Steve Fowle
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mia Sisitsky ‘28

SISITSKY This is Mia Sisitsky. Today is February 14, 2025 and I'm conducting this oral history interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. I'm recording this interview by Zoom video call with Mr. Steve Fowle. I'm on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, in the Feldberg Library, and Mr. Fowle is joining me from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at his office. Mr. Fowle, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

FOWLE You're welcome. Call me Steve.

SISITSKY Okay, so Steve, when and where were you born?

FOWLE I was born in Boston [MA] in 1947.

SISITSKY Okay, and I understand you're a longtime New Hampshire resident. Where did you grow up? What was that like?

FOWLE Oh, well, I grew up in Newton, Massachusetts until, well, until I went into the Army.

SISITSKY And, tell me about what growing up was like. What do you remember?

FOWLE Well, uh, we've got a fair amount of time here. If it's okay with you, I'd like to go, you know, cover some pre history, so to speak. Is that okay?

SISITSKY Yes, of course. Where would you like to start?

FOWLE Oh, we're gonna -- this is going to sound peculiar, but bear with me. We're going to start during the administration of President Franklin Pierce.

SISITSKY Okay.

FOWLE So Georgie Ann Fowle is born in Pembroke New Hampshire in 1854 and Franklin Pierce has been president for just under a year, and Georgie Ann's mother dies just a few days before her third birthday. She had just

given birth and apparently lingered for a couple of weeks and then died, which not uncommon in those days, of course. By 1858 Georgie Ann's father is remarried, and his new wife apparently doesn't take to Georgie Ann. Again, this is not -- this is not an uncommon story. At some point, Georgie Ann gets sent down to Boston, where she lives with a sister who's 10 years older than her.

So, you got Georgie Ann down in Boston. Years go by. It's 1911 and my father, Robert Barry Fowle, is born in Boston in November of 1911. And the most notable thing about his birth is that his parents aren't married. Now, Robert's mother, my natural grandmother, is a woman named Mary Alice Barry. They called her May, May Barry, and she's from an interesting family. Her father is an Irish immigrant who if you search the archives of The Boston Globe, he appears quite a few times for assault and battery and keeping a noisy and disorderly house, which may have been a euphemism for brothel. His most notable offense was jamming a broken beer mug into somebody, into a guy's face and his crotch, nearly killing him by severing his carotid artery. So, he's not well behaved, our Edward Barry. We're not sure that he ever spent time in jail. I couldn't find anything saying that he did, but it seems more likely than not that he did. So that's May Barry's father and his -- her parents seem to be a pair. Her mother's name was Mary, but they called her Minnie, and she was also in the court news in The Boston Globe for being dissolute. Being a dissolute and lewd woman was the word, was the phrasing. And she also attacked a woman with a bottle, some joint or other, and was arrested at one point for running a house of ill fame. So these guys are, you know, they're not models of the best behavior, but, but they certainly seem to have an affinity, you know there. So these are my father's natural parents. These are my father's natural grandparents, rather. His mother May Barry has -- when you look at the world from her, from the perspective of her lifespan, man, it's a -- it's a, it's a tough world. I mean, obviously her parents are a couple of ne'er-do-wells. Her father dies when she's in the womb.

SISITSKY Oh wow.

FOWLE Her father dies, you know, months before she you know, just a few months before she's born. When she's 11, her mother dies, and so she's now an orphan with three older brothers.

SISITSKY And this is your mother?

FOWLE This is Robert's mother, my grandmother.

SISITSKY Grandmother, I see.

FOWLE Yeah. So, you know, there she is. She's living in Boston shortly after the turn of the 20th century. And you know, times are hard, and her brothers start dropping one after another. And so she's 27 years old when she gives birth to my father, and she's only got -- she's down to two brothers at that point, and she loses the other two in quick succession. So she's unmarried, 27 years old, Boston, 1911. Yeah, this is not a good position to be in. And her -- the guy who gets her pregnant is the son of a bunch of potato farmers from way up in northern Maine.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm.

FOWLE And he's -- he only briefly appears in the picture. So, May did probably what was, you know, the only thing that she could do is, well, she looked for somebody to take this child off her hands. Because what the hell was she going to do? So, the doctor that delivered the baby appears to have had some sort of ongoing relationship with Georgie Ann Fowle, and so Robert gets handed off to Georgie Ann Fowle, who, at this point is -- how old is Georgie Ann at this point? She's like, I think she's 57. Yeah, she's 57 years old and caring for an infant. But it's not the first time she's done something like this. She's already taken care of Harold Fowle, who's 10 years old, so you got Georgie Ann, who's old and apparently not very -- my father described her as being an old, sick woman. She's caring for an infant, Robert, and a 10 year old, Harold, and they're -- they're, they're not related [pause].They're not related they're not related by blood. But they are [long pause]. I'll be able to do this, I'm sure. They're brothers.

SISITSKY Uh hmm. Take your time.

FOWLE [Long pause] In the truest sense of the word. So, there they are, early 19th, early 20th century, in Boston and [pause] just trying to get by.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE And May and Carlton, Robert's father, Carlton Linwood Osborne, a very kind of a la di da name for a guy who's basically a dirt bag. They're

supposed to be sending money to May Barry defray the cost of raising this little bastard, you know. So, I have a little bit of correspondence from, from, from each of them, and mostly it consists of apologies to May Barry, saying, I'm sorry I can't send, you know, the money as promised. You know, I'm doing the best I can. By this time, we're into the teens, in the early 20s. You know, and you know, times are good for some folks and not so good for others. None of these people have a pot to piss in. During, during these years, Georgie Ann and Robert and Harold live in -- I've got a list that he once made of the places where he had -- where they had lived. And there's something like 15 different addresses in the course of 20 some odd years. So they were constantly, I think, that they were constantly moving to stay ahead of the rent collector.

SISITSKY Was this all over the east, or was it across, you know, different areas within the United States?

FOWLE Oh, this is all in the, this is in the less-prosperous suburbs of Boston, you know, kind of north of Boston. There's a lot of small towns north of Boston that are part of the greater urbanization. But there's technically, you know, I mean, we're talking Chelmsford -- I think not Chelmsford -- Medford, Somerville and Roxbury, mostly. So, you know, kind of, you know, you know, places where people without a lot of money live and tried to figure out how to get by. And so, so we've got a rough sense of who his natural parents were, and Georgie Ann herself is kind of a piece of work -- as my father almost never talked about any of this. You know, it was, it just wasn't a general topic of conversation. Never a word about his natural mother's family, her parents.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE Never a word about them. Nothing at all about -- about his natural father, Carlton the potato scion, and very little about Georgie Ann. But he did when he was -- on his 82nd birthday, we talked a little bit about Georgie Ann, and he told me then that Georgie Ann had a very low opinion of the Barrys. She called him nothing but "South Coveites". Which, South Cove was a part of Boston, where, populated by, in her view, a bunch of shanty Irish bastards.

SISITSKY So a very negative term?

FOWLE A highly negative perspective. But it was, he said, it wasn't that she was particularly prejudiced against the shanty Irish. She didn't think much of anybody. He said, he said she was, she was a Yankee, right from the ground up. Meaning that, you know, her people had, had been in this country, you know, they came over in the great migration in the 1630s and you know, in her case, you know, it hadn't, you know -- she, she was at the other end of the spectrum from the Boston Brahmins. But, but apparently she felt, you know that -- Well, I guess a little bit like poor southern whites sometimes feel that at least they're not black, you know, so therefore they're somebody, even if they don't, you know, even if, amongst their peers, they're nobody in particular, at least on the wider scale, they're somebody because they're, they have more status than somebody else in the vicinity that they can point to. You know, I have infinite curiosity about all these people, as you can probably tell, because I didn't come by any of this information to speak of directly from my father. It's mostly -- it's certain old newspapers and just various, you know, low rent methods of investigation just to satisfy this raging curiosity about where I came from.

SISITSKY Yeah, absolutely. It sounds like you came across most of this information later on in life. [Cross talk]

FOWLE Yes -- I didn't even, didn't even start getting curious about it, really, until, oh, I don't know. I didn't -- well. I didn't really have the leisure to dig into it until the 90s. So you know, and at that point, you know, I could take the time here and there to dig into some of this stuff. And, you know, I found it very rewarding. So, anyway, there's -- we gotta take, we gotta go a little further with my father, and then we can get down to, you know, we can start moving on a little bit here. So he, he ended up dropping out of high school to work to help support, you know, himself and his and his mother, because he definitely thought of Georgie Ann as his, as his mother. He had, you know, I'm a little vague on exactly how he felt about his natural parents, because, as I say, he never talked about him, but I think he hated them both. I've got, you know, no reason really, to think any different. I think he wanted them, you know -- I think he hated them, but I think at the same time he wanted them to accept him, but I don't think that they ever did in a way that, you know, I don't think that they ever reconciled in any way. And I have no idea whether they were ever in touch with each other or not. They both lived until the early 60s and, you know, my brothers and I, we knew nothing about them, nothing at all. So anyway, he drops out of

high school and works for a guy, for a junk man who's got a horse drawn wagon. He helps an egg man who goes around Boston selling eggs, he had a horse drawn wagon. The egg man would tell him, here are the older eggs. You know, woman on the on the top floor wants eggs -- take her the old ones, because she's not going to send them back. The woman on the first floor would send back the old eggs and say, Bring me fresher eggs, you know. But the woman on the [pause] the woman on the top floor wouldn't have the heart to sell this, to tell this kid, you know, climb the stairs again. So anyway,

SISITSKY When did your father tell you these stories? Was it later on, when you were growing up?

FOWLE Well, the stories about him working, he would tell when, when we were young, my brothers and I were young, because, you know, that was a sort of well, as you will see, he had reason to be very proud of his working career. So, by the time Georgia Ann -- let's wrap up Georgie Ann -- she dies in Boston in 1935 and by then she's just older and worn out. I think she had made her living as a seamstress working for theaters in Boston, because her older sister that she had lived with was married to a guy who was a producer of shows in Boston, and so that was like a tie in to the theater. So I think she was sewing stuff for theatrical productions. So she finally dies, in 1935 and by then, I think Robert had landed his job with TJ Edwards and Company on Beach Street. And he loved to tell a story about -- he told a couple of stories about getting that job, which don't tie up completely, which I don't understand. In one version of the story, he gets off on the on the wrong floor the elevator, but figures, well, what the hell I'll give it a try anyway, and he ends up getting hired to work as a mail clerk. And in another story, he went to the wrong place. He was trying to get a job working for a blacksmith. And why a blacksmith would have --why you would need an elevator to get to a blacksmith, I can't figure out. But anyway, he lands a job there. And he's tenacious, hard working, smart, manages to hold on to the job through the Depression into World War Two. They're -- they gear up for the war effort, and they're churning out these 20 millimeter rotating bands for they go on 20 millimeter guns for anti aircraft and anti ship guns and that sort of thing. They're turning these things out by the million. And so that -- between that and his and his poor eyesight, he was working, he was working in Boston through the war.

SISITSKY Uh hmm, and he was manufacturing goods for the war?

FOWLE Yeah these are, you know, when they, when they fire a 20 millimeter cannon, it fires a slug that -- what's a good comparison? I don't know the bullet is bigger than a big man's big thumb. I mean, it's a big hunk of stuff. That's a steel thing, and in order for it to spin in the rifle barrel, they got a clamp, a ring of brass around it so that it'll catch on the grooves of the barrel. And so I call it a rotating band, because it causes the shell to rotate. So they won the Army Navy E Award for cranking the thing out just in insane quantities.

SISITSKY What was the award called?

FOWLE The Army Navy, E Award, E for excellence. And, you know, it was highly coveted. And when they -- when a company won one, they they'd throw a big shindig, and people would show up, and he'd have a dinner, and people would get up and shake hands and have their picture taken and stuff like that.

SISITSKY And the term Shindig, I assume that's like a big party.

FOWLE Yes.

SISITSKY Perfect.

FOWLE Apparently, an obsolete term for a big party. So that was how my old man won World War Two. By turning these things out literally by the barrel. And, there's a guy named -- a big Japanese General. I forget his name, and he was a real big guy in the in the Pacific War, and he got shot out of the sky with a 20 millimeter cannon. And so I like to think that.

SISITSKY Your dad helped. I see.

FOWLE So anyway during this time, he marries a nice girl from Newton Mass, very nice suburb of Boston. She's an artist and they buy a respectable house in this nice neighborhood in Newton and he claws his way to the presidency of TJ Edwards & Company. And, so it's not the biggest pool around, but he's the big fish in it, and he's, you know, quite rightly proud of that.

SISITSKY Of course.

FOWLE And -- so he -- I put myself in the mind of a guy who's, you know, he's in his 40s, early 50s. He's living in this quite nice suburb. He's got an important job, he's making a fairly decent living, and he's a respectable person in a respectable position in a respectable town, and he's an uneducated bastard from the slums of Boston. Now, this, you know -- and he's got three sons and he cares for them deeply, and he wants very much for them to succeed. And he's very concerned about you know, are they on the right track? Is this going to work? Are they going to be able to -- he's provided for them a life that that he could only have dreamed of at their age. And he doesn't go on about it like, you know, we used to be happy for our crumb of bread. But, you know, he's too evolved for that. But, I think he very much felt the burden of maintaining this image of respectability. [He] Voted Republican, Eisenhower Republican, all the way.

