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### Oral History Interview: Maurice Clark

Maurice Clark

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DATE 9/20/84

Maurice Clark  
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DATE 11/20/84

James O. Smyth  
(Signature - Witness)

Clark, Maurice  
WVV-6

# 591

WEST VIRGINIA VIETNAM VETERANS

AN INTERVIEW WITH: Maurice Clark

CONDUCTED BY: John Hennen, Jr.

September 20, 1984

TRANSCRIBED BY: Vina Hutchinson

OHAF CATALOG NO.: WVVV-6

Tape 6

JH: It's a Thursday afternoon, I'm in the office of Maurice Clark. he's assistant vice president of. ah, Huntington Federal and he's a Vietnam veteran. Wh, when, when did you serve, when were you in the service?

MC: I was in the service from, ah, 1966 through 1969.

JH: Okay and, ah, we'll get, start out with a few basic, ah, background questions of when you were raised, er, where you were raised, grew up, schooling, that type of thing.

MC: Okay, I was born in Mason County, West Virginia, ah, 1946. I was raised there, lived there until I was sixteen years old. We then moved to Huntington. I finished high school then, my last two years, junior, senior year at Huntington East. Ah, after graduation from high school I worked, ah, part time for a local carpet store, installing carpet and also going to Marshall at the same time, did that for a year, ah, then joined the service in January of 1966. Served three years, through January 69, ah, was honorably discharged at that time. I returned to Huntington, ah, took up residence with my parents, actually in South Point, for about six months. Worked for Ashland Oil in refining for about six months, ah, and I got married in, ah, 19, May of 1969. Ah, moved to Huntington at that time, ah, went to work for Capital Finance Corporation here in Huntington, I worked there two and one-half years. Then came to work here at Huntington Federal, which I now have for thirteen years.

JH: Is that, did Jim used to work at Capital Finance too?

MC: No, he worked at, ah, it's another finance company, Cofant Family Savings and Loans, I think it's the one he worked for. Eastern Heights.

JH: At E, Eastern Heights or somewhere, yeah, okay.

MC: Right. It is a, it is, it is not a federal savings and loan, that puts it in the category of basically a finance company in West Virginia.

JH: Okay. Ah, let's go back just for a little while, get a little background on your service career. Now, you went in in 66, you said, and whe, where did you take your training and, ah, were you stationed after that?

MC: I took my basic training in, ah, Fort, ah, Knox, Kentucky, ah, then I went to advanced training in Fort Ord in Georgia, a military police school.

JH: Okay. What, ah, let me get a little bit on to your fa, what size family did you come from? Did you have brothers in the service or ah

MC: I came from a family of 3 children. My mother and father were divorced when I was five. I have one older brother, who was five and a half years older than I am, and I have a younger sister, who's two years younger. And my older brother, yes he did pretty much the same thing I did, he joined the Army, pretty much right after high school and in for three years. That's including Vietnam. Okay. I got into Vietnam in, ah, it's a little close here, but I believe it's October of 1966 and, October, November, r, right in that area and was there a year until 1967.

JH: So that was, you were over there fairly early in, ah,

MC: Yeah.

JH: Right about the time of the buildup began I guess.

MC: The buildup was, was just in progress because I was assigned to the fourth infan, infantry division, they had only been there, they were brand new almost, they'd only been there like three months, four months and they were part of the big buildup.

JH: Ah huh. What was the, if you recall, what was the general morale like at that time of the, men in service?

MC: Ah, to be honest with you, in my particular unit, the fellows I was spending most of my time with was, they were mostly draftees.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: They were not overly excited about being in the Army, and in particular, Vietnam.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: But that, you know, that, that's the broad look at it, not the, all individuals were that way. But that was the overall feeling, so.

JH: Ah, were there many, at the time you enlisted, were there a lot, do you know of any others, did you know of any of your friends, neighborhood buddies did they, did they, did they join up, ah, about the same time or

MC: No, no. Matter of fact, I, I didn't, ah, know, what you'd call my closer group of friends, joined and went in the service.

JH: Okay. You were there for one term, one year, and where, whereabouts were you located?

MC: It's called the central highland, it's, it's second core area, ah, in and around Pleiku, which is, ah, a province, the capital, it's up in the central highlands.

