

# John Mateyko

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Hansley: This is the Pritzker Military Library's oral history program "Stories of Service." I'm Chris Hansley. I will be interviewing John Robert Mateyko today. He was a helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War. If you would, tell us when and where you were born, and what it was like in that neighborhood when you were growing up.

Mateyko: I was born in Hammond, Indiana. September 18, 1940. Our home was Calumet City, Illinois, which is right across the state line. The first recollections I have is...we had a two-lot empty piece of property to the west of us, and somewhere—it must have been late '45, early '46/'47—we'd go out there, play war and we would always shoot at Germans—and we would win.

I went to grade school a block away. My father was on the Board of Education for the grade school. [It was a] great grade school. We had 7th and 8th grade shop, which was electronics, plastics, metalworking, and the girls had a comparable shop of home economics. For one of the six week periods, out of six, we switched. The girls came down to the woodshop and we went up to the kitchen, and I learned how to make blueberry muffins. I thought that was just the greatest thing since sliced bread. Went to high school and would walk about a mile away. I was in the band, and on the swim team. When I graduated I attended the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. And probably one of the dumbest things a kid has ever done, I walked out after two years. Now that's a mistake. All the hard parts are done and all you have to do is learn after that. Well, I was nineteen years old and had all the answers in the world; and I walked. So I finished my Bachelor's degree at Indiana University.

At that time -- 1963, I think there was about a nine month window -- if you had a college degree you could go into the [US] Army and immediately after basic training, eight weeks into the Army, you would go into the OCS [Officer Candidate School] —either at Fort Benning, Georgia or Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for artillery OCS. I chose artillery OCS because I didn't want to walk. Artillery OCS

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<sup>1</sup> John Mateyko edited this interview to facilitate readability after reviewing the initial, near verbatim transcript. The content has not been changed.

was... we had men with prior military experience that were always eligible for OCS as well as College Op [tion Program]; we were the College Op[tion Program]. There was no animosity between the two—everyone hated the tactical officers on an equal basis. There were some academic classes that I just was lost in. When they started talking about augmenting a certain battalion within an infantry division or an armor division, they just lost me. I barely made it through those classes. The regimentation—the push-ups and the marching—that wasn't bad, but four prior servicemen took me under their wing and made sure I got through. Those same four guys were talking one night. At Fort Sill OCS TAPS [evening bugle call for lights out] was at 11 pm. Well, that didn't happen. The bugle went off but nothing stopped, and we were up before 6 am regularly. I was dead tired, and one of those four men mentioned that they were going to take a flight physicals, and when you took a flight physical, they dilated your eyes, and because your eyes were dilated, the tactical officers—our training officers—didn't put us through anything so we could sleep during the afternoon. Short of killing my mother, I would have done anything to sleep during an afternoon. So the five of us went to the flight surgeon, all passed our flight physicals, came back and had my afternoon to sleep. We graduated...four of us graduated in March of '64. Then we waited; I waited until October. I was a ground instructor at Fort Sill until October when I went to Primary Helicopter School in Fort Wolters, Texas.

Hansley: One question about you wanting to be a pilot...during the mid-50s there were two programs on TV: one was *Whirlybirds*, and they flew Bell 47 G's and J's...

Mateyko: ...H 13's. OC

Hansley: And *Sky King* flew a Cessna 150 and 310B. Did any of these programs have an influence on you wanting to be a pilot?

