Kenneth R. McGruther '65
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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[ELLEN P.]

LI: This is Ellen Li in Rauner Special Collections Library. It is June 1st, 2016, and I'm speaking with Kenneth [R.] McGruther [pronouncing it mik-GROO-thuhr], who is calling from Florida.

Hi, Ken. Could you begin by telling me your parents' names and their occupations?

McGRUTHER: My parents were Ralph Eugene (but he never used his full middle name; he always went by E.) McGruther [pronouncing it mik-GRUH-thuhr]. And my mother is Beatrice Leona—her "nee" name was Lynch. She was only a housekeeper from the time they got married. Before that, she had worked at Prudential [Financial, Inc.], I believe, as sort of a secretary-accountant. My father worked all of his life for what was first Bendix Aviation Corporation, and then the name was shortened to The Bendix Corporation. It was avionics—primarily avionics but then expanded into other areas. His area of expertise was industrial relations, and then the broader element of that was labor relations.

LI: And where were you born, and where did you grow up?

McGRUTHER: I was both born and grew up in Essex County, New Jersey, which is a county directly west of New York City, only about 20 miles from New York City. Actually, I was born at a hospital that was half in Glen Ridge and half in Montclair, New Jersey. Lived in Montclair, Bloomfield, Roseland and Livingston, New Jersey. And I grew up there through 10th grade, and the my dad was transferred to the central offices in Detroit, Michigan, and we lived in Birmingham, Michigan, my last two years, before I came to Dartmouth [College].

LI: And what was your hometown culture like, growing up?

McGRUTHER: Can you be more specific, what you're looking for so I can answer your question more accurately?

LI: Sure. I guess within the context of the 1950s and, you know, the budding Cold War, post-World War II. What was the social makeup of your town? What were the—what did you notice in terms of major issues going on at the time you were growing up? Stuff like that.

McGRUTHER: I wasn't too aware of what was going on until Livingston, so I'll really just speak about that, and we moved there when I was in fourth grade and stayed, as I said, through 10th grade, so I was there for a total of seven years. It was primarily a fairly well-off, suburban community. Most of the professionals that lived in Livingston, New Jersey, worked either in New York City or in Newark, New Jersey, which was the nearest big town.

I don't really know what the—the going issues were, but from a cultural point of view, Livingston developed a reputation as a extremely welcoming, good place for Jews from the New York City and—and northern New Jersey area to move to. I think it was tolerant and then got the reputation for that, so as I was there, there was an increasing percentage of people of the Jewish faith. And they—and the reputation, self-made reputation among the Jewish community was it was the fastest growing Jewish community in the New York City, broader metropolitan area.

But—but I never saw any cultural issues having to do with Jewishness. It was predominantly white. There were some blacks but really not very many. It was pretty monocultural in that sense.

LI: Okay.

And what were some of your hobbies growing up?

McGRUTHER: Well, I was—I was always interested in sports of every kind, so every afternoon after school, at any age, I would be out paying whatever the appropriate sport for the season is, whether it was touch football or baseball in the spring, and either basketball or ice hockey on the local ponds in the winter. And I was a diligent student. I wasn't too socially active in those days and spent—most of my time that I wasn't doing sports, it was focused on studies.

LI: And what were your favorite subjects in school?

McGRUTHER: Well, I always liked anything to do with government and history, and then after that it would probably be mathematics and sociology.

LI: And was your school rigorous? What kind of school was it?

McGRUTHER: Both schools that I went to, and we've been speaking of the Livingston high school—both schools were extremely large. The classes that I was in at both schools was around—I think both of them were between six fifty and seven hundred and fifty students.

LI: Per class?

McGRUTHER: So it was [cross-talk; unintelligible; 5:46] easy to get lost in the—in the largeness of it, so you sort of had to form your group, and my group tended to be those who were in the neighborhood where I was, which was sort of the north end of town. I was quite a ways away from the high school, so we tended to congregate among ourselves. And then the sports friendships that I made.

LI: Mm-hm.

And did you ever express any interest in your father's occupation when you were growing up?

McGRUTHER: I really didn't. I really did not know exactly what I wanted to be. I was a pre-anything as I went through either high school or college. And then college—because that was in large part paid for by the [U.S.] Navy, through the Navy ROTC [Naval Reserve Officer Training Program], I knew I was going to be spending four years in that, and I figured that would be time when I would figure out the rest of it.

LI: Mm-hm.

McGRUTHER: So the short answer is no, Ellen.

LI: [Chuckles.]

And you mentioned that you—or could you talk—tell me about how aware you were of national news or global news at the time, from fourth grade on, I guess. Pre-college days.

McGRUTHER: Oh, I sort of had my head down and my nose in the books or in sports. I didn't really become actively interested in what was going on on the national scene—this would be the '50s we're talking about; it was sort of the sublime [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower years. Everything was rolling along. It really wasn't until the [Richard M.] Nixon-[John F.] Kennedy presidential race in '60—and, of course, I was then in the high school in Michigan by that time, but that's when I really became interested in national politics.

LI: Mm-hm.

And tell me a little bit about your transition to moving to Detroit. What was that community like that you were a part of, and what differences did you notice, if any?

McGRUTHER: Culturally, excepting the Jewish factor, it was largely the same. It was a bedroom community for the executives that worked in the Detroit area, largely to do with the automobiles. It was—it was well off. It was probably financially even better off than—than Livingston, New Jersey, was.

Ask me the question again. It kind of ran out of my stream of consciousness. It just ran the wrong direction there.

LI: [Chuckles.] I was wondering about the transition from Livingston to Detroit.

McGRUTHER: I hated the idea of going. I thought, you know, with only two more years of high school left, and I had my friends, and I had my patterns of what I'd like to do, and so I was not at all in favor of it, but the selling point by my parents was. "Well, the driving age in New Jersey is 17, so you're not gonna be able to drive for another year to a year and a half, but in Michigan it's 16, so we'll put you through driver's ed, and you'll be able to drive when you're 16." That sounded pretty good.

It turns out—and that's not just a tongue-in-cheek anecdote—is that turned out to be fundamentally life-changing sort of thing between the two communities, because kids could drive and they didn't have be chaperoned, so they dated more. They were more socially active. They were more independent. I think they were more mature. And I ended up flourishing. I liked that sort of a social life. There were all kinds of social groups to join, connected through that high school, and so I became very active.

One of them, which will have to do with where we'll go, I guess, in this interview later on, was called BUNA [pronounced BYU-nuh], which stood for Birmingham (the name of the high school) United Nations Association, and this hallmark event of the year was you were assigned to represent a country, and you had a U.N. [United Nations] General Assembly meeting, and so that really got a lot of students interested in not just American politics but in global politics from the perspective of the United Nations. That's one example, but I think that was a particularly important one.

LI: And was that interest in government that you experienced through both your extracurricular and academic pursuits part of what you were looking for in a college later on? Could you tell me a little bit about your college choice and what you were looking for at that time?

McGRUTHER: I knew that because my grades were—were good, I—I was straight A's while I was in Livingston, and they—they stayed pretty good. I sacrificed something for the more active social life in the last two years, but through the first three years, when I started really thinking about college, I knew I could get into an Ivy League or an Ivy League-like school, so my interests were largely focused on Dartmouth, Cornell [University] or Princeton [University]. Princeton was quite close to the town in New Jersey where I had lived. And my best friend from there was going to Princeton. And then some schools sort of like that, Carleton College and Grinnell College, that were in the Midwest, But I was primarily interested, if I could handle the financial load of going to an Ivy League school—

I was the first of my family to be eligible to go to college. Neither of my parents went to college. Nobody in—none of their siblings went to college, so I was sort of the—you know, the hopes and dreams of—of the family future in a sense rode on that. So I was encouraged to go for the very best college that I could get into.