JH: What were you, what general duties as an MP, I think everyone has sort of a basic idea of what an MP does, but what

MC: Ah, for about the first two or three months I monitored road traffic on a road that ran between Pleiku and a certain area east of that running toward the coast and our job was to simply patrol it or, ah, disable American vehicles, that type of thing.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Just to keep traffic flowing, you know. Regular systems, whatever. Ah, I did that for about two, three months and then I was assigned to the, ah, second brigade, forward area, which, what we did there was escort resupply convoys between the base camp, which was right near Pleiku, on further west toward, toward the Cambodian border and they had a [inaudible] fire base and we would keep the resupply convoys going back and forth.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Then, I did that for about, ah, four months maybe, ah, at that time I got malaria and was in a hospital for about a month and then when I did come back to the unit, they put me

in guardian theatre, that was, an, the, the, in the fourth division's main base camp

JH: An nun.

MC: that they had [inaudible], finished it there.

JH: <sup>3</sup> Malaria, did you have any, did you have any, ah, residual effects for that?

MC: No, I don't think so.

JH: It's pretty nasty, ah

MC: Well, there's, there was two kinds of malaria in Vietnam, two different strains of <sup>3</sup> malaria, there's actually three overall. One's in Africa, and then two in Asia and, ah, the kind that I had in Vietnam, ah, supposedly is rougher to go through but reoccurrences are pretty rare.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: And the other strain of it is maybe a little easier to go through but then you do have some reoccurrences from it, so I hadn't really had much trouble. I had one episode of sickness about eight years ago, which I thought was <sup>3</sup> malaria, but I was tested and they couldn't find it, so, whether it was a relapse or not, it never was proven.

JH: This, ah, d, I don't want, you know, get real involved with politics or anything like that, but, ah, in your experience in the service, particularly the time you were over there, were, did you have any notion of, say the, the goals or the purposes of the mission over there, were they pretty clearly defined or, or were you, as an MP, were you kept in the dark about, ah, what we were there for, what was going on, or did



you have a pretty good idea of w, what, what was happening over there?

MC: No. I think that, I think of course the goals when you're, when you're there, as I was and many others, you know, what your goal is pretty much it's to, ah, whatever your particular job is, of course. If you're infantry, then you're out there simply to find 'em and fight and so forth.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: And of course my job day to day involved like I said, convoy and keeping them moving and watching out and being prepared for land mines and the road, and you know, that sort of thing. So, so your immediate goal or, or what you're looking at when you're in that situation is there, you know what it is.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Now you can stand back and look at the overall politics of the whole war and why we were there and that gets a little crowded maybe but if you're there and then

JH: Ah huh.

MC: you know pretty much what you're suppose to be doing and what's going on.

JH: How about the, the South Vietnamese themselves? Did y, did you have much contact with them?

MC: Mmm hmm. Quite a bit, ah, I don't know. I think my, my opinion, I remember at the time, ah, more than anything, my perception of the Vietnamese people in general was that they could care less when it comes to weighing Communism against

democracy, which is of course the main idea of why we were over there.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Ah, but on day-to-day basis, the, the average Vietnam, Vietnamese, very poor, he's, all he's worried about is, is feeding himself and his family from day to day and he's not, he's not out there flag-waving, saying down with communism, up with democracy. He's, he's much more worried about survival for his immediate family.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Therefore, his motivation, rather he be a soldier or a civilian in Vietnam at that time, ah, was simply to survive from the standpoint of, ah, whoever was in control, that's, then he'd go along with it at that point in time. That's pretty much my view of it.

JH: Ah huh. What, ah, followed since? I'm, I'm pretty vague on, on a lot of areas of, of military experience and, ah, what, what sort of security risks or problems were, were, like right up front in your assignment, like guarding POWs seems to be a pretty, ah, tension-filled type, ah, assignment and, ah, I don't know were you subject to guerilla attacks or, ah

MC: Well, ah, the, the attacks that we were subject to at that particular point in time and h, did occur, were not so much as your, ah, hand-to-hand type attacks. What they would do in, in, in both the base camp, where I was which was a huge think, a huge base camp completely surrounded by, ah,

constant wire, lookout posts, and sandbag bunkers and every so many feet would be a manned bunker lookout, (JH: Ah huh.) inside, and so forth. Ah, so security was very, there was, so you didn't worry about it and you did not have any charging type of hand-to-hand attacks, but,

JH: Ah huh.

MC: What we did have was mortar attacks. They would set themselves up, ah, a mile or so away at night, you know, start lobbing in, ah, mortar shells on you, so this is frequently what we had, both in the base camp like I said, but more often even further out in the forward camps which could be called fire bases, or, ah, or game camps. In other words, the further out you got, the, the narrower or smaller became this camp type thing where you, where you had supplies and your headquarter type of people so basically all I was ever subjected to was mortar attacks.