SISITSKY It sounds like you very much lived like the American dream, so to speak.

FOWLE Oh, absolutely,

SISITSKY How do you think that impacted your upbringing? Hearing these stories in your early years?

FOWLE Well, you know what the -- you know, there's a cliche about traits skipping a generation, I was looking too much like my grandfather, the, you know, I was interested in -- you know, I didn't really have a an appreciation of, you know, I knew on some intellectual level that, that he didn't grow up in opulence, and we didn't grow up in opulence. We were just comfortably middle class. I mean, don't get me wrong, we weren't living in, you know, the house was big enough, but it wasn't, you know, there are some houses in Newton that'll just knock your eye out. And you know this, we weren't living in those circumstances, but we knew people who did. And you know, we, my brothers and I, we walked to school, and when we got to school, we walked through -- we walked across the parking lot that was full of expensive cars that belonged to our classmates. But my own, you know, if we can, if I can, finally get to one of my favorite subjects, which is myself, you know, I was, I don't know I got a certain facility with, you know, language -- a certain level of awareness of what's going on around me. And I've got -- well, one thing I haven't covered is both my parents had a good sound sense of humor. You know who Tom Lehrer is?

SISITSKY I'm unfamiliar with Tom Lehrer.

FOWLE You should check out Tom Lehrer. Do a Google -- go on YouTube and look for Tom Lehrer and listen to some of his music. That guy is hilarious -- and he was funny then, he's funny today. Really holds up. And, absolutely just a scathing social critique. So, you know, there was this duality going on. There was a burning desire for our well being, my brothers and I, to -- towards respectability. And yet he's coming, you know, he's coming from someplace entirely different, and he's got a solid sense of humor. And you know as is evidenced by, you know, his embrace of Tom Lehrer, who was just -- he was up there with Mort Sahl and other satirists of the time. I think he was aware that he was living a double life, but there was a limit to how much he could confess that to us, his children, because that would challenge his authority. And if there was one thing that seemed to tickle my fancy, it was challenging authority.

So, you know, by the time I was ready to get a driver's license, we were, you know, there were times when we were practically at each other's throats. I mean, one time, you know, I'm on my learner's permit, and we're driving someplace and he -- well, his, his, his pedagogical technique was, you know, he kind of cobbled together. He didn't really have a theory of child raising. He just did it as best he could, you know, at the time, under the pressures that he was under and so forth. And, you know, I was, you know, 16 years old, and not entirely, you know -- my prefrontal cortex had not developed. You know, he gave me a little guidance on how to drive the car. The whole family's in a car. I pulled a car over the side of the road, put it in park, open the door and get out and start walking. Just I've had it. I'm not, you know, forget about it.

And, you know, I just -- so, you know, there were, I mean, when we were small, it was a bundle of laughs, you know, he really was. But as I began to get into that state of, you know, adolescence and bordering on adulthood, I think his level of concern went up, and my resistance went up. And so that's my -- I mean, my potential as a person, people being educated, was generally considered to be quite good. In fact. You know, although we never spent a great deal of time talking about -- thinking about college, going to college where, you know, in fact, you know, things might have turned out entirely different if we had spent more time doing that, and if we had found communication more fluid.

But at some point along the way, he did let me know that he'd be perfectly happy if I were to go to Dartmouth and become a lawyer, which in the present context, I find slightly ironic. But my grades started to get -- well they fell off and he was concerned. I should have been concerned. I didn't seem to be that concerned. I was -- I think I might have had more than my share of testosterone or something, I don't know. I just I was having -- I wasn't interested in school. I was interested in hanging around with my friends, just exploring the world. I mean, I wanted to get out into the world and see what was going on. I didn't even want to go to college, really. I just wanted to be a free person in this amazing United States of America in the mid 1960s because it looked like a hopping place. You know, there's all kinds of stuff going on. And, you know, I failed to apply myself to making myself a eligible candidate for acceptance to college, and I -- in my junior year, my grades were so bad that I just was finding the whole thing intolerable, and somehow, and this is why he thought I could be a lawyer, somehow, I managed to talk him into letting me drop out of high school and then take another shot at it the following year. And this took some doing, but I managed to talk him into it, to my own surprise. But he established conditions. He says, You got to work. If you're not going to be going to school, you're going to be working. And I got a job lined up for you.

So he put me to work at TJ Edwards in the most Dickensian job you can imagine -- down in the basement of this building in Jamaica Plain [Boston, MA]. And I can see it now -- there's a there's a bench, and then there's this low wall, and then on the other side of that, there are three huge tanks full of acid, and there's a couple of machines also full of acid. And this is the etching department. We would etch aluminum and brass name plates for various kinds of machinery. And you get your nitric acid. You got your, oh, I forget the names now, nitric was the bad one. And no air filtration, no ventilation to speak of. I mean, OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] would have shut the whole place down and thrown them in jail. So I spent the time that I would have been in school, working in this, in this hell hole -- which, you know, I took to reasonably well, you know, I made a little money. And it was the terms of the agreement. And then I can tell you're looking at the clock, and I got to move this up a little bit.

SISITSKY Oh, no, no worries. I was going to ask, is TJ Edwards -- It's a manufacturing company? is it the same one your father?

FOWLE Yes. He'd been working there since the 30s. Yeah, and at this point, you know, he'd been president of the outfit for at least 10 years. By this time, maybe a little longer, he knew everybody in there. And, in fact, one other thing I have to say about the place is that when we were younger when we were kids, I mean, my mother wasn't working. She was she was an at home mother, which meant that she had the three of us underfoot all the time when we weren't in school. So from time to time, and I only realized this after -- long after the fact, from time to time, in order to keep from driving her completely crazy, my father would take the three of us into TJ Edwards on a Saturday. And to our delight, we'd spend Saturday just roaming around a plant filled with machinery, including routing machines with a spinning cutter on them that you -- that had a moving table underneath it, that they used to cut out dies for stamping the insoles of shoes, and for cutting out markers for stitch markers, for marking shoe parts. Or a -- one of the big favorites was a fly press, which had a big screw and a crossbar with an iron like a cannonball on one end and a lever on the other. And you could spin this thing around and crush things like your brother's hand or his head, which we never did. I mean, nobody ever got injured. I don't know how, but we roam around this place and we loved it, and I'm sure my mother enjoyed it. But again, you know, child and protective services, I'm sorry, you're all under arrest. That was the 60s. You know [cross talk] and the 50s.

SISITSKY You mentioned your brothers, who else did you live with at home? Was it your brothers and parents?

FOWLE I had a older brother, Doug, and a younger brother, Ken, and we were all born within three years and three months. So, we were, you know, all together, taken all together, we were a handful. Their approach to parentage was, let's get this over with, you know. And again, just a brief aside, as far as my father's character, my mother used to say, I don't have three sons -- I don't have three boys, I have four. And that was, that was when he was not in his anxious bastard from the slums of Boston frame of mind, you know. At those times, there was, you know, there was no light hearted comedy going on. It was, you know, life is serious business. You know, that side of him didn't show up that often, but when it did, it was somewhat terrifying. But, you know, again, it didn't show up when we were really young, only when we were, you know, showing signs of wandering off the reservation.

But anyway, the last point about TJ Edwards is that among the many fun toys to play with was a mimeograph machine. They had electric typewriters there and mimeograph machines. And I found it great fun to sit down with the electric typewriter and type up a stencil and then run off copies on a mimeograph machine. For some reason, this really tickled me. So we'll leave that for the moment.

So -- oh, one other, one other important point is that at some point, probably when I was around 10 years old, my father asked me, So what do you want to be when you grow up? I said, pirate. Because I love to read, and I'd read about pirates, and I'd read all sorts of books aimed at adventure books for boys, lion hunters of India, and Arctic explorers, and deep sea divers, and pirates. And that day, it was pirates, you know, so.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE And he told me a story that I think was, you know, he had seen this tendency in me to, like I say, go off the reservation, so, straight into dangerous quarters. And, you know, I suspected it, and I may be wrong putting these two things together, but in my mind, they are together. My telling him that I wanted to be a pirate when I grow up, and him telling me there was a printer in the family, way back in the olden days, and he printed something the authorities didn't like, so they threw him in jail. And that story just stuck, and I can't tell you why, but it stuck. And it wasn't like I thought about it a lot after he told it to me -- it's just every, you know, every once in a while, maybe every few years, you know. I'd think about that printer in the family back in the olden days, and they threw him in jail.

SISITSKY Hmm.

FOWLE It's just kind of filed away there, you know. So anyway, I get back into school, I apply to college. They all tell me, you're not what we're looking for. It's, you know, it's 1966 at this point. And there's a lot of competition to get into college, because it happens, there's a shooting war going on in Southeast Asia, and suddenly a lot of guys want to get into college. And colleges have their pick. You know, they can have whoever they want. And the -- you know, those that don't make the cut, well, yeah, they're on their own. I applied to three schools, got into zero.

And at this point, I figured, well, okay, if I can't get into college, well, they're going to come after me. I'm going to get a draft notice, you know, sometime the next few months here, and I'm going to have to decide what the hell to do. And I didn't, you know, it's not like I had been studying Vietnam. It's not like I'd been studying anything. I was doing my best not to study anything and but just to be, you know -- I just, you know, I was intoxicated with just being a human being rolling around on this planet. You know, I was excited about girls, beer and motorcycles, probably in that order, and I wanted as much of all of them as I could, you know, possibly get next to. And, so naturally, real life caught up with me. So I'm scrambling to figure out, well, what am I going to do here?

And I realized, well, wait a minute, in order for them to draft you, you've got to -- before they can take you into the Army, you got to pass the physical. My dad tried to get in the Navy. And they told him, "No, your eyes are no good." You know, "You got 2400 vision we can't take you." Well, him being the determined guy that he was, he memorized the eye chart, and he went back and he tried it again. And, you know, they said, "Okay, take off your glasses now read the eye chart." And he recited the eye chart. And the doctor said, "Okay, wise guy, now do it backwards [laugh]." So that was that, you know. So, there's a certain strain of devilish, cleverness it runs through the family there. So I figured, well, wait a minute, if they wouldn't take the old man, they won't take me, because I can wear his glasses and he can wear mine, something that we had discovered, you know, at some point over the years. So I figured, oh, okay, I'm home free. I'm never going to pass the physical. So-- and my dad had told me. He said, "Look, we can find a college somewhere that'll take you. There's got to be a way." And I said, "No, no." I said, "I don't want to do it that way." You know, and being an obstinate son of a bitch, which I am, that, you know, he couldn't talk me into it. And, and I think at that point, you know, there's a certain level of look, you know, it's your life. I can't force you not to do something stupid.

So, I figured, alright, I'm going to outsmart the Selective Service. I'm going to enlist in the Army and force them to give me a physical, and then they'll flunk me out of the physical, and then I'll have a 4F draft card, and then I can -- then I'll be a free man. And so I needed sort of a -- I wasn't going to go down there and say, Okay, I'll sign up and just do with me as you will. So I figured, okay, if I'm -- I want to be able to plausibly enlist for some kind of training. I said Okay, make me a photographer. Can you give me

photography training, and I'll be a photographer for -- I'll sign up, take the photography training, do three years, and then that'll be that. And I figured, you know, well, I asked the recruiter, I said, "You know, I'm putting on the air of -- not that I care -- but what are the odds of getting sent to Vietnam as a photographer?" He said, the recruiter said, "That's a piss ant little war. How many photographers can they use?" Being an idiot, I sort of accepted that reassurance.

Well, I signed up to -- this is spring of '66 I figured summer's coming. I don't have to go to school. I'll enlist in October, and that way I got the summer off and then I can deal with this thing, I'll get my 4f card, and everything will be grand. And October rolls around and [I] go through the motions, and find that I've been accepted into the United States Army because they're no longer so concerned about whether or not people have to wear glasses in order to do their job. Bingo, I'm in the army now.

SISITSKY And when you enlisted, did you have any guarantee that you would become a photographer? What was -- what did that motivation look like?

FOWLE The way that guarantee work is that they guaranteed that you'd start the training, but they didn't guarantee that you'd complete the training. You had to complete the training on your own merits. You had to succeed at the training and actually become -- you had to actually be qualified as a photographer in order to -- Well, you had to maintain your grade through the course. You couldn't flunk out of photography school. If you flunk out of photography school, bingo, you're infantry now.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm, and I definitely want to get to your training. I understand you trained at Fort Monmouth. But before that, I want to ask, what did that journey look like? It sounded like you kind of started off from a place of trying to avoid enlisting,

FOWLE Oh yeah.

SISITSKY Ultimately getting in the Army, and then you ended up just enlisting on your own merit and kind of entering that training program to be a photographer. So what did that journey look like? How did that kind of change your perspective?

FOWLE Well, you got to remember that I really didn't have any intention of becoming a photographer for the army. I had no intention of ever putting on the uniform. I thought -- I really thought that I was going to skate.

SISITSKY Because of the eyeglasses?

FOWLE Because of my vision, because of my 2400 vision. So -- but at that point it's like, Well, okay, you've signed the paper. You've passed the physical and, well, it's like that famous Hunter Thompson expression. You bought the ticket, take the ride. Here we go. So at this point, you know, at this point, I got my fingers crossed that the recruiter wasn't lying to me and that I'd be a photographer stateside. You know, there was always -- at this point, there's always that possibility.