The choice between the three came down to a very simple matter. My dad said, "Look, I don't know anything about colleges, but I—a fellow who works for me went to college, and before he came to work for me he worked in small college administration, so I'll have this fellow, named Everett [R.] Nordstrom [Class of 1947], come and chat you up about colleges.

And Ev was a '46 at Dartmouth, as it turned out. Had gone through, actually, on the accelerated Officer Candidate School that was run in the—during the World War II. And then he laid out, in as objective form as he could, the pros and cons of any college and what to look for in a college, and then he got down to the three I mentioned, and when he got to Dartmouth, he said—[Clears throat and tries to control the quaver in his voice.] I have to gather myself. He said, "I'll tell you, Ken, on a crisp fall afternoon, when you sit in those west stands and look across the football field and see the colors, there's nothing in the world like it."

And I was done. I applied for early admission to Dartmouth, was accepted, and that was the end of my choice making as far as college goes. And I never regretted it.

LI: And did you have any interest in the [U.S.] Navy before joining the [Naval] ROTC program? How did that come about?

McGRUTHER: One of my very best friends in Michigan came from a Navy family, and he was going to apply for the program, and he said, "You know, I think you would like it, Ken." And, you know, it wasn't about whether you would like the Navy, but you'd like that money, because they pay your tuition and a stipend and a certain amount for books, and I thought that would be a wonderful way to help my parents pay for what was going to be a relatively costly college education.

So I applied, largely through a financial motive, but my—two of my—actually, three of my uncles, two by blood and one by marriage had all been in the Navy during World War II, and so they all had good things to say about the Navy. And my mom always said if she had been a boy, she would have joined the Navy, so she always like the concept of traveling. So it was sort of in my blood, I guess, to a certain extent, or at least in the blood in my head.

And so I—I had no objections to four years in the Navy, but it never, ever occurred to me that it would be more than four or maybe five years of service, and then I'd go on to whatever was behind that.

LI: Right. And what were things you heard about the Navy specifically from your family, growing up?

McGRUTHER: That it was rewarding, that it was fun, that the travel was to interesting places, that the Navy takes care of its own and that the uniforms are the best-looking uniforms.

LI: [Chuckles.] Okay.

McGRUTHER: And I also knew that if I was going to go into the military—I was in Boy Scouts [of America], like everybody my age was at that time, and I hated camping out in a tent because, you know, like, invariably it rained and it was uncomfortable and I had a miserable time, so I thought, *Well, if I'm gonna be in the military, at least I want clean sheets and a good bed in a dry place*, so that was another factor.

LI: So tell me about coming to Dartmouth in 1961. What was your first reaction?

McGRUTHER: I never saw the campus before I got there for the first time. And, of course, seeing Dartmouth in its full—full green splendor of—of early September, there's just—it was just great. And everybody was excited and nervous as I was to be there, but friends formed up quickly, usually around the same sorts of things that I interested in doing back in high school, which was around sports and—you know, interested in the sports that were being played by the—the teams but also in intramural and just pickup games of whatever,

basketball or touch football, either on the quad or, you know, in front of the dorms.

So I thought it was beautiful. It was exactly as beautiful as I had hoped it would be from the photographs that I'd seen of it. I never looked back. I never had a freshman schlump [sic; slump], where I said, *Gee, I wish I wasn't here*, even though our parents got warning letters that after the first trimester, you know, a lot of kids would say, *Aw, I miss home, and I wish I'd gone to a school closer.* I never had that. I—I enjoyed being at Dartmouth from the—with some rare exceptions, every day that I was there.

LI: And what was the most difficult part of that first transition for you, if any? Or was it relatively seamless?

McGRUTHER: It's got to be the workload. I mean, the—the workload was incredible compared to what it had been in high school. And—and my first trimester—the standard was to take three courses, but because of Navy ROTC, you had to take Navy ROTC courses, including in the first trimester, so I was actually carrying, you know, 30 percent more workload. Even though it was a Navy course, it still a course, and you still had to do as much reading as in any other course, so definitely the volume of reading that had to be done and study of that reading that had to be done was the most marked change.

LI: And can you tell me about what your responsibilities were with the ROTC program?

McGRUTHER: Well, there was a drill, what they called a drill period once a week. I think it was Wednesday afternoons. And I think all the different ROTC programs had the same time block, so I think that the college kept other courses away from that time.

And then, because I was what was called the "regular" program, which is the scholarship portion of the scholarship, I knew that I would be going on at least a six-week midshipman cruise between each—during each summer break.

And then there were the clas- —I think in total there were eight Navy-specific courses that had to be taken, in addition

to the regular Dartmouth-required course load. And none of those classes—even though they had to do with naval history and naval culture, none of those counted towards the liberal arts requirements of Dartmouth.

LI: Mm-hm. And how many—do you remember how many people were enrolled in this program?

McGRUTHER: There were two versions of it. One was the regular program, which was the scholarship program, and the other was [the] contract portion. And between—and contract was sort of like other ROTC programs. You signed up—you would commit [unintelligible; 19:33] commissioning to two years, and you would get some financial help but nowhere near the—the scholarship level. Between the two groups, I think there were—I think the cap was 20 regulars, and it was about the same number or maybe a little more of the contract sort.

Now, I should clarify that I—I did not actually get my scholarship, Navy ROTC scholarship between high school and Dartmouth, so when I went to Dartmouth, I actually enrolled in the Navy ROTC program as a contract student, but after the first year, the commandant of—of—the Navy officer in charge at Dartmouth had named two people who wanted to transition from the contract to the regular program, and I was one of those two, after the first year, and that did obligate me for the midsummer cruise. And that was approved probably by March or April. I mean, I knew well before the summer that I was going to be a regular student for the next year, and so my scholarship actually was for three years.

LI: And so was this community of around 40 people [an] essential one to your experience while you were here at Dartmouth?

McGRUTHER: Were they what?

LI: Was it one of your central communities at Dartmouth?

McGRUTHER: Yeah, I'd—I'd say it was because those who were interested in the Navy tended to have a common background and common interests, were sort of outgoing, serious but fun-loving, not necessarily the best students but sort of well

rounded, to a large degree. And so I found a lot of commonality, and some of my best friends long since, ever since have been those that I met in the Navy ROTC program, yes.

I'm going to walk to get myself a bottle of water, but I'm on a portable phone, so you can keep talking.

LI: [Chuckles.] Sounds good.

And was there ever a moment that you doubted the decision to enroll in the program while you were at Dartmouth, or did you enjoy it throughout?

McGRUTHER: I loved it my first year. I loved it my second year. I loved it my third year. But then you knew you had to make a choice as to which type of service you were going to go into. You knew that you would get a commission either in the Navy or the Marines [U.S. Marine Corps], but you could go into the Marines or aviation or submarines or surface warfare or supply officer, so I had to make a decision about which direction I was going to go.

I always thought the Navy was best represented by destroyers and cruisers, sort of the combatant warships, so there was not much doubt in my mind that that's where I wanted to go, so when I got my choice—and depending on which choice you think you're making, your third summer cruise, the one between junior and senior years, was on that type of either platform or in that line of the service.

Excuse me while I take a drink.

So I was assigned to a destroyer, [U.S.] Atlantic Fleet, now U.S. Fleet Forces Command], out of Norfolk, Virginia, which was in the Mediterranean [Sea] when I picked her up and sailed around there for a while and then came back to Norfolk, a total of six weeks.

