their infantry squads, consolidate ’em in one unit and we’re gonna use those to ambush. I hadn’t done any ambushing since, you know, I was taught about it when I was in the, back in school in the officer basic course. But anyway, it . . . My captain came to me and says, “Hey, Tom. I got a deal for ya.” And so, that’s what I did for the next 90 days really was do this running the ambush. I would go out and we would ambush and sometimes we’d come back in early, sometimes it was an all-nighter, and you find yourself coming back and I still had a platoon to run on reconnaissance in force which is a lot of it we did trying to find the VC or at least keep ’em on the move. And so we had . . . That’s where one of my Purple Hearts as well as one of my Bronze Stars with these come from, was out of that ambush experience plus the fact that I’ve got the Combat Infantryman Badge because the requirements for that at the time was 90 days in a combat situation as infantry or in contact. I think it was two weeks out of the 90 days or something. Anyhow, I forgot all of it but we qualified and we had a tremendous squadron commander who kind of went to the mat for us and there were four of us that were the only 12 Alphas that weren’t assigned an infantry unit that came out of Vietnam with a CI badge. Anyway, but we had absolutely loads of success. We had some harrowing moments, one of which was in February of 1970. We decided when we saw the bad guys and we did what we were supposed to do and shot at ’em. And it turned out to where it was elite element of the regiment, the 268 of NVA, and we were a little outnumbered, okay? And they had turned Claymore, whole bunch of stuff, and we just . . . It was one of those panicky things. It started about 3 a.m., went off and on the next day and into the next night, and finally on the second morning, the division . . . There was an outfit that we, a battalion of light infantry that used helicopters and the air assault type group, and they came in and that’s how we got extracted because when every time the squadron that one day . . . Every time the squadron would try to mobilize a troop to come to us, to get us out of it, it would seem that the North Vietnamese would already be ready and they would hit whatever unit was coming before it got totally unwrapped from the different locations they were at. So we couldn’t hear anything and everybody else’s area of operations was far enough away from ours that it would take ’em a while. But anyway, they got us out and that’s another one of those stories I carried in my pocket. I carried a small cross, and, like I said, one thing Vietnam did was it definitely improved my

prayer life but it was a small one, and in this ambush, my assistant gunner was from South Carolina, and one thing, all of a sudden out of the middle of all this, he elbowed me, and he said, "LT." And I said, "What?" He said, "Do you have that cross thing?" And I said, "Sure I do." And so I gave it to him, and then we went on and things got busy and then they kind of died down, and so we're there and I look over and he's rubbing this thing. He said, "How in the hell do you get this thing to work?" I said, "Well, it's not a magical lamp." I says, you know, I said, "Do you know any prayers?" And the only prayer he knew was Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep. I said, "That'll do." And so we prayed and he wanted to give me the cross back. I said, "No, you keep it," and he actually still has it. We've got a group of us that from that Charlie troop of 3rd Squadron, 1st Cav, 3rd Cav . . . We have a group of us that we've had probably every four, maybe five years, we'll have a reunion somewhere. And the last time I saw him which was in Washington two years ago, he actually still has it and he showed me, he says, "Look, LT, I still got it."

That's great. When you were over there and you were going through these experiences, did you share any of them with your wife in letters home or any of that sort of thing, or did you keep all that until years later?