So, basic training, you know, it's -- basic training is basic training. It's designed to, take a human being, remove his personhood and convert him into an interchangeable object, along with all the others in his unit. And they -- yeah, I didn't care for it, but I did get an expert marksman's badge. And when they put me in the pugil stick pit, along with my squad leader, whom I despised, I knocked him to the ground, and they pulled me off of him. So you know, what can I say? I mean, I successfully got out of basic training. So that's a victory for me. They turned me into a human being who was capable of exerting aggression against another human being. I mean, the bayonet training was particularly ridiculous. You, put a foot-long knife on the end of a three-foot-long gun, and then you stab a burlap sack full of straw while yelling at the top of your lungs. And if ever there was -- I mean, granted, you know, if you're actually facing somebody who's similarly armed and trying to kill you, you want to have a grasp of the basics. But on the other hand, you know, standing there in front of the bag of straw, you know, it's, like, you're aware of the early 20th century art movement called Dada?

SISITSKY Yes, I am.

FOWLE This is Dada, pure Dada. I'm gonna stand here with a gun, stab this bag full of straw, and yell at the top of my lungs. It's the craziest fucking thing you can imagine doing. And to make it entertaining, of course, I imagine, as probably did every other guy in the unit, take that Sergeant in law, I just ripped your guts out. You know, that's my drill sergeant standing there, and I'm sure that that's the way they meant it to be. And it worked,

because I did want to kill him. I never did, but if I had, I wouldn't be here. So anyway,

SISITSKY To backtrack a second, where and when was your basic training?

FOWLE Good job. Fort Jackson, South Carolina,

SISITSKY I see. And do you know when that was, what year?

FOWLE Yeah, that was -- I enlisted 25th of October, 1966 and got through basic training in early January. Sometime in January. I forget exactly when in January went from there to Fort Monmouth [NJ]. That took up. It took up all spring. The photography training was -- photography training was probably the best part of the army because they were really serious about training.

They started with the basics. These here are optics. Alright, we're going to talk about optics. This is what light is. This is how light behaves. This is what happens when light hits a curved lens. Talked about film and how film works, and just the whole thing, from the ground up, side to side. It was excellent, excellent training. The cameras were kind of comical, and we -- they trained us on speed graphics. And you ever heard of the photographer, Weegee? He's -- check him out. Weegee, W-E-E-J-E-E, that's the name he went by. He had some highly ethnic name, but he was famous in the 30s and 40s and into the 50s, I think for his photographs. He was a newspaper photographer, in I think it was New York, did some fantastic -- sort of startling work.

But, yeah, it's a big, boxy thing, and it's got a, usually, there's a -- it weighs about six pounds, and it's, yeah, it's a big, square box. And you slide your hand through a leather grip on the left side and grab the edge of the box. And then on your right side, there's a flash unit. It's got, I think it's 3 D cells in it, and then as a flash reflector up at the top. And if the front of the box opens out, and then there's a -- undo a latch, and there's a lens. The front of it drops down, there's a rail on it, and you grab these two things and pull out this bellows. And on the front of the bellows is the lens board, and you got this, and that's where the lens is. And your film is four inches by five inches, which is about, I don't know it's like, 25 times the size of a 35 millimeter piece of film. It's huge, huge. And if you do your job right, and you focus correctly and do your job right, like I said, you got a vast amount

of information stored on that piece of film you could blow it up the side of a wall and It'll look good. So -- but it was developed probably in the 19 teens, and by the 1960s when we're studying on these things, it's like these things are obsolete, and everybody wants to get their hands on the latest Nikon, you know.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE 35 millimeters. You know, it's fast and it's flexible, and you just crank off another frame, you know. These things -- these are the cameras where the film goes into a film holder, which is a two sided gizmo that's probably about six by seven [inches], and it's got a sheet of film on either side. You slide it into the camera, and then you pull out a dark slide, and that leaves the film inside the camera ready to be exposed. We thought it was, you know, quaint, but that's what the Army had in those days to use. So months and months of. [cross talk]

SISITSKY What were those camera models called? Do you remember? What were those camera models called? Do you remember the ones you were working?

FOWLE Those were, well the model was a Speed Graphic. And the maker was Graphlex. So that was a Graphlex Speed Graphic.

SISITSKY I see.

FOWLE And they are -- they were the camera from the teens until into the 60s. I mean, that was press -- if you watch a movie about a newspaper made in the first half of the 20th century, and you see a photographer, that's what he's got in his hand is a Speed Graphic,

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE Very iconic piece of machine.

SISITSKY Did you have a particular interest in photography before your time at Fort Monmouth?

FOWLE Yes, I did. It wasn't -- as it happens, well, like I said, my mother was an artist. Her brother was an artist, a very accomplished artist. Both her

parents were artists of one sort or another. Her mother was -- did watercolor. My mother loved to watercolor. Her -- my mother's uncle was a very accomplished artist in pastels, watercolor, oil, and her grandfather was a -- well, her father was a photo engraver. And her grandfather was also a photo engraver. And in fact, he was a pioneer in the field of photo engraving, and he made the -- he studied under the guy that invented the halftone. His name was [Frederic Eugene] Ives, I-V-E-S, I forget his first name offhand. But Ives basically invented the halftone. My grandfather, Anton Wild, who's an immigrant from Germany, learned half toning from Ives, who invented the process. So, there's a there's a history of art and photography on my mother's side. My uncle, Robert Wild was a very good photographer -- but then he could do anything. He was a photographer, a sculptor, a model maker, antique automobile restorer, yeah.

SISITSKY I see -- I mean, it sounds like you had, going back to your training, a very different experience, from your winter at Fort Jackson to your spring in Fort Monmouth. Do you remember how you felt during those times, during both basic training and when you were doing your photography training?

FOWLE Yeah. I mean, basic training, you know, there were probably -- there were moments in basic training, when I very briefly enjoyed being alive. You know, when me and some of the other guys have been laughing about this thing and that thing, but usually we would be laughing about how we'd like to murder our DI [drill instructor], you know. It was -- I mean, as I said, you know, at that stage of my life, I just wanted, you know, I had this exuberance in me that wanted to come out and the Army wanted to compress it into the smallest possible volume and then exterminate it. So basic training was just, it was, I was in opposition to it. I was in internal opposition to it every moment, to the extent that, when I --you know, every once in a while, you'd catch KP, and you'd have to get up an hour and a half earlier and go to work in the kitchen or the mess hall rather. And sometimes, when I -- and I pulled KP, same as anybody else. I forget how many times, but sometimes when I didn't pull KP, but somebody that I knew was on KP, sometimes I would ask them, Listen, you got KP, tomorrow, wake me up on your way out the barracks.

SISITSKY Can I ask what is KP? What is that?

FOWLE Kitchen patrol. You know it's wash dishes, assist the cook. Yeah, basically that kind of stuff. You know, you're feeding 110 guys who are starving to

death. They can't consume enough calories. [Laughter]. You got to feed them. If you don't, they're going to chew your arm off.

So, the thing is -- when somebody would wake me up as they were going on their way to KP, I would then have -- and I'd only be awake for, I don't know how long. Couldn't have been very long because we were so fucking tired. But for a brief period, I was free. I was in their barracks, I was in their bunk, but I was me, and there was nobody telling me what to do. I was just there, me. And nobody's yelling at me. And it was worth losing, you know, 20 minutes of sleep just to have that. That's how I felt about basic training.

So, [cross talk] anyway, so, the difference between that and the photography training was radical. You know, almost -- basic training was 100% bullshit. All bullshit all the time. And photography training, it was, okay, We're going to train you how to do something that's technically challenging, and you're motivated to learn how to do it, because if you don't, you're going to be back there with a bayonet in your hands. So, listen up all you private E-1s, and I'm going to tell you, if you pay attention, I will help save your life by teaching you photography.

So, we were, you know, there were 20 of us in the class. There was a new class. I think it was every two weeks. I don't know. I'm not sure about that. It might not have been every two weeks. I'm not sure how often they started a new class I think there were a couple of classes going on at the same time. I'm pretty hazy on all of that, so don't hold me to it. But it went on for months, and there were only 20 of us in the class, and they really worked hard to, I mean they wanted you to learn. They didn't want to be wasting their time. They wanted 20 graduates. They took that seriously.

Which -- we had one guy in the class, boy, I don't know whatever happened to him, but he just, I don't, I mean, you had to pass an aptitude test to get into the class. And I don't know how he passed that. I just, I got a bad feeling about where he ended up, because he just didn't seem to be getting it, you know. And I don't know whether -- I can't remember whether he made it through the class or not, or what happened to him after that. The we were mostly army, mostly enlisted, because you had to enlist to get an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] like that. We did have about three or four -- we had at least three or four, I would say Marines. Marines didn't have their own photography training. If they wanted a photographer, they sent them to Fort Monmouth to train with us. One of these poor

bastards -- there's a guy, one of these Marines is a guy named Hugh Speer Davey. And here's a great guy, he's a lot of fun. He was the grandson of the guy that founded the Davey Tree Company. His family had money coming out the ears.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm.

FOWLE He drove an Excalibur SS. You probably never heard of it. It's a knockoff. It was a modern reproduction of -- or a modern fake, which I should say, because it wasn't a reproduction, but it was a sort of made to look like a 1930s era Mercedes. It had huge clamshell fenders and a big ass Chevy Corvette V8 in it. They had tubes coming out the side of the hood, exhaust tubes coming out the side of the hood. Insane automobile, costs a huge amount of money. And so here you got this guy, he's a Private E-1 in the Marines, driving this car that owned -- that was worth more than all the cars owned by all the officers on base. You know, that’s hilarious.

SISITSKY And his name was Hugh Speer Davey?

FOWLE Yeah, and he was a student at Dartmouth.

SISITSKY Oh, wow.

FOWLE But he got thrown out. Well, first he got -- I think he got thrown out of his fraternity for -- they had some kind of parade. He was in the parade, and he got, I think he got thrown out of the fraternity for firing flaming arrows at something.

SISITSKY That's ridiculous.

FOWLE Like I say, the guy was a lot of fun.

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE And then, I don't know. I think he, maybe he screwed up with his grades, or maybe he -- somehow he ended -- there was a period when they were drafting people out of college and they were also drafting people into the Marines. And, man, I mean, talk about reversal of fortune. I mean, this guy had everything, and then he ends up drafted in the Marine Corps out of dark. I mean, that's harsh, that's a -- but, but he was, you know, he was

irrepressible and a lot of fun, and just a great guy to hang around with. And so he was one of, you know, part of my class there. And just goes to show you that, you know, enjoy your luck while you have it, because he lived through Vietnam, but I'm not sure how far -- how much. I'm not sure how many years later, but sometime in -- I tried to find him in the 1980s and he was dead. He had had an aortic aneurysm and dropped dead in his 30s. So, I mean, luck, it's a weird thing that luck, you know, you got it until you don't.

SISITSKY Yeah, wow, that's an incredible story.

FOWLE Yeah, he was the most, probably the most -- I had a bunch of good friends in that class because it was the kind of thing where, you know, you, I mean, you went to class from first thing in the morning to till it was time to eat, practically time to eat dinner. But it was a full day of hard studying because they wanted you to get -- they wanted you to understand every aspect of it. And but then, you know, then you had the weekend, and you had evenings, and you could just see if you could find some way to have some fun and, we managed, from time to time, to do just that. So it was night and day, the basic training versus advanced, you know, training of photography. So eventually, all good things come to an end. And towards the end of -- towards the end, you start getting your orders for where you're going from there, and at this point, I'm hoping that my recruiter wasn't lying to me.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE This is going to come to a shock -- as a shock to a lot of people, but my recruiter lied to me. [Laughter] "It's just a piss ant little war. How many photographers can they use?" Every last goddamn one of them, that's how many. I mean, out of the out of the 20 of us, 18 got orders to go directly to Vietnam, and the other two ended up there, eventually. One of them got orders to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, of all places. I forget where the other one went. Oh, Hawaii, but he ended up going from Hawaii to Vietnam and back and forth, going to Vietnam TDY [temporary duty]. So I looked at my orders and said, Okay, well, Vietnam, that part I get. But what's 9 ML, 44 MB, what is that? I asked around, and nobody could tell me what the hell that was. And everybody else got orders for the repo depot, the replacement depot, where you go to -- well, I guess some guys get assigned to -- well, I take that back. I don't know where most of the

guys got orders to, and the more I think about it, the more I think they probably got orders to specific signal units up and down the country. And some of them may have just gone to the repo depot and were assigned to photo units from there, I don't know.

SISITSKY And what is the repo depot?

FOWLE The repo depot is the replacement battalion, I think they call it officially. And that was where -- that was, that was the funnel through which the cannon fodder got shipped to Vietnam, and then from there out to the various units, infantry or support or whatever, from there. And they wouldn't know where they were going until they got there. I knew where I was going, but I didn't know what that was, and nobody that I asked could tell me. But you know, by this time, it's like, okay, it's getting on to be towards the summer of '67 and, a year earlier, I had no intention at all of even being in the Army. And now here I am in uniform on my way to Vietnam. This is not going according to my plan, you know. So the inevitable happens, and, you know, plane lands in in Bien Hoa [Vietnam], and it's June of '67 and we take the bus from Bien Hoa Air Base to Long Binh [Vietnam] and they -- you get processed in country, you show your ID to these people. And you sign this piece of paper, and you get issued uniforms and all this kind of crap, you know, you get incorporated into the big green machine there. And you wait to find out what your fate is. And so I'm there for a day and another day and another day and another day. And I think I was there for -- I might have been there about a week.