I hated it. It was a very clique-ish wardroom, which is the group of officers. The captain was sort of a back biter. The XO [executive officer] was kind of a wuss. He just didn't come across as the sort of example of what I thought a naval officer ought to be. And I—he was—when I said that almost

all my time at Dartmouth, with a limited exception, was all positive, this was the negative.

When I came back from that summer, at the start of my senior year, I was—well, all at sea, I guess. I didn't know which way I wanted to go because I thought, *If that's what the service work in the Navy is like, I don't want any part of it, and maybe I don't even want to be in the Navy at all.*

I'll stop there. You can ask whatever question you want from there.

LI: Yeah, so I guess how did you grapple with that, going into your senior year and ultimately make a choice?

McGRUTHER: I went in two directions. I decided, *Well, at least I'm gonna have as much fun as I can possibly have while I'm at Dartmouth, because I don't know what's gonna lie beyond*, so I concentrated much less on studying and much more on road tripping and partying in my fall trimester, and my grades showed it. I ended up going on academic probation when I had been carrying a B average up till that point. So it was sort of, you know, a result of depression.

And the other was I talked to—he wasn't actually one of my instructors at the time, but he was a young officer who was part of the program faculty, and he—he had been an aviator, and I still remember: I was standing in front of Robinson Hall, I think, and chatting with him, and he said, "Well, Ken, do you picture yourself driving around in a black sedan, or do you picture yourself driving around in a red convertible with beautiful women everywhere?" And I said, "Well, that's an easy choice." And he said, "Well, then, you want to go aviation." "Okay." So [chuckles]—so I said, "All right, I'll be—I'll be a Navy aviator, not a—not a service ship driver."

And that's what I got. You always—you always got your—your selection of at least the general type, so when I graduated from Dartmouth, I went to Pensacola, Florida, to start to be a naval aviator.

LI: Stepping—

McGRUTHER: So that's dealing with it by not dealing with it, I guess. [Both chuckle.]

LI: Stepping back for just a little bit,—

McGRUTHER: Yeah.

LI: —did you perceive any changes—or I guess let me rephrase. How did Dartmouth's culture or campus change throughout your time there? [Recording glitch at 26:20]

No worries. So I think we just—

McGRUTHER: —thing that—we were—we were the last or the next to last class of things were going along smoothly. The biggest event that happened, of course, would be the assassination of President Kennedy, which was in—early in—in junior year.

LI: I believe so. What was the campus reaction to that event?

McGRUTHER: It was—it was like somebody had drawn—drawn a black cloud over the whole campus. Everybody just sort of sat and—either sat and watched the TV or sat in the living room or—or in their dorm rooms and just sort of—nobody—couldn't believe it.

LI: And did you often talk about—

McGRUTHER: A little depression, I would say.

LI: Sorry, could you repeat that?

McGRUTHER: Yeah. It was like the whole campus was just in a total mope, a total depression.

LI: And how often did you discuss any national issues while you were at school? Did that ever come up in conversation amongst you and your classmates?

McGRUTHER: Well, of course, it was—after Kennedy was assassinated, then—then there was the '64 election, so the rise of Barry [M.] Goldwater, and then his campaign against Lyndon [B.] Johnson energized the campus, as it did lots of places, lots

of campuses, I presume. And so the national issues focused around the '64 election. The answer is definitely yes.

LI: And within the ROTC group in particular, how was—what was the general outlook on military service? Obviously, it's a very specific and self-selective group, but what was the sentiment about service at the time?

McGRUTHER: Well, it was the time of the draft, of course, first off, so therefore the option of going in as an officer or going in by being drafted as an enlisted was stark, and most people that went to Dartmouth themselves, if they had to make a choice between the two, thinking that military service, unless you had a waiver of some sort, was going to be inevitable, would much rather be in one of the services as an officer. So the ROTC program was embraced and—and much sought after—all three: Air Force, Army and Navy.

I think the Navy was the most selective of the three, and the Air Force second most, and then the Army was the easiest to get into. But neither the Air Force nor the Army had anything like the scholarship program that the Navy offered.

LI: And so do you think that was why it was the most selective?

McGRUTHER: That was why what was—

LI: Is the fact that the Navy had the scholarship program why it was the most selective of the three?

McGRUTHER: Well, it may have had to do with—with service demands as well because there was the prospect, at least, that the Vietnam War was—was going to increase and therefore increase the demands for Army officers. I think there was more expansion in the Army program, whereas the fleet was going to stay the same size, so it was sort of naturally capped at whatever its level had been, 40 to 45.

LI: And did you ever discuss the Vietnam War and the prospects of where it was going, within the ROTC program?

McGRUTHER: Not so much in the ROTC program. We talked about it a lot in my fraternity and in my senior society. That's where you had more bull sessions on lots of topics, and, of course,

Vietnam, as that was starting to ramp up after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, was certainly one that got a lot of attention at that point.

LI: And what were—was there a general consensus about opinion on the Vietnam War in those discussions?

McGRUTHER: I wouldn't say there was a consensus. I think it was a topic ripe for conversation, whether—whether the Gulf of Tonkin incident was exactly as it had been described or whether it was trumped up, whether it had been invited or whether it just was the North Vietnamese that initiated it. And then the reaction to it, of course, and then the subsequent increase when Operation Rolling Thunder, which was the air strikes against the North, started in response to the attack on Da Nang.

So there were a lot of opinions. I would say they were roughly even, as I can remember, but that were that "the president is right, we can't stand for being treated like that. We're there for the right reason, and we need to [unintelligible; 32:08] the president says, and we need to support the president." And others saying, "We're being dragged into something that we shouldn't be in or at least shouldn't be there in any more than advisory capacity."

LI: And what were your—what was your major while at school?

McGRUTHER: Government.

LI: Government.

McGRUTHER: It was government, and I took—I think you had to take eight courses in whatever your major was at that time. I took nine government courses, but I took eight history courses as well, so I—almost equal in history and government. Between the two, that was about 40 percent of my total load.

LI: And do you remember any classes in particular that were your favorites that you studied while here?

McGRUTHER: Well, I loved the Theory of Government. It was then called Govie 5, sort of, you know, the deep historical roots of different political theories. I liked that a lot. I liked the course

on International Law. But I think much more, the Political Theory was—was what I enjoyed the most.

LI: And were there any traditions that your class loved at Dartmouth or that you loved at Dartmouth while you were here?

McGRUTHER: Well, we really didn't like the beanies, but it was part of the tradition, so, you know, we—we were very much into the "lest the old traditions fail" sort of thing, so whether we liked the traditions or not, we kind of went along with them, so there was the bonfires and—and—in fact, back then we had bonfires for every home football game. There was the ringing of the bell after home football victories. There was the tradition of ice hockey games on Occom Pond [in Hanover, New Hampshire] and of all kinds of intramural and other sports, pickup sports on the—on the [Dartmouth] Green.

LI: And if you had to criticize Dartmouth of one thing during your time there, what would that be?

McGRUTHER: [Pause.] I don't know that I really had any—any criticism. I'll come—I'll say one, but it's still a small bump. During rush my junior year, two black students came to rush, to my fraternity, which was The Tabard at the time. And there was a not very nice incident where the president of the house told them that, you know, they're welcome to rush but don't plan on being members, applying here for membership. And obviously, that was distasteful, but—but most of the views of the—of the house members were he was out of order and we will take care of it. But the college, we thought, overreacted and came down hard on the house in general, when we thought it was really the—the opinion of one person. So we thought that was an overreaction, but you know, that was—that came and went relatively quickly, and—and there was no direct schmear [sic; smear] on—on my personal record as a result of it.