Thomas Morgan: It was actually years later that . . . You know, my gosh, how do you explain? You've gotta have been there and done that yourself, is how you . . . To understand the situation, the preamble you'd have to go through to get somebody close enough to reality that you've just gone through that . . . I mean, my gosh, it would take forever. How do you explain, okay, what you do in combat? And you tell people that out of every hour there may be 58 minutes of just sheer boredom and two minutes of absolute ungodly panic, okay? Because somebody's trying to kill ya. Or either it could be just the opposite. It could be 58 minutes of sheer panic and, you know, two minutes of boredom. But, you know, war's a funny thing, and it's virtually impossible to explain it to someone who hasn't been, and you . . . I don't know, it's just, in a letter . . . I was spending enough time 'cause she was going back to school, and I for sure didn't want to get the Dear John letter, and so I said . . . We hadn't been married, you know, a little over six months when I left. But she was . . . I like to tell her now, she was wise enough but I guess I was too. Buy anyway, we hung on and she still has the letters, and I've read back through 'em and I've got the ones she wrote me. I brought those back, and we've shared those thoughts some, and some of 'em definitely kept 'em away from our kids and our grandkids 'cause that's not something you want to hear, some of the thoughts we were writing back and forth to each other. You know, we were . . . Later it did. Her brother, who is now retired, was a vice president of IBM, and after Vietnam, we were assigned to Germany in an armored cav troop, and after we were there about a year, he went over and he was assigned in London which is where his office was. When we actually started talking, he said, "What happened to you?" And I said, "What do you mean, what happened to me?" He said, "You went over with flag glory and, you know, kind of kill the commie and this type of thing, and you don't seem to be quite as gung-ho as you were when you went." And I said, "Well, war changes ya a whole lot. Some of it good, some of it bad." You know, that's one of the challenges I'm still going through because, you know, it has really, since I've retired, the VA here in Houston has really been tremendous about their PTSD program, and some of the things they do.

That's good.

Thomas Morgan: But back to the field. We were in the field in probably March or maybe April. A really good friend of mine . . . One of the reasons that a lot of divisions really enjoyed their armored cav is that organic to a squadron that's assigned to a division level to a division comes an air cav troop which is, at the time, was Loaches and Cobras and all the rest of it. And so we had a long-range patrol insertion that they were doing, and my good buddy, he was a helicopter pilot. He saw me, and said, "Hey, my door gunner is sick. You wanna come and sit in tonight?" He said, "We shouldn't be that long. We're just gonna go do an insertion. We're gonna come back." And I thought, "Sure, hey, you know." It's always fun. I used to really enjoy the helicopter bunch and that. So anyway, we flew out and we inserted this long-range patrol. It turned out where we were in the absolute center, okay, of a very large group of VC. And it was the headquarters of some sort. But anyway, we had to abort the mission and stuff, so we went to a safer area, shall I say, that was dark which is where the long-range patrols were supposed to meet and to be safe. We started taking fire as we were leaving and the pilot was killed, and my friend was wounded, and he says, "You need to come and try to fly this helicopter back to Cu Chi." And thank God for some folk in a control tower that I understood but anyway, we were . . . There we were and thus, the Air Medal I have, okay? I've got, you know, enough. They talked me down, finally got me to a point where I could, you know, didn't kill anybody other than the poor pilot that had been shot but, you know, it was . . . My friend was wounded but eventually, you know, recovered and went back to flying and stuff. He said, "I'll never forget that night as long as I live." I says, "Oh, you ain't the only one."

Yeah. What was it like, sir, when you came back after having been gone for a year? When you got back, I assume, Fort Hood, is that right? Where you came back to?

Thomas Morgan: I came back and was actually assigned to Germany.

Okay.

Thomas Morgan: Every . . . Some folk I knew from A&M that I was in correspondence with as well as some other people, you know, the West Pointers say, you know, they knock their rooms and they get straight into the Pentagon and get what they want. But that's one thing about an Aggie, when you, you know, you can knock it but if it's a busy signal . . . But we got back. Everyone had said, "On your way back, do not get assigned to a stateside unit. Do everything you can. Korea, wherever. It doesn't make any difference." And, of course, this is when the East German-West German border was still there, and so I hustled around and . . . I ended up as a platoon leader, executive officer, and then I commanded for about four months, Alpha Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, and one of my lieutenants had been assigned to a border regiment, cavalry regiment which was the screening force for . . . And he said, "Whatever you do, try to get here because it's a small concern and we're right on the border. We got a mission and you can see the bad guys, and it's really, really, pretty good." So, I said, "Okay, fine, great, super." And I began to write letters. Here it's like anything else, and you've been there. It's . . . You know, the squeaking wheel gets the grease, and I decided that . . . You know, the Army was not gonna happen to me which is what you can make life happen or you can have life happen to ya. And I decided to do some of the same stuff in the Army, so I was trying to be as good as I could so I wasn't shunned or . . . You know, somebody said, "My God, we don't want that guy." And I kept pushing real hard and, sure enough, I got a letter back that said, "Okay, you've been assigned to the 3rd Squadron," again. The 3rd Squadron, at the time it was the 14th ACR. They eventually changed it later on to the 11th Blackhorse. But anyway, we were right on, absolutely on the