SISITSKY Where was this? This is Long Binh?

FOWLE This is Long Binh. L-O-N-G-B-I-N-H. Bien Hoa I think it's P-I-N-H-O-A. So I'm standing around in Long Binh. And, you know, we just generally, you -- well, I say standing around, I think most of the time I spent filling sandbags, if I remember, right. But I don't really remember -- about the only thing I can really remember about Long Binh is as I was standing at the at the lister bag, and somebody called my name. And Lister bag is a canvas thing about two feet in diameter, I guess, and about 10 feet high, and it hangs on a sort of a crane, and it's full of water, and the water evaporates out the side and keeps it cooler than it would be otherwise, brilliant invention, really.

So I'm standing by the lister bag, and somebody calls my name. And a guy comes up to me, and he's a little guy, and he's wearing tailored fatigues. And he's wearing jump boots, which is a little odd. Jump Boots, have a -- your basic combat boot, you got a smooth toe. And jump boots, they get a cap on the toe, another piece of leather on the cap of the toe, and they lace higher up. And I don't know why he was wearing jump boots. I don't know that he was jump qualified. I got no reason to believe he was. But he was -- his name was Dan Hart, H-A-R-T, and he said, "Okay, you're you. I'm Dan Hart. You're my replacement. Come with me." And so I walk with him. Well, I collect my duffel bag, because when you're at the repo depot, you keep all your stuff in the duffel bag and you're ready to go in a moment's notice. Grab my duffel bag, go with him, put it in the back of the Jeep, and we're on our way to Saigon [Vietnam]. And he explains to me what 9 ML is. It's the ninth Medical Laboratory, 44th, Medical Brigade.

As he's explaining this, we're on the -- we're about probably 18 miles, maybe from Saigon, something like that. It's, you know, that's far enough away that there's countryside in between. And it's -- I don't even remember, I guess it's paved. I don't really remember. But we're in the Jeep, and as there's deuce and a half, there's big trucks, deuce and a halfs and such like going by, and lots of Jeeps, medium sized trucks. And as, you know, there's a ditch at the side of the road, and it's just green out there. A lot of green. The green is tearing past, and he says, he tells me, "You're my replacement, and you're going to be photographing autopsies for the next year." And he kind of, let's it go at that. And I'm sitting there and my brain suddenly seems to be in a different gear, and I'm thinking -- well, I don't know if I'm thinking. I'm just letting that settle in. Photographing and autopsies for the next year. Huh. Huh, really? And I don't know if I was thinking anything. I think, it might have been real still inside my head [pause].

I don't remember what I said back to him, if I said anything at all. And I don't remember what else he might have said to me on the way down there. You know, it probably took, I don't know, might have taken a half an hour to get there. I don't know. I can't remember. Can't remember my memory of -- well, my memory in general, at this point, might as well point out that, I mean, some of this is probably due to age, you know, because I am, I think I'm 77 years old now. You can correct me if I'm wrong [laughter] and -- but I don't think I've got Alzheimer's. I'm able to, you

know, I try to -- every day, I try to remember what I did the day before, and I seem to be able to keep up with myself. But, but my memory of this period of my life in general, from late high school to about --well, to about the 1980s is unreliable. Yeah, there are things that I remember with great clarity. And there's pieces that -- there's a lot of pieces, but I'm not sure in a lot of cases about the sequences and what happened in between that sort of thing.

But anyway, you know, I can remember that that's what he told me. And, you know, and that's what happened. That's what happened for the next year I was his replacement. He stuck around for another, oh, I'd say, two or three weeks and -- actually it was, it was a couple of weeks. The first couple of weeks I was there, they, I mean, I don't know if everybody that came from the US to Vietnam and ate Army food suffered the same gastric discomfort that I did, but my recollection is that it was pretty much universal. That you know, for the first week or so, your primary concern is going to be, how far is it to the next bathroom. Because you know your digestion just hits -- your whole biome just gets flushed away right away, and it takes you a while to get acclimated to it. So they don't -- they tend not to load you up with things to do. You process in and you sign up for this and that and the other thing, you get your meal card, that sort of garbage, bureaucratic crap. But beyond that, you don't really have to do much. You got a question.

SISITSKY I was going to ask, do you remember how you felt both when you, you know, first arrived in Vietnam and when you heard this news from Mr. Dan Hart about what your duties would actually entail that you were going to be photographing autopsies?

FOWLE I was pretty much in awe of Vietnam altogether, because it was just, well, anybody -- I think it's probably fairly universal when you abruptly land on another planet altogether. And you're only 19 years old. And you've never been anywhere outside of New England that landing on another planet is really eye opening. Because on this planet, it's absolutely, you know, it's unremarkable to see children and adults using the gutter for a bathroom. It's somewhat startling to see large animals walking down the street. I mean, we're talking Musk Ox here, with the -- or is what they call them? Musk Ox? They got these oxen with the huge, curled horns that come out ahead of the -- they pull carts around, you know, and they're mixed in the traffic. You got traffic. Saigon traffic is where I learned about -- I feel like I

got a fairly good basic education in fluid dynamics, just from watching the pedestrians, the motorcycles, the putt putts, the jeeps, the taxi cabs, the trucks, the deuce and a halfs, all using the same streets that are filled from curb to curb with this mix. You know, it's like, wow, this is, this is not Boston.

SISITSKY What were your impressions of Saigon? What kind of city was it? Was it exciting? Scary? Busy? How did it feel?

FOWLE Oh, it was busy. It was busy. The sidewalks were crazy. You got -- you could -- there was stuff -- there was Army equipment for sale on the sidewalk. I couldn't figure out how that worked. You know, wait a minute, doesn't that belong to the US Army? Why is this woman in a conical straw hat and wearing pajamas, selling this on the sidewalk? I don't understand. Speaking of things being sold on the sidewalk, look at all those chickens strung up there. That's -- and various other things that I can't even identify but appear to be food. And these -- there are these tiny -- all the people are so small. They're tiny people. And, they're walking along with -- they've got a stick over their shoulder and pointing fore and aftand a basket on either end. And they got these huge loads in them that they're carrying. And they're bouncing up and down. And then every once in a while you'll see, you know, they'll stop by -- on the sidewalk and set up. And they get a little -- they got some dishes. And they got a little pot going there. And they'll sell you some something to eat right there on the sidewalk. You know, it's bewildering.

Never mind the heat. The heat was just, you know, the hottest day you've ever experienced is the coldest day, you know, that you get over there. It's just -- now up in the highlands, it's different. You know, I understand from people that have been there, but, but Saigon is right on the Saigon River, and it's about as low as you can go. And you know, the equator is right down there. And it's hot as the devil's. It just hot, hot, humid, hot. And you can sit there -- if you can possibly get dry after you take a shower and sit down in the shade without moving a finger, you're going to immediately start to sweat. It's just hot, humid. And it just hits you. It just hits you. It's physical.

And then, you know, the smell of the place is confusing. It's like there's a million smells you never heard of all fighting to be the one to dominate your nose. It's just one thing after another. This is like a circus of smells,

just, it's just overwhelming. You know, it's, -- this is not the suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts. You again, it's like, wow, this is different.

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE There are -- there's people in uniform all over the place. There's small South Vietnamese enlisted men and officers. There are Vietnamese police, white mice they call them. They got white uniforms and white helmets, and they're directing traffic. And it's like, what are you even doing? You know, because it seems so out of control. It was quite impressive, in a way. Lush, lush growth everywhere, just stuff, just exploding out of the ground, you know where it had the chance.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE And funny little buildings. The buildings seemed comical, because, I mean, here we are, we're in Saigon. Well, I should describe Saigon. Saigon is -- I mean, I say Saigon like it was one place, but it was at least three places, and it was probably 1000 places. You know, Saigon proper, the old city of Saigon, the French capital from back when the French were extorting the living bejesus out of the defenseless Vietnamese for practically 100 years or something. Their capital was elegant, with broad streets and these magnificent, if slightly seedy-looking -- because of, you know, deterioration and the climate. These big buildings, fancy buildings. I spent, actually very little time in Saigon proper. That's in the southeastern -- it's like a triangle. The base -- the base is down, and then the point is at the top. The top of the triangle is the Tan Son Nhut Air Base, which is massive. This huge area, big runways, not a lot of runways. I think they only had a couple or three runways, but it was huge. And they were long because they had to -- they want to be able to land anything they wanted to up there.

SISITSKY And what was the name of that air base?

FOWLE Tan Son Nhut. I've seen it spelled a lot of ways, but the right way to spell it is T-A-N, S-O-N, N-H-U-T.

SISITSKY I see, okay.

FOWLE And that was Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and that was nominally run by the US Air Force. But it was used by the South Vietnamese Air Force and the Marine Corps and all the -- well not, of course, I had landed at Bien Hoa, but some commercial aircraft landed there too. Interesting how they land there -- how they were landing airplanes there in those days. I mean, if you take an airplane in the US these days they'll land -- you know, landing is a very sedate process. You might turn once or twice, and you gradually lose altitude, and then the wheels contact the pavement, and that's it. When you land in a war zone, they come in, they come in at sort of a corkscrew movement. And they come in -- they dive steeper than you used to, and they're turning and turning because they don't want to get shot at. And then they come in fast, and then they stop hard. So that's the other guys -- well, anybody piloting an airplane in Saigon would land that way because you never knew when somebody's going to take a shot at you. The outskirts of town weren't secure. And in town security was kind of iffy.

Well, let me finish with the with the layout. So Tan Son Nhut is up at the north end -- at the pointy end of the triangle. The left hand point of the triangle is Cholon in the West. And that's the Chinese part of town, Chinese suburb of this whole complex. Because really, it's a complex. It all works together in a very rude, cobbled together, kind of a half-assed way. I mean by half-assed, I mean Cholon was, you know, sort of semi-real, in that there were real buildings there. They were -- I was, my, what I had for barracks, I was billeted in the St George Hotel, which is in downtown Cholon. And that was, that might have been, God, that was seven stories, I think. Because, you know, being a new guy, and the elevator being out of work -- out of order, which, of course, it was. New guys, E-1s, no rank, you're on the top floor, buddy. So to get to my bunk it's seven floors up. So it was a substantial building. We ate our -- it wasn't really a mess -- well, it was a mess hall on the second floor. It was a big, open, fairly open space. Might have been 20-30 tables, but you would -- it wasn't like -- I don't remember how they timed the meals, whether you could eat at any time of day or not. But it was, it wasn't quite as rigid as a mess hall. We had round tables, four seats to a table and then windows on the main drag out front the name of which I forget, but.

SISITSKY And were the other people staying in this kind of converted complex, all also members of the 9th Medical Laboratory?

FOWLE Yeah, a lot of -- we were -- there were probably, my guess is it might have been 50 or 60 of us. Maybe, somewhere in that vicinity. Maybe a few more, mostly enlisted, of course, there were also some officers. Now the officers would be staying in what they call BOQs, Bachelor officers quarters. And they'd be like dormitories, but a higher class of dormitory, because they're a higher class of people, because they're officers. I mean, this is, you know, United States of America, E Pluribus Unum. We're all equal under the law. But if you're in the Army or if you're in the Department of Defense, we are rigidly hierarchical society. And officers get treated better than enlisted people. And you better know your chain of command, because the people above you on it are only too happy to straighten you out if you screw up.

So the enlisted people from the 9th Medical Lab were scattered in several different BEQs, bachelor enlisted quarters. So, I was initially assigned to the King George, and I was there for about, June, July, August, September, October, December, January, for about seven months at the Saint George in Cholon. And so a bunch of other guys from the 9th were there, but you might be mixed in with guys from other units too. I know that I spent a fair amount of time bunking with guys from the 1st Logistics Command. They were truck drivers, and they would drive trucks back and forth from Saigon to Long Binh to anywhere. So it was all a mix there. And so you might run into any sort of enlisted person. People would be put up at the St George if they were passing through town. So if you got an infantryman who's on his way from one unit to another, if there might be a reason for him to go through Saigon, you might eat lunch with him. Although we didn't eat lunch there. We would sleep there, have breakfast there, have dinner there, but lunch we usually ate in the vicinity of the lab.

Now, the lab was located, you remember we got a triangle here. You got the left side of the triangle. You got Cholon in the southwest. You got Tan Son Nhut in the north. The medical lab is halfway between Cholon and Tan Son Nhut, a little more than that, probably three fifths of the way. So it's in this kind of area of smaller buildings. Our lab was, I believe it was five stories, the top story a little smaller. And my office was on the top floor. And this is weird, because the medical illustrator -- my official title was, medical illustrator. And, you know, so for the first few weeks I was there, it was me and Hart on the top floor. And the only other living human being on the top floor was the colonel, Colonel Hinton Baker. He was a full colonel. He was a doctor. You had to be a doctor to be commander of the

9th Medical Laboratory. It's written into the regulations. You need to be a doctor to run the joint. So there's nobody there, but, and like I say this, there might be as many as 80 people in the building. 60-80 somewhere in there, but there's only three on the top floor. They're not big offices, but we didn't need a big office. And just, I mean, Hart is, I believe a SPC-5, and I'm a private E-1. I mean, we're way down there on the totem pole. Next door to the guy that's on the top of the totem pole.