Mateyko: No, the only thing that influenced me was that four hours of sleep. That was the guidance. I went to Primary Helicopter School at Fort Wolters, Texas, and that's where you learn about what being Texan's all about, we learned about Texas football. Our primary instructors were outstanding, you can't say enough about primary helicopter instructors. When I soloed there was a tradition at that time I think they did away with it. When you soloed you, bought a fifth of your instructor's liquor. You found out what bar he was going to be in that night and you walked in with a bag. He'd say "Oh gee, you're here!" Big surprise, he just happened to have a white beer stein with our names engraved in gold and raised aviator wings on it, just like coincidence. I thought that was a neat tradition and I think that tradition died off. I flew primary was H-23's made by Hiller, and the first time you soloed that's a thrill and the first time you fly across country and finally get back to where you belong that's kind of nice. I came home for Christmas break then in January went back for another month of primary. In

February, my class went to Fort Rucker, Alabama, stopping in New Orleans on the way. There are two sides to New Orleans. One you see when you're a twenty-four-year old bachelor on flight pay and the other you see thirty years later when you take your wife and kids for reserve school. You see different things depending on which group you're with.

Fort Rucker...Dale County, Alabama, a dry county. Well, Fort Rucker's right smack dab in the middle of it, so any kind of function we had a mayor from each of the three municipalities was there, probably the three police chiefs. It was good, got my wings in June of '65 and stayed there as a flight instructor. That's the MOS they gave me because nothing else fit. I wasn't an instructor pilot teaching others how to fly, I was a chase pilot and because it was in the school I became an instructor pilot. I wasn't at the controls with the student. I had a Huey with fifty gallons aviation gasoline in five-gallon cans in back. When foreign students, specifically the South Vietnamese students, would run their H-34s out of fuel, we'd land in a cotton patch next to them and give them fifteen minutes of fuel and say, "Go back right away" in our broken French-Vietnamese-English conversations. I would count -- indicating with circles on a wrist watch -- "1, 2, 3, and 3/4, finis fuel." And if they didn't get it they would go back and run out of fuel again. Some guys needed a re-fuel every week, others never ran out of fuel. Then I took a couple of days off and went to Vietnam in August of '65. In OCS, a tactical officer is responsible for the regimentation, the drilling and pounding military stuff in your head and making sure you know how to obey an order right now. Boom, that's a tactical officer. One of my tactical officers was Jim Dorsey and he went to flight school ahead of me. When I got to Vietnam --I don't know how other pilots did it -- I was assigned to a specific helicopter company before I left the States. When the jet landed, the first thing that hit you in Vietnam was the stench. You can smell it. They took us through the civilian terminal at Tân Sơn Nhất and put us on buses. Some people went here, some people went there and I went to a little operations building on the southeast corner of Tân Sơn Nhất airfield on the west side of the old north-south runway called Hotel-3. [i.e., in aviation parlance, it's Hotel 3 which meant the third helipad, H-3]. I reported in and they said they would have a Rattler ship to get me in about fifteen minutes. Well, the Rattlers were only fifteen minutes away so as soon as H-3 had me, they called Biên Hòa and a Rattler ship came over. At the controls was Jim Dorsey, my tactical officer in OCS, and I got the usual nonsense in a fifteen minute flight. They rolled in for a rocket pass, they fired the machine guns like "Okay, Jim, what else can this thing do?" They got me to Biên Hòa and I checked in with the company. We had a 2 1/2 ton truck which shuttled us to the villa. A Company/501<sup>st</sup> Battalion was fortunate. The 118th Helicopter Company was the next villa down and because the company came over so early [we were part of the 1st Armored Division] if there was anything we wanted someone would call Fort Hood, Texas and someone from the 1st Armored Division made sure we had it on the next possible plane coming over. We had an L-shaped villa, two pilots

per room. Each room had a full bath with a commode, sink and shower. We also had one wall closet per man. It had shelves and a coat rung for our clothes. A twenty-five watt bulb was in the closet so when the door was closed, the bulb would create dry air and our clothes wouldn't mold. Tile floors, an air conditioner in each room, two beds and a desk. We had one hooch maid, who would take care of four rooms. We must have had eight hooch maids in the place.

Hansley: Now a hooch maid is?