border and we had permanently staffed observation post, and every day, our mission, we ran our patrol up and down the border. So you had no problems there with the bad guys, but if you had . . . If I'm getting too lengthy in this whole thing, you tell me.

No, we're good, sir, although we have about 15 minutes or so before my time is up with the equipment and the conference room but, no, we're good. I want to make sure to capture kind of the biggest things that you want to share with us that you would want future generations to hear.

Thomas Morgan: One of the things that happened in, you know . . . There was a large contingent back here in the United States that was very, very vocal and very antiwar. And so when we were back, got back to the States, and we could have a choice . . . And they didn't give enlisted the choice but they gave the officers the choice of, if you could get yourself to the San Francisco airport, you could either go or not, or you could wait to get _ which would be about another 15 days. Well, there was a group of us, about four of us, and we decided that the last thing we wanted to do was wait to go see our wives and our sweethearts. So we all decided that we came up with enough money that we could get ourselves a cab and go to the airport there in San Francisco, and each, everybody was going different places, and I was . . . This is when they had a redeye special, inexpensive flight from San Francisco straight to Houston, and it was on Braniff when they were still operational. So anyway, they let me out at Braniff, and I had my duffle bag. We were still in uniform, and I started walking in the door and then several younger folk came out the door about the same time, and one of them looked at me and says, "Well, how many babies did you kill today?" And, of course, as I am, I get caustic at times and stuff, and I said, "Well, after 10 or 15, you kinda lose count." But he took it as an offense, responding to him the way I did, and so we got into a little bit of a tete-a-tete, and kept asking the lady or one of the girls that . . . She wasn't a girl, she was a young woman. But anyway, I kept asking her to please calm him down. "I'm just trying to go home to my wife," and he kept getting worse and worse with his language and everything else. It just so happened where a glass door and he had a collision. I'm not sure how it all happened but . . . So anyway, all of a sudden, they're screaming and running off to get the police, and, you know, you could hear the whistles, and it caused quite a row there in the airport. Of course, this was obviously before 9/11 so it wasn't quite as what it is today. But anyway, the station manager for Braniff saw what went on. He jumped the counter, came over to me and said, "Lieutenant, you better come with me, okay?" And he grabbed me and we went back in the back where they had a VIP area, and, you know, he asked me where I was going, what flight I was on and stuff like this. He said, "Okay," he says, "Get out of the uniform. Here's a bathrobe, put it on, clean up. Here's the shower and everything else. I'll have your uniform cleaned. It will all be back to ya before your flight and we'll make sure you don't miss it. And, by the way, we just upgraded you to first class." So that's how I got to Houston.

That's great.

Thomas Morgan: Yeah, it was. We ended up, Judy met me. I had called her and it was one of those years, this would have been . . . One of those years that there was . . . I forget who Texas was playing but anyway there was some sort of big huge send-off for the team as they were going to a bowl or something. I forget what it was. But anyway, they were gonna . . . Had this big pep rally over at the football stadium, and Judy had a test the next day so she decided not to go for some reason, and she said it was really funny 'cause she was surprised that I called. She knew I was coming home but she didn't precisely know the date, and so I called her, told her I was coming home, and I was going to arrive at approximately X-hour or so in Houston. She said,