Funny little aside about this is the guy that had the position before him was a guy named Colonel Pierre Finck. Pierre is spelled like you would expect, and Finck is, I think, F-I-N-K-E. And he appears in the index of a lot of history books because he -- I believe he took part in the autopsy of John F. Kennedy. And so anyway, but he was gone before I got there. We're up there, and the lab is a -- like, I say it's a funny little building that the -- it's got balconies. It's in -- it's really two structures connected. There's a wide, skinny building in the back, from left to right, say. And then in front of that, but connected with walkways, is a square building, more or less. And the building in the back has got these walkways, covered walkways, that provide a little shelter from the sun. And so the -- but the top floor is just, it's just that rectangular part, if I remember right. Anyway, doesn't matter.

So me and Hart are up there, along with the colonel. Second floor is pathology. They're in the back of that building, on the second floor. And you got two or three doctors, depending, although at some, at one point, I think it might have been four doctors. And they are -- that's the pathology department. Next door to them, next door to the doctors, is histopathology. Which is -- they're the guys that take gross specimens, pieces of people, either living or -- they can be living or dead, that the doctors want to examine more closely. So they process them through this carousel rig full of formaldehyde, and then they put them in a bottle, little cube of wax, and then they slice it real thin, put it on the slide so that the doctors can look at the cells and say, "Ah, that's this. That's that." But for our purposes, the main job of the doctors was to perform autopsies at the morgue at Tan Son Nhut. And though the rule was that, I mean people, [cross talk] people would not.

SISITSKY Excuse me, the morgue where? The morgue at Tan Son Nhut?

FOWLE At Tan Son Nhut. The morgue -- like I say, you got this big runway at Tan Son Nhut and it runs more or less east to west or west to east. And just north of that, there's a scattering of various buildings, not very many. Most of what went on in Tan Son Nhut was south of the runway. And south of the runway, Jesus, you had, I mean, you had MACV [Military Assistance Command] there. You had, you know, hundreds, you had 1000s of people south of the runway, on Tan Son Nhut.

North of the runways was a little bit like the top floor of the 9th Medical Lab. Very few people up there doing peculiar things. Including the -- it was run by a quartermaster and, geez, I forget what the official name of it was. I mean it was, the morgue. It was like I say it was -- there's a branch of the army called quartermasters. And I don't think they assigned people to the quartermaster randomly. I think they're very careful when they select those people, because among their jobs is to collect the dead from the battlefield and bring them to the morgue and process them for shipment back to the US. Which almost invariably, well -- so they collect them, they identify them, and they embalm them, and they wrap them up for shipment, and they put them in transfer cases, and they load them on the plane.

So they -- as far as my end of this thing I'm arriving there in June of '67 and things have been busy, and they're getting busier at the morgue. And they -- and, as it happens, the year I was there was in terms of casualties, there were -- if you take a one year frame and move it back and forth across the timeline of that war, it's just about as many people dying during that year as there are at any point. If it shifted, if I got there a few months later, it would have been a little bit worse. But it was, you know, it was, there was a lot of dying going on.

SISITSKY What specific duties did you carry out? I know your MOS was 84B so you were a photographic specialist and a medical illustrator in the 9th laboratory, but what specific kind of duties you carry out? And what was that like?

FOWLE Well, here we get to the pathologists at the 9th Med Lab were, they were the only pathologists for the whole of Southeast Asia. Which meant, you know, they were responsible for a huge area. But most of their work was -- well they dealt with, you know, whatever doctors needed. Whatever doctors in that whole area needed, in the way of histological pathology, looking at the cells from people scattered hither and yon.

But when it came to the more local effort, like I say, you got a lot of people dying in Vietnam at that at that time, and they were not responsible, in general, for any of them, except under certain conditions. But if somebody died -- if somebody in the --working for the Department of Defense, Army, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, whatever CIA, was to die in Vietnam by accident or by, or in the hospital from disease, or in the hospital while being treated for wounds or for any other -- any death in the hospital. Any murders, and there were some murders. Any suicides, and there were some suicides. Any unexplained deaths, and there were unexplained deaths. Just if it wasn't K.I.A. [killed in action], it got bumped over to these guys. Which, at the time I arrived, was two guys. And, you know, they were fairly busy. Like I say, a lot of people dying because they were getting shot at by the Viet Cong or blown up, or take your pick. But there was also -- oh, aircraft accidents or aircraft crashes. If an airplane went down and people died, they had to get an autopsy, just across the board.

SISITSKY So it's everyone who wasn't killed in action?

FOWLE Exactly, exactly. And I don't -- in case I forget, like I say, I don't know, I didn't keep count, I didn't keep track. But my guess is that minimum of 300 and might have been upwards of 400 autopsies that I was present for and documented during that time. Can't say for sure. So you never knew -- the purpose of an autopsy is to discover why somebody's dead. You know, here we have this human being. Why isn't he breathing? Let's find out. And my job was to, whenever the doctor, for whatever reason decided that something ought to be documented to help -- to help confirm his analysis of the case. He asked me to take a picture.

And so, you know, that was how my talents were put to use over the next, well, nominally a year. But in fact, like I say it was several weeks before Hart, told me. And I'm sure that during that time, Hart went to the morgue without me. He'd go off with the doctors, and he'd come back a few hours later. And they -- I think they were just letting me get acclimated. But they may also have been waiting for the right test case. Because, you know, I think, they may -- I don't know this for a fact. It's only speculation that sort of crept into my brain since then, that they may have been waiting for one that would allow them to decide on the spot whether to keep me or whether they could, sort of in poker terms, ask for another card.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE Because I think it wasn't necessarily a job for just any random photographer. I mean, it might have been a job for, you know. I mean, maybe you can handle it and maybe you can't. I mean, I suppose that it's possible that somebody might not have been able to handle it. I feel like I was able to handle it, but I think it was kind of on the bubble. I think it was, yeah, I could handle it. I could handle it. But think it was kind of a stretch to because it was kind of a lot. There was a lot of it.

SISITSKY Why do you think it is that they knew you could handle it?

FOWLE Well because I did.

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE Because I did. I mean, one day, Hart said, "Come on, we're going to the morgue." And we went to the morgue. And I forget which doctor it was, and it might have been both of that day, might have been both doctors and Hart and me and this green suitcase with the Speed Graphic in it.

But, you know, so at this point I'm like, it's sort of reconstructing in my brain, but I imagine it must have been a lot like that ride down from Long Binh, when Hart told me what my job was going to be. Because, okay, well, we dubbed around at Bien Hoa for a couple of days. Dubbed around in Long Binh for about a week. Dubbed around in Saigon for a week or two or three, something like that. I don't know how long it was. But now we're, this is -- by this time, I think at this point, we're like early July. And we head off to the to the morgue, and we drive around the end of the runway and up to the morgue and go through the front room, and there's like three or four desks. It's like a long, wide room. And then in the center of the opposite door, there's a couple of birch fly doors, like you might see in the school, only, there's no windows, just solid wood top to bottom. Couple of brass plates where the two doors swing open and shut, and we swing through those. And I think Hart had me carrying the suitcase, because he's a SPC-5, and I'm at E-1 so if there's any toting to be doing the low guy on the totem pole does it.

SISITSKY SPC-5 and E-1 those are your two rankings?

FOWLE That's our ranks. He's a specialist five, and I'm a private E-1.

SISITSKY I see.

FOWLE PFC -- oh no, I'm sorry. I'm giving you mixed messages here, and one of them is incorrect. PFC, private first class, and I think that's an E-2 or maybe it's an E-3 I forget.

SISITSKY Okay.

FOWLE Who gives a damn? Let them give me a court martial if I got it wrong. Fuck them anyway [laugh]. But, so, humor in a gruesome circumstance. What a hard thing. Who would have expected that? So, you know, through the doors, and I don't really remember, you know, I'm following these guys. They're ahead of me, and they're, they know where they're going, so I'm following them. So we go off to the -- we go through the doors and to the right. And I get this vague sense off to the left, that there's stuff going on over there. And that's this large, this larger room of the mortuary. And this space for a lot of business over there.

And over on the right is a much smaller room with white tile on the walls, and there's a white trough on the, along the far wall that is sort of almost suspiciously large. It's like, as I remember it, it's like close to two feet wide and several feet deep. That's the basin that's on the floor. And it's all tile, white tile. And there's, I believe three, might have been four tables. And you've seen these tables because autopsies are a popular element of a lot of different kinds of movies these days. So you know what the tables look like. And there's three or four of those guys lined up, and they're tilted down towards the trough. And that drain in the far end of the table is located over the trough. And there's -- I don't remember now -- I don't remember whether this fella was in the bag or not, in the body bag. He might have been taken out of the bag and he might not have. I don't remember. But I don't remember the bag because I remember the guy. And I remember the guy because he was half recognizable as a person and half not recognizable. And he was a grotesque site. He was something that you would never expect to see, something like this.

And it turned out there was an explanation for this, and it was pretty readily apparent what it was, because we had, we had the file on him. And the file said that he was flying a -- until probably the day before, he was

flying a routine mission, F4 phantom jet, and somebody -- either he was in the wrong place, or somebody pulled the lanyard at the wrong time, 105 millimeter Howitzer. And the round from the Howitzer, our Howitzer hit his F4 and fucked up his plane bad enough that he couldn't fly it. And so he hit the eject button and successfully ejected from his airplane. And all would have been well, except he came down too close to a tree on the side of a mountain. And his chute caught in the tree, and it slammed him with great force up against the side of the mountain. And just crushed half of the body, just you could barely tell what the parts were. And Hart turned to me, and he said, "If you're gonna puke, do it over there." And he pointed to the trough. And I kind of stood there and Hart took the pictures. And I kind of stood there and absorbed it.

And that's everything I remember about that particular day. I mean, I don't remember. There might have been another autopsy going on, I don't know. Somebody might have said something else to me at some point or not. I don't know. But that part I remember quite clearly. And, well, and I didn't puke. And I think, I mean, nobody said it at the time, but I don't think anybody had to say it. That if I decided that if I wasn't suited for this line of work, that they could find me another line of work in Vietnam. I mean, anybody would have made the same calculation, I suspect. That unpleasant as the immediate scenery might be, that the sooner I adapted myself to this line of work, the less likely it would be that I would end up getting my photograph taken on one of those tables. So I was motivated to, you know -- I mean, I didn't have the urge to puke. I didn't have to fight back the urge to puke. I just kind of stood there in a state of, I won't even say that I stood there in a state of any kind of paralysis. I just kind of stood there and tried to assimilate my situation. And I think that -- I don't think it was a rational process. I think it was just sort of a -- I think it was my brain stem at work there. I think it was my, you know, the lowest, earliest part of my brain saying just, "Somebody asks you a question, answer. Somebody tells you to do something, do it. Otherwise, if they don't ask you anything, of you, just stand there and keep your fucking mouth shut. They're gonna do what they're gonna do, pay attention." And so I did.

And so for the next few weeks, I would accompany Hart to the morgue when we went to the morgue, and at some point on the way, he said, "You shoot this one." And I would shoot it. And then after a while, after those three weeks were up, he got on the plane, he said, "See you later." And he was gone. And at that point, I was 19 years old. I had a couple of

weeks of experience hanging out in the morgue, watching Hart take pictures and taking pictures myself. And at that point in the entire defense department, I was the one guy taking pictures for the one set of doctors who are determining the cause of death for everybody who died in Vietnam for reasons other than direct combat. Which just goes to show that the, you know, if you want to get real life, work experience, the US Army is the way to go. Because [pause].

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE They'll give it to you. They'll, they will trust you to carry out the orders that they give you, unless you prove incapable of doing that, in which case they will replace you and send you off to the boondocks where you can take your chances with Uncle Charlie.

SISITSKY It sounds like you certainly saw firsthand, the brutality of the war. Did it ever get easier in your line of work? Were you ever more accustomed to it? Or from that moment was it like harder?

FOWLE Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, it wasn't like I spent every day just waking up in shock and horror that I was alive another day in this hell. I mean, true, I did wake up every day, you know, fully aware that I was waking up in hell. But it wasn't a complete shock. I was used to it. I mean, well, I do remember something else from that day. And it's directly pertinent to your question. The, you know, they wrapped up the autopsy and said, "Yep, yep. Blunt force injury as the cause of death," answered that question, pretty definitive. Not a lot of deep sleuthing going on here.

So it must have been morning when we did that, because we went from there directly to a place called the Ypsilanti, named after the town in Michigan, and had lunch. And now that I think of it, I don't think I -- I think just now I realized that if, in fact, that first autopsy was a test, then maybe lunch was too. Because they wanted to find out if I could keep my lunch down after seeing that, after seeing my first autopsy, and a particularly gruesome one at that. Although there's no such thing as an autopsy that isn’t gruesome. Although some are less gruesome than others. I'll get back to that, if I forget, remind me. But so we stop at the Ypsilanti, and we're looking at the menu. And you know, this is the US Army in the mid 1960s and what's for lunch? Well, it's a hamburger. Which bore a remarkable resemblance to the guy whose picture Hart had just taken.