LI: And was there—was that kind of sentiment across campus very common, or was that member an outlier, would you say?

McGRUTHER: I think it was very much an outlier. I think it was outlier within the house. I mean, there were—many of the house members were outraged that that had happened.

LI:` Mm-hm.

And so in thinking—tell me a little bit about your transition from Dartmouth to the Navy.

McGRUTHER: My—my first tour was assigned to go to Pensacola, Florida, which was where all prospective naval aviators got their training, at least their initial training. So I drove to Pensacola. There were, I believe, nine of us from the Dartmouth Navy ROTC program who chose aviation, so buddied up with—we—we ended up dividing into three groups of three and—and getting three different places to stay. And those two were close friends, had been at Dartmouth, became even much more closer when I was at Pensacola. We tended to do everything at least in threes and then, many of us from Dartmouth stayed in relatively close touch while we were there.

Because—because the Rolling Thunder air program had ramped up—I think it was in the spring of '65—the Navy was starting to—let me see if I can get this right—was starting to take more applications for aviators because they could see a need for—for more naval pilots to fly off the carriers against North Vietnam. But that had just happened, so they were—they were taking in more officer—more aviation candidates, but it took a while to move—change the pipeline to be able to move that many students through the program.

As a result, there was—there was a staggered waiting line to start, and at the front of line were the guys that had graduated from the [U.S.] Naval Academy. And so they sort of took up all the—the starting positions for July, August and into September, so our start date, as I recall—I think that was true of every one of us from Dartmouth—was not until late September, early October or—or later.

So we were assigned to temporary duty. We were assigned to—we were in the Navy, we were officers, we were paid as officers, but they had to find something for us to do, so I was assigned to the legal office at one of the bases, the five air

bases. This one was [Naval Air Station] Ellyson Field [Florida], which is the helicopter base in Pensacola.

But they didn't really know what to do with us; we were just extra officers, so we worked about four hours a day, and they told us to go home. We'd done everything that was necessary and probably more. And so we usually went to the golf course or—or—or to the tennis courts or—or whatever else we wanted to do for the afternoons. So that was a very easy, fun transition, but it was kind of—you know, look, my clock was supposed to start when I graduated four years of obligated service, and then, if you're an aviator, your clock restarts from the time you get your wings, and it's three and a half years of obligated service from the time you get your wings.

So all of a sudden, you're going to wait. You're going to go through the aviation program. That's going to take a year and a half, and the you got three and a half years to start then. So all of a sudden, this four-year obligation is starting to look like a six- or six-and-a-half-year obligation because we're not doing anything. We're not getting started.
So it was fun, and it was easy, but it was tedious, and there was a sense of time was slipping by and nothing was happening.

LI: So you were frustrated a little bit?

McGRUTHER: Yeah. You know, I mean, for a while it was just nothing but fun and games, and then it was, like, "Aw, c'mon, let's get this show on the road here."

LI: And so how did that, I guess, interim period finally come to an end?

McGRUTHER: There was some kind of a scheduling glitch, and for the life of me, I can't remember exactly what it was, but one of my two—actually, I think it was both of my two roommates and I all misunderstood when and where we were supposed to report, and we were an hour late or something like that, and they said, "Well, you can't start with this group. Then you'll have to wait until there's some more openings."

And so there was another three- or four-week delay. And I was kind of outraged at—at that. I thought, you know, it was a mistake, but it shouldn't have cost us a month penalty, basically. So I was getting a little bit ir- —now I was starting to get frustrated in the sense of irate with the program.

But we started, and I think—I think we started in mid November, finally, so it was four and a half months after graduation we finally started doing what we had gone to Pensacola to do.

And you go through a six-week preflight—I forget—basic, I guess it is, and then you graduate from that, and then you—then you start preflight. Well, by the time we—I guess we started in early November because then it was mid December when we finished that, and then they said, "Well, there's no point in continuing school because there's so many people that take leave over Christmas, so there'll be a stand-down and you won't start the next phase until the second week of January."

And I thought, *This is really starting to mount up. It's now going to be six months plus before I even get started,* and I really didn't enjoy the first phase all that much, the basic preflight. So the more I looked at it and the more I talked to people, the more I started to think—and by the way, I really did want destroyers. My view of what a naval officer does is, you know, stand on the bridge of a ship and—and run out the guns and that sort of thing. And it was looking to me like if you're going to be an aviator—

Well, there's two things here. If you're going to be an aviator, in my book, you might as well go with the best. You might as well be a jet pilot, and you might as well fly either fighters or attack planes. But there's relatively few of—of the total that go there because you also could be assigned to be a helicopter pilot or be a propeller-driven airplane pilot. So the odds of getting exactly what I wanted out of aviation was starting to look slimmer.

And I was not—you know, as you'll see from what I said about what I studied, enjoyed studying most in high school and college, I was very much on the qualitative side. I wasn't very much of a techie guy. And it was a very technically

specific curriculum, and you had to know how all the parts worked and how all the aerodynamics worked, and that was not my strong suit. So I wasn't doing nearly as well academically, and so I thought, *You know, I'm going end up getting through this, getting my wings if I do stay with it and not be flying jets after all.*

And, by the way, by this time we were now heavily in Rolling Thunder, and pilots were being shot down, and I was one of the—when I think about the side of—two sides of the discussion back at Dartmouth about Vietnam, I was of the latter. I thought that—I smelled a rat in the Gulf of Tonkin incident. I didn't trust President Johnson anyway, about a lot of things, but about the way he was portraying what was going on in Vietnam. And I didn't like the idea of flying into—you know, through a lot of flak and missiles and maybe being shot down.

So it was a dangerous enough business without that sort of thing going on, so add those two different arguments together, and I sort of said, *Is this really where I want to be?* Three arguments, actually. And as I went home for Christmas, I pretty much made up my mind that it was not what I wanted and that I probably couldn't go directly from there to a combatant ship, but I could work my way in that direction, and what I really wanted to do was be in charge of troops, because it was looking to me like being a pilot was nothing much more than being a highly glorified bus driver. Or flying in a target.

LI: So—

McGRUTHER: So that pretty much—I pretty much came back after Christmas break, which was somewhere around the first week of January, with my mind probably 75 to 80 percent made up that I really didn't want to continue with the aviation program and I better get on with getting back into the surface Navy.

And they—they always threatened you with, you know, "You're gonna get a miserable set of orders to the worst place in the world on the worst possible ships and oilers and stuff like that," and I thought, *Well, I'll deal with that.* So I finally just walked in and said, "I'd like to just call a DOR", a

drop on request. And there was no push-back. He said, "That's fine. If that's what you want, I'll—we'll tell Washington. Just sit tight and stand by for orders." And that was—that was around the middle of January, when I dropped.

LI: And that's January of 1966, correct?

McGRUTHER: Correct.

LI: Okay.

And so you mentioned that you didn't trust President Johnson and had doubtful views on the Vietnam War, I guess.

McGRUTHER: Yup.

LI: So what did you think of the possibility of being sent to Vietnam?

McGRUTHER: Well, if I was on a ship and going to be off Vietnam, I—I didn't—that didn't bother me at all. I mean, I'd go wherever the ship would go, and going to Vietnam was as good as going anywhere else, so I had no objections to being off shore and never thought about, at that point—at least never thought about the idea of being in country.

LI: So you had no qualms about it, then, I guess.