JH: Ah huh. Okay. Now your stretch is over and it's, 67 did you say?

MC: Right, ah huh.

JH: And then you still served two more years, ah, after all, where?

MC: About a year and a half.

JH: I know you mentioned this once before but if you could go back to that progression of coming back to the states, your two years and then your, ah, informant.

MC: Of course. I came back, flew into the West Coast and then pretty much immediately flew straight on home. I had a mon,

months leave and of course I spent it here, ah, then I was assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to an MP company there, and for the most part while I was there I did some patrol duty, which is just normal police work. Cruising and so forth.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: But for the most part what I did there, Fort Bragg was, ah, stockade duty. And I think they picked that up because I've had some PD guarding experience over in Vietnam, they picked that out of my records, because there is a pretty good size stockade there at Fort Bragg, where you have military prisoners. So I pretty much worked there both as a, well pretty much of the whole time, I was called, what's called the training, ah, NCO, which is I was in charge of taking the different classifications of prisoners and, ah, trying to put some retraining in front of them, you know, as to proper conduct for, for people that were there because of, you know, bad conduct and so forth, things like that.

JH: Ah huh. Okay, then when you returned, okay then you returned to Huntington after

MC: Right.

JH: after that, and, ah, went to work for Ashland Oil. What were your duties there, was, were, what were there, I know a lot, ah, lot of veterans ran into, you know, some employment problems when they came back, sounds like you were, you were pretty fortunate in, ah, in finding work.

MC: Yeah, I was real lucky because I soon as I, of course, got back and within, within a few days after I'd been here I

started hitting the streets and getting applications, filling them out and turn, turning them in wherever I could. I applied with, ah, for instance, the telephone company here in Huntington, with, with Ashland Oil, with, ah, the, I was set up to take a Federal Postal Worker exam, so I was, I was, you know, touching everywhere I could and, ah, I, Ashland Oil was looking for someone in their, ah, data processing department that absolutely had no experience in it at all, they wanted to run a little experiment, because everybody else they had in their data processing computer departments were previously trained somewhere else, either by schooling or experience from some other company.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: They wanted to take one person who absolutely knew nothing about data processing, and train them themselves and see how that sort of worked.

JH: Right.

MC: So that's why I was hired there, ah, and as a matter of fact within just two or three days after I was hired and accepted a position with Ashland Oil, C & P Telephone called. They w, they wanted to make me an offer. I said thank you but I've taken this one, so, so I was real fortunate as far as coming back and finding a job and settling down.

JH: Ah huh. At this time, ah, an, the Huntington area I, I would assume, I don't know for sure, seemed to me to be fairly supportive of returning veterans. Ah, was any sort of, I know at this time was probably about the period where the student demonstrations were beginning and, ah, and, ah,

I've talked to several veterans who, who said they didn't necessarily have a, any particular disagreement maybe with, with some of the stuff that was going on on campus, but they felt a sort of frustration that these people really didn't know what was going on and they did, didn't really know what the background of the war and the American mission was or anything. Did you run into any of that here? Was there any?

MC: Well

JH: Did the people even, you know, talk much about Vietnam?

MC: I suppose, ah, from my having any direct contact with, ah, people who were vocally taking a stand against the war and being very open and, like I said, vocal about it. No, I never had any discussions or contacts or, or that type of thing. Of course, I was aware it was going on by the newspapers in other parts of the country and you saw this (JH: Ah huh.) in the media all the time and, ah, you know, I sort of had mixed feelings about it. I, I didn't necessarily agree with what they were saying but at the same time I understood they certainly had a right to, you know, to believe they had to make their opinions known.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Ah, and still I have mixed feelings about that

JH: Ah huh.

MC: even through today. I mean, I, I can, you know, I can understand and see both sides of the picture, but, but I had

it out right at that time. I think if I would have stayed there, yes, the next semester he could have probably worked something out and I could have got to go to Marshall but I was ready to start.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Ashland Oil's job wasn't that important to me as getting started in at Marshall. So, I quit and found a full-time day job at Capitol Finance Company so I could at least go in the evenings because at Ashland Oil I was working on and off.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: One week it'd be days, one week it'd be nights, so I just needed something. I either needed night work or day work steady so I could go to school. So I did that, went to Capitol Finance.

JH: Okay, and so you reentered Marshall, would you say, like, you entered Marshall, 1970?

MC: Sixty-nine. Fall of '69.