And I'm looking at the menu, and I'm thinking, hamburger. And I mean, I didn't have to think to make the connection, but it was just staring me in the face. And they said, "what'll you have? I said, "Well, I guess I'll have a hamburger." And I had a hamburger. And so, you know, they didn't tell me to go elsewhere. They kept me in the unit and I kept taking photographs for them, and on we went from there.

SISITSKY Yeah, I know the '68 Tet Offensive took place during your time in Vietnam. Do you have any memories of that?

FOWLE You bet. Let me fill you in on the acclamation process, though, and then we can get to Tet. Because there's some laughs to be had there, despite everything. Yeah, so it was -- that was a challenge for -- that was the immediate challenge was -- because, I mean, it was clear that this was going to be a challenge. It was -- because it was a shock. It was a shock. I mean, I had never seen a dead body before. I had never seen a primped and powdered old person who had lived a full life in a coffin all gussied up for a nice, polite funeral. Never, in my experience. Had never been to a funeral. Never been to a closed coffin funeral. You know, this is America in the 1960s. Death is something that happens remotely elsewhere, and we don't talk about it. We don't think about it.

But so it was like, well, you know, if the pool is full of ice water, are you going to go in gradually? Or are you going to just jump in. Well, I jumped in. Only it wasn't ice water that filled that pool. So you know it -- I don't remember my thinking process. I don't remember how I felt in those, in that -- during that period when I was getting used to going to the morgue a couple of times a week. And taking pictures of I don't know how many autopsies on a given day. I was only able to reconstruct that number I came up with just by calculating how many weeks I think I was actively going to the morgue with those guys, and how many we probably did on an average day. So wild guess, but until Tet, it was pretty much, you know, as I recall, and as I say, my memory is pretty shaky, but we had to have gone two or three times a week I would say. And on average, we probably did three or four or five or maybe a half a dozen autopsies. I don't know.

Somewhere those files may still exist with my photographs in them. I don't know. Every once in a while I get curious and try to figure out where they might be. I mean, do they still exist? Or did they burn them all when we left

Vietnam. I don't know. Could have gone one way. Could have gone another. Could be Raiders of the Lost Ark territory, you know, where they're putting a crate in a warehouse, lost forever. Or they could have gone up in smoke. I don't know. But, you know, over the over the course of those next months, I got used to it. You know, because that was the choice, get used to it, or roll the dice. And those dice were, you know, they looked like they were bound to come up with something worse.

So, what did happen that was a big change is that I got tired of being up there on the top floor, nobody there but me and the colonel and him gone half the time, you know, going all over Southeast Asia. So -- and besides, it was hot as a devil up there. I mean, the sun's beating down on the on the roof of the room I'm in. It's just, it's hell. And there's nothing to do out there but think, and I don't want to do that. So the doctors are down on the second floor. They're in part of that floor, and then histopathology is over here. And there's a bunch of guys that are lower ranked enlisted men like myself, and they're preparing these slides for the doctors. And they're processing this tissue, and the room reeks of formaldehyde, which I've since come to learn is a carcinogen, but because the work they're doing, their space is air conditioned.

So, you know, I stop in, I just hang out a little bit. I mean, I got an excuse because we're both working for the same department. And I said, hey, you know, first it's just hanging around, then it's – you're coverslipping those slides. That looks like something I could do. I don't have any training, but how hard can it be? You put a drop of stuff on there, you drop a cover slide on there, and you got some of their work done. So I started volunteering to do that, and so they let me hang out there. And I got to know them, and we got to be friends, and we just, it was no big deal. So I spend my day there. Hanging around with them, doing cover slides or whatever else I was capable of.

And also I would sometimes, because my only official work was going to the morgue with the pathologist I would also sometimes drive blood around. They'd need, for some reason, they the -- there was a hospital up at Tan Son Nhut and they needed blood. There's constant need for blood everywhere. And so somehow, 9th Med Lab got the job of running the blood around. And sometimes when the regular guy couldn't do it, I would do it. And so, and also they would use me to drive officers around when they came in country, and I would take them around to the different places

they had to go to get checked in. So I would drive around Saigon and I got to know it that way from doing those two things. So,

SISITSKY It, sounds like you got to explore a bit of Vietnam, then in the greater Saigon area, was there anything, [cross talk]

FOWLE Well, only -- sometimes we would go up to Long Binh. Sometimes, if there was a trial going on at Long Binh, I would drive a doctor up there for that. And so that was the only time I ever went out of Saigon proper. And most of the time it was just in Saigon. Some of the time, right, the doctors and some of the officers, sometimes their BOQs would be over in Saigon, so I would join them over there. So yeah, I got, I did get to know the whole town to that extent. Yeah, it was always interesting driving the doctors around, because they would -- they were officers, and so that included -- that increased the odds that you might get shot at, but we never got shot at. They were officers, so they made a more enticing target to the Viet Cong, who were occasionally driving around on scooters. The guy in the front would drive the scooter, and the guy in the back would have the 45 and he'd take a pot shot at an officer. And they would, they would get some from time to time.

SISITSKY Yeah, I do want to hear about your memories from the Tet Offensive as well.

FOWLE Well, that was interesting. We were -- I see by the clock that even more long winded than I expected to be. So I'm still at the St George hotel. And for some reason, hell I don't know why -- the first sergeant told me, okay, here's, we're changing you from the St George. Well, from the St George hotel we used to get to, this is, this is funny. We'd get from the Saint George -- the guys who were from the lab, who were staying at the Saint George, would, we'd in the morning, we'd get in a bus out front that had mesh on the windows to keep the grenades out. If somebody threw it, nobody ever threw a grenade at us, but that was because there was mesh on the windows and a grenade would just bounce off. So we get in the bus, and the driver was this Vietnamese guy named Rook, and he had this astonishing hair. His hair was like Kim Jong Un's in that, it sort of stood straight up. And he was a great guy. He was a lot of fun. And if you got on the bus early enough, when there was very few guys on the bus, he would take his pipe out from under the seat of his bus, and he would smoke a little. He'd give himself a nice, big hit of pot.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm. And remind me what was his name?

FOWLE Rook. We spelled it, R-O-O-K, but that's probably not the way he spelled it.

SISITSKY Okay.

FOWLE He was a lovely guy. I wish I could buy him a beer. Huge grin on his face. He loved to drive the bus because he thought he was driving at Le Mans, a race car. And we would be in the back of the bus, hooting and hollering, cheering him on. If he could, he'd pass people. He's driving this big old Kawasaki bus. And on the way we would go by the Nuoc Mam factory. And by this time, you get used to the smell of Vietnam, but driving past the Nuoc Mam factory was like -- it was like going to Vietnam all over again. Because it was like Vietnam cubed. It was because that's where they made fish sauce. They layered fish, salt, fish, salt, in these big jars, and they'd leave them in the sun from months on end. And it would ferment. And it made this powerful, powerful seasoning, which they loved. Me, not so much.

But anyway, so, they moved me. They tell me, "Okay, that's enough of the St George. You're moving to," I think it was called the Montana, which was just a couple of blocks. It was within walking distance of the lab. So I grabbed my duffel bag, moved there, settle in. First night at the Montana and the guy who's Sergeant of the guard, said, "Fowle, Fowle, where's Fowle?" "I'm Fowle." "Okay, you're on guard duty." I said, "Give me a break. I haven't even unpacked yet." He says, "I'll tell you what, I'll make you a promise. I'm in a bind here. I'm short. Pull guard duty tonight. Don't give me any guff and I won't put you on guard duty again for months." Okay, sounds like a deal. So I pulled guard duty, I think, from eight to midnight. Up on the roof of the hotel.

And, you're up on the roof of the hotel, and you're looking around, and you got this view of -- it's dark, but you got the city lights, and then at the edge of the city you got, these strange red lines. Going from about 20 degrees above the horizon, down to the ground. They're long, long lines. And then they stop from the top to the bottom. And that's C130s flying around there, shooting the living bejesus out of somebody down there. And whoever's down there is dying, because they're getting shot to shit. Whether it's our

guys or theirs. Then every once in a while, you see falling star with that white thing over it. It's a flare. It's swinging back and forth -- the parachute over it is illuminated. So there you see this -- all this business going on, plus airplanes flying around and all sorts of business.

So, midnight I hit the rack. Three o'clock in the morning, [imitates explosion sounds]. This crescendo of explosion. What the hell is that? Well, that's the Tet Offensive. They're rocketing Tan Son Nhut, which is maybe a mile away at the most, to the north. And I pulled guard duty every night for the next three months I think. So much for that promise. It was like hell broke. That was the first of it was -- there was that -- it was either rockets or mortars, I don't know which. Probably rockets. And they just -- you wake up and it's like, okay, this is new. This is new and different. And there was, like -- there was gunfire, rockets, all kind of commotion. More or less everywhere. Not in the immediate vicinity, but it was all around, all around. Just keeping a very welcomed distance. And so the word went around at the BEQ, okay, nobody go anywhere. We're here.

SISITSKY What was the BEQ?

FOWLE Bachelor enlisted quarters.

SISITSKY Okay.

FOWLE It's a building -- it's a four story building. It's a long four story building. With sort of -- broken up into and into rooms. Small rooms with like, bunks, typically it'd be a bunk and a single bed in a single room. And a fairly small room.

SISITSKY And this is where you were on guard duty?

FOWLE This is where I was -- that was where I was -- where I slept at night and where I was on guard duty, when I was on guard duty.

SISITSKY I see, okay.

FOWLE There were guards at the front, guards at the ends, guards at the sides, guards on the roof. Multiple guards on the roof, guards everywhere.

SISITSKY And when you're on guard duty, are you armed?

FOWLE Oh yeah, yeah. Got a M14 and a couple of magazines, Flak Jacket, steel helmet, all that jazz. None of which [cross talk]

SISITSKY You were definitely stationed as a guard during very turbulent time. Did you ever have to use any of that machinery?

FOWLE I didn't -- no. And well, we'll get to an incident where, an instance where that was a factor. But anyway, we're like a day or two days at the BEQ, more or less under lockdown. You know, the word went out, just sit tight and we're going to see how this thing shakes out. And nobody knew anything about what the hell was going on at all. We just knew that there was something going on and it wasn't particularly good.

And then Lance Michael, who was a, he was a stenographer, a clerk typist. He was a clerk typist for the doctors. He was a SPC-5, or a SPC-4, low ranking guy. And basically that was his job as a typist. There were also two or three Vietnamese secretaries working for the doctors typing up these autopsy reports. Which must have been some dismal work for those unfortunate young women too. So Michael shows up at the BEQ, and he's got -- he's wearing like three flak jackets and carrying three or four M-14s and he's got a fistful of straps to steal helmets in his hand. And he's getting me and Mike Severson, another guy from the lab, and he says, "Okay, time to go for a walk. We're going back to the -- we're going over the lab." So we all suit up and walk over to the lab and report for duty there.

And we get sort of parceled out here and there and spend the next job. It was about a week, I think, before anyone went anywhere. We didn't know what was going on around us. We heard a rumor at one point that there was a VC [Viet Cong] unit on this side of us, and there was a US infantry unit on the other side of us, and the infantry was going to try to catch up with the VC and engage them. So for all we knew, there was going to be a firefight right in the neighborhood, right surrounding us. And that never happened, but not an uncommon occurrence, rumors of war, you might say.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE What did happen one night was that somebody -- we had, again, like at the BEQ, at the 9th, we had guards on the roof. Guards -- we had a perimeter made up of KONEX containers in metal boxes. And the back of the building was blank, just no windows, no nothing back there. So we didn't have any protection back there. Which means that, you know, a clever VC with a sapper charge could have blown his way into the building. At his -- whenever he felt like it. But, extending on either side, we had this square area with, there was -- had these metal boxes, huge, big metal box, eight foot tall, metal boxes all around the outside edge, covered with barbed wire on the top and chairs for guard duty. And if you were lucky, there might be some sandbags in front of the chair. So at one point, somebody on guard on the roof decided that there was -- that he'd seen tracer rounds go over overhead, and so he let off some rounds to where he think they came -- he thought they came from. And a bunch of other guys on guard got enthusiastic and started shooting in the same general direction. My personal belief is that nobody ever took a shot at us at all, and he just imagined the whole thing. But it caused a general commotion, and I remember particularly somebody yelled "more ammo on the roof." So everybody went down to the arms room, down on the first floor, grabbed a bunch of magazines and brought them up to the top floor and I just, I don't know what the consequences were out there, about three blocks away, where there was a little sawmill, of all things. There was a lot of rounds went in this direction. I just, I hope nobody got hit, but I think it -- pretty good chance somebody might have gotten hurt there. But, you know, it's Vietnam in the middle of the Tet Offensive. And there's a lot of shit happening. Not a lot of it was accounted for.

SISITSKY How was Saigon different before versus after the Tet Offensive?