McGRUTHER: No. Nope.

LI: Okay.

And how did you finally make that transition from the aviation to the destroyer?

McGRUTHER: When my—when my orders came, they were to a minesweeper, which is a very small ship. I would be the fifth of five officers and crew of about 65 or 70. I would have my own direct responsibility for a department, for a department of 15 to 20 sailors, and a lot of extra work. There's all the different collateral duties that ships of any size have; it's just

the bigger ships have more officers to do them. And so we only had three or four officers to do that.

And I was ready to work. I mean, I hadn't been working for—since I left Dartmouth, and I was, like, "All right, bring it on." So I—I fit in quite naturally. And I had never been west of the Mississippi River, and my orders were to a minesweeper out of Long Beach, California, at the time that the Mama & Papa's [sic; The Mamas & the Papa's] hit song, "California Dreamin'," was popular. And I thought, *That's my song.* I was ready to go.

And then—so I did—I did my tour for about—I think I did 19 months on the minesweeper, and then—I did very well, and the captain really—really liked me and said, "What can I recommend you for?" And I said, "I want destroyers." And so I got sent to and old but very much fun and interesting radar picket destroyer.

And then my third tour was on a brand-new destroyer. It was just being built. And I was on the commissioning crew. By that time, I was sort of a regular destroyer officer.

LI: So if you could give me the name of your first ship, which was the minesweeper.

McGRUTHER: Right. That was USS *Loyalty*, and its designation was MSO-457. MSO stands for minesweeper oceanic, larger form of minesweepers.

LI: And what was your role specifically, and what were your duties associated with that?

McGRUTHER: Originally, I was assigned as—there—let me drop back for a little bit of background. There is a supply corps that is specifically trained to do nothing but supply officer duties: dispersing food service, stock keeping spare parts and so forth. On a ship as small as a minesweeper, they didn't have room for a supply officer to do that, so I was what was called a line officer—line supply officer. So I had to do those duties. I was in charge of the supply department and was responsible for the food—not the—not the payment; that was done by whatever the biggest ship around was, usually a carrier—but food service, parts and supplies.

And so my first job on—on it was supply officer, sort of in training to be the—it was called the deck officer, basically responsible for the minesweeping gear, the guns and the maintenance of the topsides of the deck—of the ship.

LI: And what was the culture like aboard the ship?

McGRUTHER: What was what, the culture?

LI: Mm-hm.

McGRUTHER: [Chuckles.] The officer—the commanding officer of the ship was a [unintelligible; 50:58] when he didn't have a Navy uniform on and wasn't on board a ship. A great social, very nice to his family. His wife loved him. And he was—he went to school to learn how to be a commanding officer by studying Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*. I say that tongue in cheek because it was almost literally true. I mean, you could almost see the same sorts of yellowtail [sic; yellowstain] and strawberry incidents. It was like he made a point of being as nitpicky and small-minded and focused on the administrative rather than the operational aspects of—of what the ship did. It was important to look good in inspections. It was less important to actually be effective operationally.

So he was very dominating, but fortunately the number two in command, the executive officer, was a hail-fellow-well-met, and he sort of balanced out the captain fairly nicely, so you could go to him, and he sort of kept things running okay.

But there was a bit of a culture of fear of being shouted at, relieved of—of whatever watch you were standing if the captain was dissatisfied, getting poor fitness reports, which is the grading system. So he basically ran a command by terror.

I was very fortunate. I came on board at the exact same time as the new officer who came in as the engineering officer, and by a combination of luck—I ended up shining, and poor Joe took the brunt of the captain's anger, so I—I did well, and I loved it. I loved working that hard. I joined the ship when it was already deployed to the western Pacific [Ocean].

Met her in Subic Bay in the Philippines. So we were already operational a few days after I came on board. We went over to Vietnam to work on Market Time, Operation Market Time patrol off Vietnam. I qualified extremely early to be officer of the deck, to be in charge on the ship when the captain's asleep, and I was where I belonged. I loved it.

LI: And could you tell me a little bit about the ship's role in Operation Market Time?

McGRUTHER: The—the coastal area off—off Vietnam was divided into nine zones. It was four military zones inland, but there were nine zones off shore, I think seven that sort of went down towards Saigon. Zone 8 was around Saigon and the Mekong River mouth, and then 9 was around to the west—western side of the peninsula.

We were each—each naval zone had one patrolling vessel that was usually a minesweeper but—but not necessarily; it could be a destroyer of some sort. And—and sometimes there were other ships there, in which case the minesweeper or destroyer would be in tactical command of the other units, but mostly—mostly, you had a zone, and you had to make sure that nobody that wasn't identified made a run, presumably from North Vietnam, with weapons on board into the beach.

And I don't know what the math breaks down to when you divide the coastline of Vietnam into nine. I don't know how long the coastline is, but it seems to me it was 150 miles, maybe, wide. Maybe not that much, maybe 125. And it extended out about 60 miles.

LI: So on average, how long were you at sea for in each period between reliefs, I guess?

McGRUTHER: I think it was probably around 40 to 50 days.

LI: And was that mentally grueling?

McGRUTHER: You had to keep the crew busy so they didn't get bored, but that was easy to do because there weren't a whole lot of crew, and the watch standing while you're at sea takes up a lot of time. I mean, somebody's got to be watching the

engine room, somebody's got to be watching the topside, and you had to had response crews ready to board if you did intercept a suspect ship. There had to be that.

But basically being at sea and being in an operational environment is why ships go to sea, and so everybody thought we were doing what we were supposed to do, and it was a hell of a lot better than minesweeping, by the way, because it really had something to do with, you know, trying to protect the—the folks ashore from invaders, but invaders in the sense of supply ships.

So it was—it was—I'd say morale was generally pretty good. And sailors always like to get off the line and back to shore to both do some maintenance that you can't do when you're steaming 24 hours a day and also to do some individual steaming on the beach. But while we were out at sea doing what you're supposed to do, it's hard to—hard to complain about that.

LI: And did you have much recreational time at sea?

McGRUTHER: No. There were only three—three or four watch standing officers. We had—one of our officers got injured and had to be Medevac'd, and so I moved into his slot, which was operations officer, which is in charge of the combat center and the communications and the electronics of the ship. And he was not replaced for quite a long time and may not even have been at all, for the rest of my tour of duty.

So the CO [commanding officer] and the XO did not stand watches, so when you're at sea, you're standing four hours on and eight hours off, so there's eight hours a day when you're doing nothing but standing watches, being officer of the deck. And then the other eight hours or so, you have to do whatever your main job was, and eat and then sleep.

And then the communications systems, the crypto, the coding system, was very primitive, so any classified signals that came to the ship came in a—not a automated, decrypted form, because that equipment wasn't—it may have been in the fleet, but it wasn't down to the minesweeper level, so it had to be manually decoded, and only officers could do that. So you usually spent two to three

hours after you came off watch in the crypto room, decoding messages.

The answer to your question was simply: No.

LI: And tell me a little bit about the next ship you were on, the radar picket destroyer.

McGRUTHER: Yeah, I went there also as operations officer, with the same set of responsibilities. That ship was home ported in Hawaii, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. It was built in 1944 and had been on what was called a DEW line, Defense Early Warning line, because it had a very powerful air search radar and had been stationed—this class of ship had two or three or four of them stationed sort of in a line around Greenland, Iceland to watch for any Soviet Union bombers that might come across the North Pole area and try and attack. They had radars on land to look over the North Pole, but they broadened it by using these destroyers.