Mateyko: It's the Vietnamese woman who took care of our room, our linens, our uniforms, our boots and that's about it. They would come to work, I don't know when they would come to work maybe 7,8,9 [am]and were generally done by 4 pm. My roommate said, "You know, the biggest problem we have is sometimes the hooch maid turn off the air conditioning because they don't like it cold." Our biggest problem was coming in and hitting the button for the air conditioning. We had a separate dining hall which could seat all of us. We had fifty plus pilots so I think it could seat about eighty. So it had twenty four-man tables. Our first commanding officer was a prince you couldn't ask for a better man, Major Henderson. The Rattler-Firebirds have a reunion on even numbered years and when we have our reunions one of the things, we talk about is why Major Henderson never made...general. He was one heck of a leader both for the pilots on tactical missions and for the company and there's a lot of headaches running an aviation company. He rotated back to the States about six weeks later and the last time I saw Major Henderson before the reunions, I was in the shower. I heard a knock on the bathroom door, and I'm like, no one knocks on a bathroom door. I opened it soaking wet and there's Major Henderson he says "John, I'm leaving it was nice knowing you, maybe I'll see you in the States some time." And I thought, here I am, a young punk, twenty-five year old rookie pilot and he took the time to say good-bye to me. You can learn a lot from leaders like that.

Hansley: That's class.

Mateyko: Yeah, that's what I thought. Then we got our second company commander and that was a big letdown to have someone just shy of God to having this guy come in. He made a lot of changes we think for the sake of making changes. I've got to take a break here and set the stage. When the Army realized they needed a lot of helicopter pilots, a lot of pilots. They went to the civilian industry and started recruiting men who were already commercial pilots. They went to the retired ranks to find men who were retired. They took pilots who had been in the Army as airplane pilots, very good pilots they were instrument rated, they were instructors they were out on assignments with the Idaho, Montana National Guard helping their aviation units and transitioned them into helicopters. Their MOS was the same as our MOS except we had at that time a couple hundred

hours in combat and these guys had seventy hours in training, but they're senior captains and majors so they became the platoon commanders, the company executive officers and the company commanders. Now this is all well and good if you're flying in Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Colorado, okay? It's not worth diddly squat if you don't realize the program, if you're in Vietnam. Major Henderson used to fly in the middle, he could see the formation. He could see who was out of formation or who was having trouble or who was held back. He could see that and he didn't have to worry about navigating or the approach. Approaches into landing zones are the most important part of the mission, he didn't have to worry about doing that because he had his platoon leaders do that. He could run the company without by being bogged down with this. Now this is going to sound petty when you say it but it's big: he didn't have to be bogged down with landing a flight. Let someone else worry about that and he'll sit back and administrate, we all thought that was great. Our second company commander flew lead. Well one time we were going into a landing zone which was halfway between Saigon and Vũng Tàu, which is about forty-fifty miles. It was halfway there, on the right side of the only road and across the street from the church, the only church on the highway. All he had to do was just lead us. Come out, turn south, and lead us there. He had the executive officer in there [cockpit] as the navigator and we missed it. The first time he was too long. Helicopters are pretty maneuverable, but a lot of what they can do when they're fully loaded and you're coming out of a sink trying to come up that gets hairy. The helicopter can do it but you'd really rather do it another way. So we all went around, came in did it again, missed it again! So finally, one of the Firebirds [a gunship] came in and peppered the landing zone with white phosphorous rockets and said, "That's where it is, see if you can get the XXX [i.e., the formations] to fly in there," which we did. We had a lot of good missions. We worked with U.S. Special Forces, U.S. advisors, three different Vietnamese divisions, the Australian battalion -- the Aussies were great -- all of our troops were great, but the Aussies just have a little different way of doing things, then the Korean brigade -- it may have been a division. It couldn't have been a whole division it had to have just been a brigade of the Korean division. How much of this do you want me to go into?

Hansley: Just go.