JH: Sixty-nine, okay. That's when I started there, too. The campus has changed a good bit in the last 14, 15 years.

MC: Yeah, I'd say.

JH: Okay, how about your time over there? Were you, did you go all the way through, ah, finish up?

MC: Yeah, of course. It was all evenings.

JH: Oh.

MC: So I didn't actually graduate until 1974. Yeah, it was the spring of 1974 when I finally graduated because it was all

evenings, and I was carrying anywhere from, most of the time I tried to keep a full 12-hour schedule but there was some semesters when I just couldn't and I, like, kept 9 or something like that, but

JH: You said you were studying business, right?

MC: Yeah.

JH: Good, okay. Ah, many other veterans over there at that time?

MC: Yeah. There, particularly in the night classes (JH: Ah huh.) cause they were working then and they had other classes.

JH: What about the, ah, GI bill? Did, ah, was it pretty comprehensive benefits for, ah, the returning veteran, ah,

MC: Yeah, ah, I, I don't think I, ah, let me put it this way, I think I could have finished without the GI bill but it would have been much more difficult.

JH: Ah huh.

MC: Much more difficult, ah, an, I can't probably say enough about the GI bill because it really got me through Marshall. I'm sure of that. Like I said, I could have done it, I don't know, but, ah, because there I was a young married man and our first child came along not too long after I entered school there and the financial burden probably, probably would have, would have put me in a, I, I don't, to be completely honest, I don't think I would have finished if it hadn't been for the GI bill.

JH: Ah huh.



MC: Because of the financial strain.

JH: Now that, the GI bill, does it, does it put a time limit on the, on the, how long you can draw the benefits if you're going to school? I mean, for instance, do they say you gotta c, you can draw it for five years or six years.

MC: Yes, there, there is some sort of limit there but to be honest with you I forget what is is now, ah, I can't remember but yes, there is a time limit and you have to do it within a certain amount of time.

JH: Yeah. I've, I've talked to several veterans who said pretty much the same thing, that it was, ah, they couldn't, they probably couldn't have got through school with it. Yeah.

MC: They probably couldn't have without, without having that available to them, I could have been done but I probably wouldn't have.

JH: I suppose a lot of guys followed a pretty similar pattern to yours. They were anxious to start a family when they got back and, ah, pick up their education again and, ah, really came in handy. Okay, so you finish there, when at, ah, Marshall?

MC: Marshall, I think if I'm, think, if I'm thinking right, it was the, ah, ah, I never looked at the diploma but it was the spring of '74, I think 1974. I graduated with a BBA, ah, business management major.

JH: And at this time you're still working for Capitol Finance?

MC: No, by that time I had come here. Ah, I had been here at that time probably two years.

JH: Well, you've had, ah, it, it's refreshing to talk to, you know, somebody's who, you know, that, a lot of the veterans that we talk to from the Vietnam era particularly have, seem to have particular readjustment problems when they come back to the community. A lot of them face unemployment, ah, it sounds like you pretty much charted a course and, ah, and, ah, stuck with it. That's, ah, refr, refreshing to hear it, a success story.

MC: Yeah.

JH: Ah, do you have contact with veterans organizations here in town or are you

MC: No, no

JH: Do they make any contact with you or

MC: No, ah, ah, I've never joined any veteran-type affiliation.

JH: What age are your kids now?

MC: My children are, I have one 13 and one 10.

JH: Where do they go to school?

MC: Ah, one goes to Davis Creek Elementary and the other goes to Barboursville Junior High.

JH: So what's your, ah, what's your projection, you're pretty satisfied with your work at Huntington Federal?

MC: Yeah. I, you know, I think we, of course, for years here I had visions of I guess we all do, you know, climbing up the ladder and hey I'll be, before long I'll be top man here, you know, but then little by little you have to, I think, you can look at the realistic side of it that, you know, you're, you're not, you may like to think of yourself as

completely different from everybody else and that you'll just go great guns be, because you are important to yourself, but, ah, I think you settle around and realistically look that hey, you know, I do the best job I can but its going to be heck working and I'll slowly get my promotions and elevate to where I want, but it's not going to happen overnight,

JH: Ah huh.

MC: But you have to make yourself realize that sooner or later yes, basically, I'm, I'm satisfied with what I've done, so to speak.

JH: It's a great building, this part.

MC: [inaudible] designed it.

JH: Who?

MC: Yeah, if they're gonna take theirs, I'll take mine. They're gonna see my voice box. There's a man of prosperity. [end of side 1, end of interview.]