The were built with diesel engines, which meant they had extremely long legs. They could stay at sea for a long time without refueling, and so they were also cast into the role of Market Time, but also because they had guns, far bigger guns than the minesweeper had, they would also be called in close to shore to provide gunfire support when needed for forces that were ashore, within reach of the guns.

LI: And how did your experience differ between the two?

McGRUTHER: For one thing, I had two of the finest officers I've ever met as the two commanding officers back to back. The first one remained a friend and mentor ever since. Still is. And changed my whole outlook on what a commanding officer could be like and—and most likely would be like. And it was a very high-morale ship, a very closely-knit wardroom. They got on extremely well.

The pressures on board for all the work was more spread out because there were more officers. There were 14 to 16 officers on board [at] any time. And the combination of—of things we did and—and just the harmony that was set by the example of the commanding officer and also the executive

officer, who was a real fine fellow as well. It was one of the best tours I ever had.

LI: And how regular was your access to news?

McGRUTHER: On the minesweeper, not very much. On—by the time we got to the radar picket destroyer, it was quite good. We—we would get what was called "The Fox," which is sort of the general fleet broadcast [Fleet Broadcasting System (FBS)], and that would have what was going on not just in the fleet but what was going on in the world. And so you had the daily input, almost like a newspaper, of what was going on.

LI: And that was mainly your only source of information.

McGRUTHER: Yeah, it really was. There's nothing else when you're out at sea.

LI: Mm-hm.

And could you briefly describe your technical duties on that second tour?

McGRUTHER: Yeah. It was—it was the same in terms of the responsibility of the department head, who's the operations officer. Now I have a junior officer working for me in charge of communications, a junior officer working for me in charge of the combat information center, and a junior officer working for me in charge of the ship's electronics, so I was in much more of a supervisory rather than a hands-on leadership role.

But I soon—I don't really recall how—how long into that tour—I soon was the senior watch officer, the most senior in grade of the watch-standing officers, so I probably spent at least as much time training officers how to stand watches and how the ship handled and, you know, just how to—how to—yeah, stand watches in all respects and monitor their broadening and—and their growth as naval officers in—in—in things out of the lane of their particular assignment on the ship.

LI: And did your opinion of the war or the conflict change throughout these periods of time?

McGRUTHER: I just—I got a beep that my phone is running out of juice, so here comes the switch. Stand by.

LI: Sure.

McGRUTHER: Okay.

LI: Great.

McGRUTHER: Okay. So ask that question again, please.

LI: My question was did your feelings or opinions about the Vietnamese conflict change at all throughout your service?

McGRUTHER: Yes. The more it went on, the uglier it looked, and the closer you got to it, the more you saw the cynicism and the things that—that were—the things that were wrong with it. If you want examples, I can go into one or two.

LI: Yes, that would be great.

McGRUTHER: When we went in for a naval gunfire job, called in, the captain—this was the second captain now. He really saw himself as a blood-and-guts kind of officer, and he kept saying, "Get me a mission!" So we called up the beach and ask him and run up and down and ask everybody on every frequency if they had anything we could shoot at, and if somebody said that they did—you know, they got tired, I think, of us whining for a job and so we—we went in fairly close to the beach and fired on the direction of the gunfire control crew that was on the beach.

And after you're finished, you have to file a report. The title of the report was called an Op Rep Four, Operational Report Type Four. The reports [unintelligible; 1:05:45] how many rounds you fired, who you fired in support of, where you were geographically, and you had to report what damage was done.

And so we knew all the first three, but when we called in for the damage done, the—the answer was something like, "Well, you knocked down two tree lines and exploded one bunker, filled in one bunker and"—you know, something else

that was sort of innocuous, which probably was all we did. All we had was a three-inch gun. It wasn't a big gun by any means.

So I called—our combat center was down in—in the bottom of the ship, so I called up to the bridge to tell the captain what the results were, and he said, "Ah, bullshit! That's not good enough. Go back and ask 'em again." So I called back to the beach and said, "Uh, the captain would like you to verify damage report." He says, "Okay, I got it. Uh, how about three KIA [killed in action], two wounded, two hooches destroyed and a number of troops on the run." And I said, "Oh, the captain's gonna love that. Thanks."

And I called up, and he said, "Great! Oh, that's wonderful!" And that's what I put in the report, and all those reports, many of which probably looked exactly as cynical as that, where the damage—all the damage that we were doing to the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese and—and the country—that's how they were put together. It was the most cynical thing I think I ever saw.

And we had a reunion of this particular ship's wardroom just last—what was it now?—October. And the cap- —both the commanding officers were there, and that commanding officer still thought—we went around at dinner and said, "Okay, what's your most memorable thing that you did on this ship?"—which was named USS *Hissem*, *H-i-s-s-e-m*. His most memorable thing he did in his year-and-a-half tour as commanding officer was, "We got three KIA on a mission that we fired." He still thought that was the best thing he ever did. So that's one.

And then another one, and I told this at the panel that we had at my fiftieth reunion last June, also—whenever you would report into one of these offshore zones you would then send a—a liaison party ashore to meet with whatever the military command was so you get all your call signs right and sort of know—you know, get to meet each other and sort of get your—everything coordinated so that you could work together whenever you would need to do that.

And so I didn't always go in with those, but either I or one of my officers from the operations office—operations

department always did. In this case, I did with a couple of enlisted, and I think there was one other officer. And we met with the CO and XO of the Marine unit that was close to shore and a couple of other guys. They were in two Jeeps, and we said "Goodbye and good luck, and give us a call if we can help you at all and support you in any way," and they said, "Great." And then we thought what wonderful guys they were.

And when we got back to the ship, we found out that the Jeep that they were riding back to their camp in had been blown up by a mine, and one of them was dead, and the other had his legs blown off. And I was sick—sick to my stomach. That's the closest I was to actual casualties, but it really made a life-long impression about how cynical the war was.

LI: And so after this tour on the USS *Hissem*, did you have an option to switch, or what was—what was the—

McGRUTHER: Well, I was running to the end of—

LI: —process afterwards like?

McGRUTHER: —my four-year tour, and I didn't have anything in particular in mind as to what I wanted to do next, but this first commanding officer, whose name was [James A.] "Jim" Barber—he was saying, "You know, Ken, you're a real natural. You just—everything seems easy for you." And he was a Navy ROTC graduate himself, and—and he said, "And it's—it's fun. And he spoke to me about the advantages of a Navy career, and he said, "And by the way, you're not only good at it, but it looks like you love it." And I said, "Well, I do." He said, "Well, why don't—why don't you stay for another tour and see what happens? Unless there's something pressing that you want to go back to graduate school or you have, you know, a business—a family business or something you need to get into." And I thought, *Yeah, why not?*

He said, "Well, at least—at least stay—I'll put you in for, you know, a fancy new ship, and we'll see what comes out of it." And he did, and I got orders, which I could have turned down, but I got orders to a ship that was just being built,

brand new, the new class of ship, subsequently called a fast frigate. That is a destroyer type. And again as operations officer, and by being operations officer at that level, on that new and fancy a ship, I had preempted having to go to destroyer school, which mostly you had to do in order to become a department head on a destroyer. And so I sort of jumped ahead, and so I think that was one of the most formative events for me, was to be assigned to the USS *Roark*, *R-o-a-r-k*.

LI: And how long were you there for?

McGRUTHER: I reported in September—or August, I guess it was, of 1969, and I stayed there until I left the Navy for the first time in 1971, July 1971, so I was there about 20 months, 22 months.

LI: And how did your roles—were your roles there essentially the same as on the *Hissem*?