FOWLE Completely, completely. There's two different cities. I mean, before -- although I didn't do much sightseeing before, because a lot of guys thought nothing of just going and checking out restaurants and whore houses and so forth, and just generally exploring the city and getting to know the people and so forth. I was more reticent. And I mean, we were doing autopsies on guys that got fished out of the river. And believe me, those are memorable occasions. Because you spend a few days in the Saigon River and your mother's not going to recognize you. You're gonna, in fact, it takes some effort, on the part of -- it takes some effort to recognize them as human beings from this planet. And they looking quite different. And turns out, yeah, they got knifed by somebody. And, after the

guy who said, "Let me introduce you to my sister," took him down the wrong alley and put a knife in his kidney and rolled him into the river. Or, you know, some guy that, he doesn't -- funny, I don't see why he's dead, but there he is on the table. You take a sample of his blood and that liquor that he bought on the black market was poison.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE There were a lot of ways to die over there. They weren't all obvious. And I wasn't inclined to take my chances. I wasn't -- not anymore out there, they call it -- well if you particularly, if you lived somewhere other than your assigned billet in a BEQ, you were living on the economy. And there were people who did that. And there were people who did that and lived. But they didn't all live. Some of them ended up, like I say, in the wrong alley, at the wrong time. And so it was an -- in fact, once you get used to the heat and the humidity is a very inviting place in a lot of ways. As I say, for myself, I didn't particularly partake of it. I mean, it's funny, parts of it were beautiful. There was a zoo. It was gorgeous, very just a lovely zoo. And then there were the slums. And the slums were just unbelievable. People living in hovels made out of tin cans.

I mean the whole road, or not the whole road, but half of Plantation Road that we -- that Rook used to drive us up. There was a long stretch of it that was just a lot of cans for cooking oil came in -- cooking oil came in five gallon cans. And if you cut them apart, they were building material. And a whole, it must have been hundreds and hundreds of yards of Plantation Road, the whole west side of it, I remember, it's just oil cans. Housing made out of oil cans and scrap lumber and, God knows what. And people living on nothing, because, you know, they couldn't live in the countryside. Their village had been destroyed. They came into the city and they protected themselves from the elements as best they could.

I don't know why they didn't kill every goddamn last one of us. I really don't because, you know, I mean, we were destroying their country, we were destroying the city, and we were destroying the countryside. And all of this because somebody's politics. I mean, this is fucking insane. This is fucking insane, and they were in no position to do anything about it. They're muckety mucks. The people with power in their society were saying, "We are fierce non-communists, we fight for freedom," and, "You peons better get in line or we crush you too. You'll do what we tell you to do, or we'll

just shoot you." It's that simple. And if they had power or a way to make some kind of -- come up with some kind of a scam. Maybe they could get a better life, but, or maybe they could -- or they could tie up -- if they were in the right family, they could get some kind of a deal going, and maybe things would be alright. But, there was a power structure, and it was 100% corrupt from the very top to the very bottom. The people of the top were involved in the heroin trade that was killing US GIs. Now, this didn't really get ripping until after I was gone, but it was starting. It was already underway. Well, it didn't get endemic. It didn't get unavoidable until I was gone.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm Uh-hmm

FOWLE There were people dying of heroin overdoses while I was there. And the money from that heroin was going to the boss. And everybody in Vietnamese society understood how corrupt it was. And so, they'd smile. They'd do what they had to do. They would act like the same way I did in the morgue. For Christ sake. They try to go on, get along, just to stay alive and hope that things got better someday, somehow, some way.

SISITSKY What were your encounters with ordinary Vietnamese like?

FOWLE Very limited, very limited. I mean, there were the people that -- there were the secretaries in the pathology department, and they were very -- they were just, they were sweet [pause]. Yeah, they were lovely people. There was the guard down in front. He was the funniest guy I ever saw in my life, because he just didn't seem to give a fuck. His job was to be -- was to guard the front gate of the compound. And every once in a while, I had to get out and do his job, because he got up and walked away to follow a chicken [laugh]. Yeah, "That's a fine looking chicken. I think I'll have him for dinner." And he'd disappear. He'd be gone. And somebody would notice. "Hey, we need a guard down." "Alright." I'd get out, sit down there and guard for him.

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE He just, he was a role model for not giving a fuck. Because he just, he had this -- They all, all the Vietnamese guards would carry a carbine, which is a. Uh, M1 carbine was a short light 30 caliber semi automatic weapon.

And you know it was easier for them to lug around. Steel pot on his head, carbine on his shoulder, on the trail of a chicken.

SISITSKY And, yeah, I want to go back for a second-- [crosstalk]

FOWLE So I knew the secretaries. One of them had smallpox when she was, probably, when she was a child. She had, you know, her face had smallpox scars all over it. So she'd been through hell. But, you know, and all of them, there's this touch of sadness, it just [long pause] you knew it was there, and they just, they carried it [pause]. And they were very graceful about it, you know. Of course, on the other end of the spectrum, I'm sure that if you're out there in the boondocks and you were carrying a gun around, and you ran into their cousin or their brother or them on a different day, that they would gut you like a fish. Human beings, they got a wide spectrum of potential behavior in every one of us. Any one of us could be as graceful as one of those Vietnamese secretaries, or as blood thirsty as their cousin out in the bushes. You know, any one of us, any one of them. You -- savage behavior, it's just under the skin there.

So the funny thing about Tet was that it was disturbing. I mean, if you're up there in the daytime -- one day, about three days in, I'm up there on the roof of the BEQ, and I'm on guard duty, I'm looking around. And it's like, you look over here and there's a three quarter ton truck on its way to Tan Son Nhut. And you know where it's going, because in the back of the truck there's about five or six GIs, and they're laying down. And every time it hits a bump, the legs bounce. Because they're dead as shit. They're on their way to Tan Son Nhut and they're going straight to the morgue. There's no grave unit. There's no graves registration, pickup point involved here, straight to the morgue for those boys.

And then you look over here, and there's -- up in the sky there's three or four or five or maybe half a dozen US planes in Vietnamese market. And these are, these airplanes -- they call them SPADs, and that was the name of a World War I airplane. These aren't World War I airplanes, but they are World War II airplanes. These things are old. And they're older than you are. And they're up there, and they're flying in a big circle over downtown Saigon. And every once in a while the -- it's like they're taking turns. And they get to a certain point on that circle, and they go into a dive. And then, I can't say that I saw it, but you know that what they're doing is that they're dropping a bomb. There's some area down there in downtown

Saigon that Vietnamese pilots in airplanes we gave them are bombing their own capital. And you look at that and you think, well, ain't that something.

Because it's -- I mean, when you grow up on your belly as a boy in the suburbs of Boston watching war movies on television, you don't expect to see John Wayne bombing the capital city of his allies. This is -- but by that time, again, it's, the whole thing is Dada. It's all crazy. From the moment you open your eyes until you drop off to sleep at night. It's all Dada, all the time. It's crazy from 360 degrees in a compass. It's all nuts. I mean, Joseph Heller -- they say that Joseph Heller wrote Catch 22 and it was about World War II, and it was fiction. It was a documentary. It was non fiction. I mean, it's just, it's all crazy, you can't -- I mean, look at the result. That war has been over for going on 50 years, that war has been over. And tell me it got anybody anywhere. And yet, there's people that still will tell you that it was a noble cause.

Let me just add one thing about noble -- because I know we've gotta be running out of time. Let me just say one thing about noble causes. Let me just give you a real, truncated view since Vietnam, because we covered pretty much, you know -- there's not much more to say about Vietnam. I could tell you a lot more about the particulars of dying various ways, but nobody wants that. But the -- when I got out of Vietnam, I bounced around like a ping pong ball in a washing machine for about five years. I was just trying to figure things out. And I pretty much fell apart after about five years. And most of that time I was knocking around out west, just trying to make a living here and there and do this and that and so forth. Have a little fun, if I can manage it.

And after about five years of that, I just realized, I'm not able to sustain this. This is not working at all. And, the highs are okay, but the lows I can't deal with that. I can't deal with that. Because the lows were just, they were way too low. And it was much too much stuff just dragging me way down. I wasn't happy with it. And the thing that turned me around was -- I was up, I was doing a job up in Eastern Oregon. And we were going from place to place, and my job was just as Dada as anything else in my life. My job was to drag a wire across the desert, stop when I felt resistance on the back end of the wire, dig a small hole in the ground, put in a piece of aluminum foil, pour in salt water, cover it up, connect the wire to it, and await further instructions. And then I would hear over the radio "go," and I

would go, and I would do the thing again. And it was great. I loved it because it in a sense, it made no sense. I was out in the desert. There was nothing there but me, dirt, rocks, mountains, sky, that was it. And that I could handle.

So we're going from one job to another. We stop in a place called Adel, Oregon, down in southwestern Oregon. And it's just -- you talking about one of the most remote places in the lower 48. This little town got maybe couple of dozen people in it, maybe. This little store, because it's at the crossroads, and if anybody's going to -- wants anything in 100 miles, they got to come to you. I'm in there, and they got -- and it's, you know, it's the Old West. I mean, the Old West was still alive then. And they got these cases here and there to display various old Westy type things. And one of the things they got in there is a skull. And the thing about the skull was that on the top of this guy's skull, I'm assuming it was a guy. I mean, most of the skull is kind of a darker color, sort of a grayish, darkish grayish, sort of a color, bone color. But part of it is like a circle on the top of his head that is pale, like it's been exposed to the sun. This guy's -- this skull has been buried in the desert for years before somebody found it. And then somebody dug it up and they brought it to Adel, and they put it in this case, in the in the Adel store. And this guy, his skull is sitting there. It's got a lot of teeth, sort of grinning at you. And on the side of it -- it's not directly on top of his head, it's off to the side, and it looks like a jaunty yarmulke. And, I felt like he was speaking to me saying, "Brother, there's something you need to do." I felt -- you know, he started something in me. He didn't do anything. He's dead as shit. He's been dead 100 years. He hadn't had a thought in a long time. But he spoke to me. I heard him anyway.

And I started -- I borrowed one of the guys with the crew at a Remington typewriter, and he wasn't using it, and he let me borrow it, and I started writing. And I started writing about Vietnam and about the morgue in Vietnam. And it just wanted to get out. I get back to Tucson [AZ], where I'd been living for the last several years. And, I just, I went back to town. I thought I had a bunch of money because I wasn't able to spend much out there in the boondocks. But it all evaporated pretty quickly. And I'm scrambling once again. You know, like I say the highs were okay, but the lows, I was getting less and less capable of dealing with them. So I called my old man. By then had moved to Hillsboro, New Hampshire, and bought a farm and was getting ready to retire. And I said, "Hey, you got all that acreage up there. Let me build a house up there." And this took some

doing on my part, because, our relationship had not always been comfortable. But it had been as cordial as it had to be for us to maintain any sense of dignity on either end, you know. And to his credit, and he always was a generous guy. He said, "Yeah, come on." So, it didn't happen right away. I took odd jobs in Hillsboro, lived in his shed for a few weeks, picked up a job that worked out well. I really got to speed it up here.

SISITSKY No worries -- don't worry about time. Around what year did you move to Hillsborough?

FOWLE As it happens, I moved -- I made that call in the spring of '75 which was coincidence or not that was the same year same season when the Vietnamese -- when the North Vietnamese drove their tanks through the gate of the US Embassy.

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE It collapsed the same time I did,

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE So, like I said, I was able to get some work in Hillsboro. Things worked out. Things got good in a lot of ways, I landed a job. I had a job. A lot of credit here is due to a friend of mine, Ernie Russell, who hired me to help him work on his house. And then he went off to England for a couple of years and to study woodworking at the London School of Economics for woodworking. And Ernie is a prince of a guy. He let me live in his pretty nice house in Hillsboro, and tend the house for him while he was gone. And then from there, I ended up -- I worked for a while at a sawmill, which was kind of brutal amusement, as they say. And then got a job at Brookstone Company inspecting widgets. It's the widget factory. That was down at Peterborough.

SISITSKY This is all in New Hampshire?

FOWLE Yeah. I'm living -- but at this point, I'm living in Hillsboro, commuting down to Peterborough in New Hampshire for work. And I stopped in one day, at the -- I found myself in the right bar at the right time, at the end of the work day. And the reporter for the Hillsboro Messenger had just finished

wrapping up the paper. And she was attractive young woman, and I felt like talking with her, so I did, and she says, "Listen, this isn't going to get you anywhere, because I'm leaving town to go to back to Minnesota and take a job there, but stick around because Ralph, the editor of the Hillsboro Messenger, is going to be here any minute now, and he's going to need -- he needs a replacement for me." And Ralph, as it turns out, had worked for the US Army radio in Saigon and was editor, and was now editing the paper, and he didn't like to develop film, which is a major part of his job. So when he showed up, he said, "Can you develop film?" I said, confidently said, "Yeah." He said, "Can you write a complete sentence?" "Yeah." "Alright," he says, "Listen, tomorrow, show up. Talk to David the publisher. And if he says, you're in, you're in." And that was it. I got hired on a newspaper and it was great. It was great. My mother was still alive at that point, she was -- she only lived a couple of years after that. She developed Alzheimer's, and went pretty quickly. But I'm always grateful that [pause] she was really happy to see that, because it was the closest thing I'd ever had to, at that point, to a job that at all really suited me.

SISITSKY I appreciate you talking about what it was like returning home and going on this journey both literally when you were out west, and also, just mentally processing your experiences. I know you're currently running the New Hampshire Gazette, and I'm just curious, how has your experience in Vietnam -- how has that impacted your perspective as a journalist? And your career in journalism and working with newspapers?