it was really funny, because when she hung up the phone, there was nobody to call or nobody to tell 'cause everybody at the dorm had gone over, or at the apartment, had gone over to the pep rally. So she had to bite her tongue for a couple hours while everybody got back. We had . . . Other than that one instance at the airport, getting back to the States was a real challenge because, first of all, Vietnam is in south of the equator and, of course, as a result, all the water and everything else does different, and you're actually flushing toilets and you can actually take a shower. That was a unique thing because in the field all we had was a five-gallon container of water. But 30 days later I found myself in Germany along the East German-West German border, and it was a really spooky experience because I got involved with nuclear weapons and nuclear surety and some of the other stuff in Germany, and I could not get approvals to go to Berlin at all. And neither could Judy. So that meant . . . We went right after I retired in the summer of 2012. We took a cruise to St. Petersburg and Oceania and we came back through. One of the places we stopped at was Warnemunde which is in Germany, and we caught a bus in one of their tours that they had, and we ended up on this bus and it was about a three-hour trip from Warnemunde to Berlin, and we got a chance to go to Berlin. The first time I've ever been there. Very unique city. But we actually drove through, to us, was East Germany. And the young tour guide and the lady that he was working with were also young. They were probably in their early 20s. They wanted to talk to us more because the wall had been down, and they had not experienced life behind it, so we were on the other side and it was somewhat surreal in a way.

Sure.

Thomas Morgan: Because we were, you know, running around in East Berlin and they were asking us the questions 'cause they had never experienced it. They had read about it in school and stuff. They didn't have any idea of, you know, what it was like and all the rest of it so . . . Anyhow, my overall experience not only in Vietnam but through the U.S. Army was, at times, totally harrowing and you could get so mad at all of it that you wanted to spit. But, overall when I look back at it, the picture now has gone by some, you know, you don't remember necessarily all the bad stuff but, some of it I do but I was lucky enough not to. I really had some commanders that were absolutely incredible to work with. I worked with a regimental commander on regimental staffs my last six months in Germany, and this guy had four Silver Stars and eight Purple Hearts. And the guy was incredible. I mean, he had a Ph.D. in international relations, and was just an incredible person to talk to. You know, we spent a lot of time going on patrols and stuff like this, and I was lucky enough. Of course, I was assigned, through Germany I was assigned to Fort Benning, of all places. Been an Army officer, ended up at the infantry school, but I taught there and I worked with General Depew who was the TRADOC which is the training and doctor in command at the time, four star. And I worked with him and we wrote tactics because of my experience in infantry as well as armored cav and, you know. As a matter of fact, when I saw the first Gulf War and was watching some of the movement and stuff like this that was on TV, I actually recognized it because it was something that he and I put together, and, sure enough, you're looking at it how many years later and it's still active and still somewhat doing it the same way. I'm going, "Wow. This is really pretty cool."

Sure. Well, sir, I've got to cut you off here because our time is pretty much up with the conference room, but I want to thank you for sharing all these memories with our program. It's really an honor for us, and on behalf of Commissioner Jerry Patterson and everyone here at the

Land Office, we want to thank you especially for your service to our nation. In a couple weeks or so, we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs that you can give to friends or family or whomever as well as a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson that comes in a commemorative binder. So, it's just kind of one small way for the State of Texas to say thank you for your service.

Thomas Morgan: Well, thank you for your patience in doing this. I really, really, really do appreciate because it's not easy for you, I'm sure, to sit there and listen to us older guys just ramble.

No, this is what I do, and I enjoy it. I've done a lot of veterans' interviews, and every interview is unique. And our goal is just to get these and to save them for posterity, you know. Try to hold on to them for future generations. So this is one more that we can say we've collected. Again, sir, it's been an honor, and I really appreciate it. I'll be in touch with you again soon, especially to let you know we're going to send all the stuff to you and make sure I've got the right address and that sort of thing.

Thomas Morgan: Sure, no problem.

Yes sir. So have a good weekend and a good evening.

Thomas Morgan: You have a great Easter and blessings here yourself.

Yes sir.

Thomas Morgan: I thoroughly appreciate your patience.

Oh, not a problem. The honor is all mine, sir. We'll talk to you soon.

Thomas Morgan: Okay. Thank you. Bye.

Bye bye.