McGRUTHER: It was the same. All the equipment was modern, and, you know, the sonar was one of the most powerful sonars we had. The gun was a big gun. And the duties were—we—you still did some off-Vietnam work, but when you went in on—on the gun line, you had a much bigger gun, much greater range. It could do more damage. And we also did a lot more work with aircraft carriers. We had not done any work with—with carriers as part of a battle force on the two previous ships. That was all independent operations.

LI: So then what did you do after 1971 when you left the Navy for the first time?

McGRUTHER: Let me go back and answer a question you didn't ask, which is why did I decide to leave.

LI: Mm-hm.

McGRUTHER: And it's because that commanding officer, who was an even finer officer, I thought, than—than Capt. Barber had been, said, "You—you're really a hot runner. I'm sure that you are going to be eligible to go to postgraduate school or—or to the [U.S.] Naval War College. You've been at sea for basically almost six years, had three tours of duty, and

you're—you're due for some down time where you can learn, you know, what the shore Navy is, is all about and sort of re-gather yourself." And I said, "Okay, we'll see what happens."

And he called back to Washington to argue on my behalf, and he came back and said, "I've got some good news and bad news. The good news is you're one of the highest-ranked lieutenants in the U.S. Navy, and the bad news, from your point of view, is all the best lieutenants in the U.S. Navy are going in country to Vietnam," because Admiral [Elmo R.] Zumwalt [Jr.], who was the chief of naval operations, newly installed at that point, had been in Vietnam himself, and he said, "That's where the action is. That's where all the best officers have to go."

And both for the specific sorts of reasons of the examples I gave you and also because the more I saw of the war, the more I heard of the war, the more I thought of what it was doing to the country, the less I liked it, I didn't like that option at all. But he said, "Because you're so well ranked, you can basically choose any job in country you want, so spend some time thinking about what you want to do ashore, and then you'll have a year ashore, and then you can have any job that you—you know, go anywhere that you want."

And I thought about it, and I thought about it, and I thought, *There is no way that I need to go live like an Army officer and eat snakes in order to prove that I'm a good Navy officer, and that war sucks, and I don't want any part of it.* And that's why I resigned. And I resigned tentatively, because I had spent my full six-year option all on active duty, so I had no remaining obligation for any kind of Reserve duty, so I resigned my commission completely and did not intend to have anything to do with the Navy thereafter.

And I went home to my family in Michigan and from there looked at—for a number of jobs for about three or four months and finally took one. It was actually through a Dartmouth connection. There was the fellow named William Petty—I don't know what his class year was—who was heading the marketing department for a company called Associates Financial Services. The president of the company had decided that marketing was a key to

expanding business, which was a new concept in the world of personal finance companies.

And so Bill was putting together bright, young people to staff this—this new concept, and it was the Dartmouth connection that got me an interview with him and I think got me hired, and that's—I worked as a marketing associate and then assistant marketing manager, and then I think I was promoted to marketing manager about the time that I decided to leave and go back into the Navy. That was in South Bend, Indiana, by the way.

LI: So did you miss the Navy once you had left it?

McGRUTHER: Not at first, but after I stopped being pissed off at it, I started realizing that I liked the order of the way things were done, the hierarchical system, and most of all I missed the sense of service, and so I thought, *I think I really would like to go back into government*, because working to find ways to sell people loans, many of whom can't afford what they already have, just is not as personally rewarding as what I did in the Navy was.

And the EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] was new at that point, so I applied for the EPA, and I thought the intelligence business might be fun and challenging, and so I applied to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], and while I was at it, I applied to the Navy. And the Navy answered first and said, "Yes, we're just starting to re-expand after the Vietnam draw-down, and there's room for four officers, and we will accept you back on active duty."

I had sort of taken an interim step by re-applying for a Reserve commission so that I could at least drill on weekends, but then I quickly realized that that wasn't the real thing, so I thought, *If I'm gonna do this Navy thing in terms of service to country, I'm gonna do it as a full-up officer.* So I applied not as a Reserve but I applied to reestablish my regular commission, and that was what was approved.

LI: And then once approved, where did you head?

McGRUTHER: They sent me to the Pentagon, to the chief of naval operations staff, I think sort of as a—as a—it's—that's a very

large staff, but it's in the Pentagon, and I think I was there more in a holding position until they decided what they really wanted to do with me.

I'll add parenthetically that my—my marriage—I had married a woman I had met during my second tour of duty, and I married her during my third tour of duty, but the marriage was rocky, and she was in need of—of psychological help I thought of the sort that her parents could provide, and her parents were in the Washington, D.C., area, so moving to Washington seemed like a good idea, so I actually asked for some sort of Washington, D.C., area duty.

LI: And how long were you there for?

McGRUTHER: I was there, mercifully, for six months, and I got a phone call in late—so I—I got there on the 16th of January, I believe it was, whatever day the Vietnam final accords were signed, which I think was the 15th. I got there about two days later, so I was reactivated into the Navy. I was no longer involved in—no longer supporting the country that was in Vietnam, which made my conscience feel very good about it.

And then it was in one of the very last days of June—so I was only there for five and a half months—I got a phone call from my detailer, who was the officer in the Department of Naval Personnel, who has me and a bunch of other officers whose careers he follows and tries to slot you into whatever training or—or job you need for experience and so forth. And he called me up and said, "The new admiral at the Naval War College wants to open up the junior class to lieutenants, and he wants ten lieutenants is, is the quota, and we think you're eligible. Would you like to go to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island?"

And I thought about it, and I said, "Well, alright," you know. Here, I'm trying to work my way through—through a troubled marriage. I've got some other issues going on. And I had gotten not a promotion promotion, but the job I had was—was moved up, so I was doing basically a commander's work at that point. So, you know, "I kind of like what I'm doing here. When do you need to know?" And he said, "Tomorrow morning."

So I called this officer who had spoken on my behalf on the third shift, who was my commanding officer, who was in the Philippines. He was now in charge of the naval base there. I called him up. And, of course, I couldn't reach him the first time, but his aide said that he would have him call back as soon as possible. And even before he called back, I knew he would tell me that I ought to go to the Naval War College, and I already knew that that's what I wanted to do. So I said yes, and off I went to the Naval War College, and I got there in the end of July of '71.

LI: And how was that experience?

McGRUTHER: Wonderful. It was interesting. It was fun. Again I did well. I participated in an advanced research project as an independent researcher, and that project caught the eye of the admiral, and I also won an essay contest, and so that admiral became a "sea daddy," so to speak, of me and kind of took a bit of responsibility for watching my career after that.

It was a year-long—well, it was—it ran from end of August till I think the end of June or mid-June, a nine- —nine-month program, and then you normally had a month to transition.

And I was sent from there to a cruiser out of Norfolk, again as operations officer, and that's what's called a "get-well tour." If you unofficially—if you do well in a job like that, you're sort of back in the running as if you hadn't had broken service, which I did have.

LI: So I guess in thinking about your service in Vietnam, in that your personnel beliefs were enough to make you resign from something that you did enjoy so much, can you speak about what you believe is the Vietnam War's legacy on both military service and, I guess, our nation today?

McGRUTHER: To be quite honest, I think—I think the major thing that Vietnam did was [it] led to the counter-culture movement, hippies and so forth, in especially the latter '60s, very early '70s. I think Vietnam, as an issue, caused people to doubt their government, doubt their leadership, so it was the second big nail, after Kennedy's assassination. It caused people to really wonder about what was going on here.

But in the long run, I don't think having fought in Vietnam has made all that much of a difference, and I think that was borne out just last week, when President [Barack H.] Obama went to Hanoi. I think the wounds are finally healing.