FOWLE Well, the experience in Vietnam affects me from the top of my head to the soles of my shoes. I mean, there is -- at this point, there is no me without the experience in Vietnam. It's just, it's that -- it had that much of an effect. That's -- I can safely say that. I left well -- so what it brought to my work on the Messenger and at the New Hampshire Gazette is deep and a biting skepticism of anything official. I may slip up sometimes and accidentally, briefly take something that was told to me under cover of authority as being the truth. But, that's an accident, and that's a mistake. You can't believe anything that anybody tells you, because they are a figure of authority. They are more motivated to lie than to tell you the truth. That's just the way of it. For a person in authority to tell the truth is for a person in authority to take a risk. They don't want to do that, if they can help it. You know, they would prefer to lie to you than just tell it to you straight. And me being a perverse fucker that I am, the only thing I want is to find out what the lie is and what the truth is behind the lie. So, I think -- so Vietnam was

the perfect -- it was the perfect, sort of on the job training. Because it tells you, yeah, this matters, alright. It matters alright. Because people are living and dying on the basis of what these fuckers are saying. So don't just -- you can't be making rash assumptions here, that they're telling you the truth. Because it may not matter to you, but it may mean life or death to somebody else. And man, are we ever seeing that acted out right now today, this very day. We are seeing that happen.

SISITSKY Uh-hmm

FOWLE And somehow, the media has done a piss poor job, increasingly poor. They never did the job as well as they should have. Allow me to say, Jesus, it's going to take me a half a second to -- The Brass Check, Upton Sinclair, wrote a book called The Brass Check, and he will -- he wrote a devastating critique of US newspapers. Of course, that's all it was in those days, but that's back in, I think it was the teens. Around the time of the first World War. And you can read that, and that you can take for gospel. Because it's a direct line from there to where we are today. And then there's another guy who, well, he lived 100 years, and he was a journalist for 80 years, and his name is trying to escape me, but he was a press critic. And, oh, Jesus, his brother was a famous Broadway critic. And his name continues to escape me, but, basically -- mid century, press critics look them up because they were telling the truth. AJ Liebling was another guy. You want to know about journalism and telling the truth and its failures. Liebling is good on that. Ask.

SISITSKY I just wanted to ask, how have your feelings surrounding the war and your service changed over time? As well as your own process in integrating your experiences in Vietnam -- how has that impacted you, and what has that journey been like?

FOWLE Good question. Let me see if I can give you a quick but complete answer. When I was there, my intention was, and I told the guy, "I get out of here. I'm forgetting this, all of it, as soon as I can. The whole thing". It's in the rear view mirror, and I'm not looking in the rear view mirror. Of course, that didn't happen for a long time. From the day I landed back in CONUS [Continental United States], until about 1980. I was either trying to shut it out of my mind, or feeling just aggravated and disturbed and not knowing what I -- and confused. Because, I mean, I got out of there in one piece. And I personally took photographs of hundreds of guys who did not. Well

what does that tell you? There's a certain kind of moral calculus that says, and it's not rational, but it's human. And I defy anyone to deny it. There's a certain calculus that you have to perform somewhere in your being that says they're dead, I'm alive, and I'm glad, because I would rather not be him. One, because he's dead, and two, that didn't come easy to him. It was hard to get dead, and it was not a pleasant experience for him. And I cannot imagine what it took for him to go from being alive to being dead. And that was -- I feel bad for this guy, because that had to be harder than anything I can possibly imagine. But I'm glad it was him and it wasn't me. Every time you run that equation, and you run that equation, every time you see that guy -- this guy, the next guy, every one of them. Even though to some degree it's all the same. I believe that you have to do that moral equation in your head or somewhere in your body, in your person, every time. And every time you do that, your debt gets a little bit deeper.

So somehow, at some point, you -- I mean, that's probably what happened in 1975 is that I realized I got to make that reckoning somehow. Because I can't go on [pause]. You can't go on living with that debt without dealing with it somehow. And I didn't know how to do it. I didn't know how to do it. I knew I had to do it. I mean that guy with a jaunty yarmulke on his head -- and it made me realize that somehow I gotta do it, but I don't know how. I don't know how. And I guess I knew I wasn't going to do it without a support system. Because I had been trying and failing, and trying and failing, and dragging myself up out of the gutter every goddamn time, and I was running out of ways I hadn't tried to live some kind of a life. And every fucking time just, you know, eventually it just fell apart. I mean, I just, I try to work a job, but I keep -- a large part of the problem was that whatever I was doing, something in me knew that it wasn't the thing that I had to do. And something about that disconnect, that mismatch, that failure for the one thing to do -- that failure of anything that I was doing to achieve what I needed to do was causing trouble.

I mean, for example, you know, I'm working for the Hillsboro Messenger, and it was for a while, it was the greatest thing, because I got to -- I mean, it's a small town. You got 4000 people. You got some surrounding towns. They all together might make up another two or three or 4000 people, and they're just ordinary, New Hampshire people living their lives. What's not to like? I mean, they're good. They tend to be more conservative than I am, grant you, but they're not bad people. You get to know them. And, they tolerate me, I mean to them -- I'd been familiar with Hillsboro my

whole life, because we had a little camp up in Washington, New Hampshire. Because my father, had connections with people through Georgie Ann and Franklin Pierce, for God's sake. I mean, I'm familiar with all of that stuff. And so I wasn't a local, and they never let me think I was a local. But on the other hand, they put up with me, and they get used to me and some of them like me.

So taking pictures, putting the pictures in the paper, and you bump into somebody say, "Hey, I like that picture you took of so and so," you know, "That's a good picture," stuff like that. It was good, it was good. But there was -- but I was still me, and there was still that part of me that hadn't worked through what it had to work through. And it would make -- that would manifest itself from time to time. And sometimes it manifested itself in conflict with the advertising department. And one day, do you know who Lyndon LaRouche is? Or was? You gotta study up a little bit on Lyndon LaRouche. Do that for me because, well, you will find it rewarding. Lyndon LaRouche, born in Rochester, New Hampshire. New Hampshire man. Wanted to be the second New Hampshire man to be President of the United States. But he took some strange detours along the way. He was a Marxist. He was a lunatic. He was a crank. He was a nut job. And he was running for president in 1980. And one day in, I think it was late ‘79 or early ‘80, right. It was the New Hampshire primary of 1980 and May came in after the advertising deadline and said, "Oh, I'm so excited. I just sold the full page ad to Lyndon LaRouche." And I snapped. I snapped in that I didn't punch her in the face, I didn't strangle her, I didn't threaten to kill her. But the way I said, "Well, that's fine. That's fine, May” -- May [full name withheld at narrator’s request] same name as my grandmother. “That's fine, May. We’ll just tear the whole goddamn newspaper apart, put that fucking thing back together again to accommodate your full page ad from Lyndon fucking LaRouche," or something to that effect. I don't know it might not have -- it might have been less brutal than that.

But I mean, I'd already -- I had long found it difficult to maintain that inner tension that sometimes that took the form of -- when you develop film, you're supposed to tap the container on the counter to dislodge bubbles. But sometimes when I tap the container on the counter, I did it with enough force to probably crush somebody's fingers if they were under there. I was a bull in a china shop. I was stupid enough to behave as if being in the dark room muffled all these noises, but they didn't. I'd be slamming things around in there. The dark room was right next to her

office, and it had probably been making her nervous for months and months. And then finally, one day out there in the office, I just, I go into a brief but suppressed -- a tirade of suppressed violence and express my displeasure that she has violated the advertising deadline. And it's going to cause work for the rest of us, just so she can claim that her advertising income numbers are higher.

And the next day. I think it was the next day when the publisher came in, he said, "I want you to go home." And I forget exactly the timing of it, but basically he fired me. Said, "That's it." I can run this paper without an editor, but I can't run it without a advertising manager, so you gotta go. And that was that. So, it wasn't the first time that I left a job under less than sterling circumstances. So that was about 1980.

At that point things started -- things finally started to go right in that I saw a article in a newspaper about Vietnam Veterans of America meeting in Henniker, one of the towns I used to cover, and I thought, well, I wonder what's going on. I went over and talked to them, and suddenly -- and that was the beginning of everything turning around, because I had never even really thought of myself as a Vietnam veteran. I was just a guy who went to Vietnam and didn't like it, came back. And these guys, I would talk to them, and they'd say, "So what'd you do over there?" "Well, I photographed autopsies for a year." and they would give me a look that said, "Oh, yeah, I understand." And I know they did.

So for about five years, I spent a lot of time with those guys. In fairly short order, they made the mistake of making me the president of the local chapter. And we spent years trying to do things for Vietnam veterans in New Hampshire, and we got a few things done, nothing near what we wanted to get done. But maybe the most important thing we did, at least, and it didn't reach nearly as far as I wanted it to, but those of us that were involved with the chapter, really, we were able by associating with each other, by having group therapy sessions together, and by just chewing the fat with each other, and by getting howling drunk with each other, and just by generally hanging out with each other, all of us benefited greatly. And me, perhaps more than any of them, because I was -- I didn't know who I was. I didn't know who I was. I was very, very confused. I mean, it just -- and I felt, this -- I felt like I was dragging 100 cotton sacks of guilt behind me. And it just, I mean, where do you even start?

But then -- I'm almost, I can almost wrap this up quickly. I eventually -- eventually, the paper changed hands. They hired me back to do a little of this and do a little of that. And then finally, they hired me back, you know, almost full time I think, if I remember right. And I was doing a lot of, a fair amount of work for him anyway. And I guess, if I remember right, I was a full time reporter photographer for a while. And then a local lawyer said he was going to buy the paper. And I'm sorry, but I knew him too well to work for him. And so we started talking about, what if we started another paper? We could start another paper and go into competition with our paper and put it out of business, and squeeze him out, and he can go fuck himself, and we can go back to putting out the paper that that the Messenger was before he came and fucked it up. So that was the plan, except when we figured out how much money it was going to take, and that every nickel we had was gonna -- the only way we could possibly do it was if somebody mortgaged their farm and that was just too much of a risk.

So the whole thing went down to shoot. But during the course of that -- by this time, I had asked myself about that story that my father had told me enough times that I said I'm going to do something about it. And so at the UNH [University of New Hampshire] library, I looked up history of printing in the card catalog back when they still had a card catalog, and found Isaiah Thomas's history of printing. And I looked in the index in the back, and there's Daniel Fowle, who founded the first newspaper in the state of New Hampshire. Son of a bitch. He was down in Boston, Massachusetts, and he had a print shop in Boston, Massachusetts. They printed something the authorities didn't like, and they threw him in jail. And Isaiah Thomas was an apprentice for Daniel's brother, and he wrote the whole history, because Isaiah Thomas with a real firecracker. He was a brilliant guy, and he was a child when all this happened. He was apprenticed to Zechariah Fowle when he was six years old. And he heard this story directly from his master, Zechariah, and he went on to be a huge stinking success in the printing business and in other things.

And he wrote the first history of printing, which I took off the shelf all those years later. And the funniest thing about this whole story is that -- well, so I find out about the New Hampshire Gazette. I say, well, okay, Isaiah Thomas says it went on to become the second oldest newspaper in the country. Well, that's something. I looked in other histories, and it turns out, after his -- after Isaiah’s day, 1839, it's the oldest. It's not the second oldest anymore. It's the oldest as of 1939. Where is it today? And it took

some finding. It turns out that it was bought by the Herald [The Portsmouth Herald], folded into the Herald. And so where's the trade name? Because by this time, I just gotta know, never mind what I'm going to do with it. Well, trade names are registered with the Secretary of State, I went to Concord, asked the Secretary of State, "Who owns the trade name New Hampshire Gazette?" They said, "Nobody, you want it?" "How much?" "$40." "Sold."

So I didn't know what I was going to do with it, but I wasn't gonna just leave it there for $40, I was gonna have it. And gradually I figured out a way to make it work. And here it is today. And the funniest thing about it is that -- I mean, at first, my old man was skeptical. Because I was putting it out now and then, in a single sheet of paper, trading my typesetting skills to the Hillsboro printer, and it didn't really amount to much. And he was skeptical, and he'd always been skeptical of everything I ever did. But eventually I worked it out to where I'm publishing it here, every other week. 1000s of copies. Lots of people reading it, 1000s of readers. And eventually -- I mean, unfortunately, my mother didn't get to see it. She got to see me hired as a reporter. But my father got to see me publish the thing every other week and get some readers, and get some writers, and people. And the thing was happening. It got around to where he gave me some credit for it. And so the funniest thing about it, though, is that he asked me one time, he said, "How did you ever discover all this?" And I said, "Don't you remember?" He said, "Remember what?" "You told me about Daniel Fowle, when I was 10 years old." "I don't remember that. What did I say?" I told him, "There was a printer in the family, way back in the old days. He printed something the authorities didn't like and they threw him in jail. Don't you remember telling me that story?" "No. No, I don't remember that at all." So that's the thread that it all hung by.

SISITSKY Yeah.

FOWLE He might have forgot that story the day he told it to me. Would have been lost forever.

SISITSKY That's certainly very full circle with the Daniel Fowle story. Thank you so much, Mr. Fowle, again for your time. I really appreciated it, and this has been a wonderful interview. Thank you so much.

FOWLE You've been very patient, and I salute your patience, because I can get long winded, and this went on for twice as long as I hoped I could cover it. But you hung in there, and you let me roll, and you asked good question. And you kept your eye on the ball there. You did good.

SISITSKY I appreciate it. Thank you so much again, Mr. Fowle.

FOWLE Thank you very much.

[End of interview.]