LI: And over all, what were your favorite aspects of your naval service?

McGRUTHER: Well,—

LI: Not just in Vietnam, in general.

McGRUTHER: Well, number one would be I went on to be commanding officer of my own ship eventually, and there is nothing like that. I've said that there's nothing so close to God as the commanding officer of a Navy ship, and it's power and authority, but it's responsibility, and it's a challenge every day, and I absolutely loved being in command.

I loved, at all levels, from commanding officer down to the first time I gave a helm order on the minesweeper, I loved ship handling, just the idea of making such a large piece of machinery do exactly what you wanted and maneuver the way you wanted it to was fun, and I liked—it was fun and interesting and rewarding.

And I loved the camaraderie of the wardroom. Even in that first wardroom, where the CO was a nitpicker, socializing off the ship—it was a lot of fun, and—and the officers on every ship automatically get close, and the only exception was that midshipman cruise that I had, and that was maybe the exception that proved the rule.

LI: And how has the transition from the Navy back into normal civilian life been?

McGRUTHER: I never missed it. I—I had gone as far as I thought I would ever go, as a captain, rank of captain, O-6. I knew some officers who were good friends, who—who made it the next rank up, which is to be selected as an admiral, and once you're selected as an admiral, your life kind of isn't your own. You're sort of—it sounds ironic to say it. You know, an

admiral, wow! But for the first tour or two that you have as an admiral, you're sort of pushed back into scut work again.

So when I asked them was it worth it—because you have to—if you pardon my French, but you have to kiss a lot of ass to—to be an admiral and—and go to the right places and work for the right people, and—and with all of that, it's a lot of luck. And I asked them was it worth it, and both the two of them said, "Frankly, Ken, it wasn't."

And so when it came time—I had done everything I wanted to do in the Navy, and I was offered at one point a second seagoing command, but it would not have been of a ship; it would have been of a squadron, which sounds like it's great, but it basically means you're responsible for every CO's mistakes, and I thought, *No, if I'm gonna do that I'm—if I'm gonna be in command at sea, I want to be in command of a ship.* And I was selected to be a squadron commander.

So I said, *Okay, so sea tour is done,* and I'd had several excellent tours ashore, in positions of very high responsibility, and I was offered several good consulting jobs when I left the N- —you know, if and when I would leave the Navy, and it just seemed like the time was right.

So when the Navy said, you know—you know, "Would you like to stay? Would you like another tour?" I said, "I think that's enough." And I was in Colorado at the time, working for the U.S. Space Command, and there were—I learned a lot about the space business, and that's still the work that I do now, is consulting to the space community, so that was sort of a pot ready to be stirred.

And I never looked back, Ellen. I never, ever said, *Gee, I wish I was back at sea again.* I loved it, absolutely loved it. It was twenty-seven and a half wonderful years, broken by a year and a half, as I [sandwiched? 1:29:38] around, a year and a half of broken service, but I loved the sense of service, and even in the consulting work I do, it's still, in one way or another, supporting the country, and it makes me proud, and I have never regretted leaving the Navy or serving in the Navy when I did.

LI: That's—you couldn't ask for anything better.

McGRUTHER: Yep.

LI: And do you think that the Navy has changed since you left, and if so, how?

McGRUTHER: I haven't stayed that close with it because most of my contemporaries we're, you know, out. I mean, it's been—'93, so many, many years since I was around the Navy. I don't have many contacts that are in the Navy. Some people of my vintage still follow it very closely, but usually those are in the Washington area, so there's sort of a professional interest as well as a personal interest, and I have not kept in touch with that—with that part of things.

The biggest change, looking at the public record, is probably women on board and women in combat positions now, which was not the case when I was there. I don't know how I would have coped with that if it had been my job, but that was—that was—that's coming in as I was leaving the Navy, actually, or maybe a year before I left the Navy.

LI: And could you speak a little bit about how your Navy experience continues to influence your life today?

McGRUTHER: Well, for one thing, I was shocked to find out, when I—a month after I retired, that my first retirement check showed up, and it showed up at the end of every month ever since, and that's—so that gives me—has given me the freedom to take chances with the things that I have tried since, because I know I have a base of pay, you know, whether I work or not, so I've been able to work in a consulting world, where you're always sort of dependent on the next job or next task or next employer. And it allowed me to work that way, as opposed to taking a full-time time—you know, a 40-hour a week regular job for a regular employer. So that's two ways, but—but they're related there.

LI: And what do you think is the nation's biggest challenge at the moment?

McGRUTHER: Well, it's too easy an answer. [Chuckles.] I mean, it's obviously to figure out some other way that either of the two impending candidates are, so I guess what that means is we

have de-fixed the nomination process to the point that the Founding Fathers would not recognize it, and the results that it's produced are indigestible, and so something needs to be fixed in the nomination process, but I don't know how to do that.

LI: Great. Well, do you have any closing remarks you'd like to make about either Dartmouth, the Vietnam War or anything else?

McGRUTHER: Well, a few years ago, as I was reviewing my personal journals, which I've kept ever since I left Dartmouth or at least since I was down in Pensacola, and having reviewed those, I wrote down on September 17th of 2013 that the most formative events for me in my life were one we've spoken of, which is the orders to be the operations officer on USS *Roark* in 1969. That meant that I was going to stay in the Navy and I'd made a commitment, which was far different than what I thought I was going to do when I left Dartmouth.

The second was when North Korea seized the USS *Pueblo* in January of 1968. As much as I've read the justification for the commanding officer, Lloyd [M.] Bucher, having not had an option to defend himself and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, to me you don't give up the ship, and—and you defend to the last ounce within your body. And that basically formed my frame of reference for how I looked at myself as a commanding officer of a ship, that I was going—we were going to defend the ship and defend anything that we were told to defend and—and never, ever give in to anything. And that was a very—I don't know if I've explained it very well, but that was certainly a very formative event in my life.

And—and we were not in Japanese waters, but we were around Kor- —Taiwan at the time, so we were not very far away. But we were never ordered to go—you know, steam north or make a show of force and I thought that the commanding officer was at fault, but I also thought that President Johnson was at fault for—for not—for having allowed that to happen, and then ended up apologizing to those idiots in North Korea.

I have down RFK's [Robert F. Kennedy's] assassination in June of 1968, and—but that's because it was almost like the

last straw. [The Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther Kind [Jr.] had been assassinated just a few months before that. We were overseas at the time, so you're looking quite objectively back. You're only getting the highlights of the news, but to me, I though the country was absolutely coming apart and that that was going to be the triggering event.

And I had—again, you're 14 hours time different from Washington, D.C., but I had just come off watch at midnight, I believe it was, or maybe it was four in the morning. It must have been four in the morning. And I turned on the radio on March 31st, 1968, to hear Lyndon Johnson's announcement that "I will not seek, nor will I accept my party's nomination to be president." And I thought at the time, W*hoever is going to succeed him is going to be better, and maybe that's going to be the start to getting out of this ridiculous war in Vietnam*.

And then the last thing I have is the total stupidity of the Vietnam War.

LI: Well, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. The Project definitely appreciates it as a whole.

McGRUTHER: It's been a pleasure. You've—you've sparked a number of memories, and I think you've wrung me pretty dry, but I—I do appreciate it, Ellen.

LI: [Chuckles.] Well, thank you so much. And we'll be in touch.

McGRUTHER: Okay.

LI: Great. Have a great rest of your day.

McGRUTHER: Thanks very much. Bye-bye.

LI: Bye.

[End of interview.]