Mateyko: The thing that was screwed up in Vietnam was this tactic of Search and Destroy. We would take a unit in to a landing zone and we'd pick them up a week later, twenty days later or a month later and no one would be there for two months. At the end of those two months we would take another unit in. There was one landing zone up in D Zone that we took two American units in on separate occasions, the Aussies in on a separate operation on a third, and on another a Vietnamese operation. I might have the order messed up but it probably went Vietnamese, Aussie and then our guys. But we never held that land. We'd occupy it for thirty days and then we'd come out, and it wasn't like WWII where you had

a front, or Korea where you had a front and everything behind it was fairly secure. We didn't do that. The Special Forces guys; they're just a different breed of animal. Each camp we went to they had a sign in their bar, "Tonight's Excuse for a Party Is \_\_\_\_\_" any excuse you could make for a party. We had a nice mission one day. We had three slicks, two gun ships and four A1Es

Hansley: What is a slick?

Mateyko: A slick is a D model Huey [or H-model] that only has machine guns on it [as opposed to a gunship]. On ours, the pilots were designated aircraft commanders and pilots. There were a lot of political reasons for that rather than being pilot and first officer. The aircraft commander in a slick flew in the left seat, in a gunship he flew on the right seat. Every ship we had had two pilots. The crew chief on a slick would ride on the left side with the aircraft commander and on the right side you had the "Peter Pilot" [i.e., co-pilot]. "Peter Pilot" was just a term that was thrown in, I don't know where that came from], and a gunner. The two gunners had M-60 machine guns on a slick. With our slicks we could haul -- on a good afternoon if the density altitude wasn't too bad -- we could get off the ground with four Americans. That's four Americans with all their gear because you only had 1100 horsepower.

Hansley: Besides crew?

Mateyko: Right. With the crew we could haul four Americans, three Americans if they had a 4.2 mortar and the base plate that goes with it. A gunship is a completely different animal, the aircraft commander flew in the right seat and the pilot flew in the left seat because that's where the triggers and the aiming devices for the flexible machine guns and the flexible grenade launchers. They too had a gunner and a crew chief. Under the back seat of the gunships were four trays of ammunition, one tray feeding each of the four flex guns and the flex guns could move up and down and traverse laterally with stops on them so you could not shoot your own nose so if you went like that, they would fire, fire, fire, stop, fire, fire, fire. These things would stop so you didn't put it through your chin and same way you hold your breath. The grenade launcher was in the nose and I'll go into the armament systems in a little bit. The grenade launcher, I don't know why but they had two-hand grips for two hands, and we didn't really use the sights you just went pop, pop and watched it. They were 40mm the same as the shoulder fired weapon that the grunts had but a little bigger charge because we were shooting far greater distances than they were. We had one gunship that had only rockets on it, twenty-four on each side. That was controlled only from the right seat. In late '64 and '65 the gun kits, the weapon system kits came over to Vietnam in a box. The company that had the helicopter and was going to turn it into a gunship wired the system themselves. On the cyclic stick of the helicopter is a switch which looks like a Chinese hat. Some were wired so if you

push forward on the Chinese hat the machine guns would fire and you'd pull back and the rockets would fire. That's really nice because you can roll in, fire the machine guns get on target and come back in with the rockets. You're not going to hit the target exactly but you're close enough with them. Other ships might have the machine guns on the first click and the rockets on the second click of the switch where you normally talk. Some ships had intercom here other ships had machine guns here and if you pull back some ships had transmit, and others had fire the rockets, so you really had to pay attention to which ship you were in.

Hansley: Were you assigned a particular ship?

Mateyko: No.

Hansley: So whatever was available you grabbed so before you went up you had to determine--

Mateyko: Well, you found out the next morning when you're talking to the crew chief. I said "No" fairly quickly. With one exception, the ship with all of the rockets on it - - just rockets [i.e., it did have flexible machine guns, no grenades]. It was not exactly -- but for all practical purposes it was the gunships platoon leader's ship [i.e., being third in line, it provided the platoon leader with a platform with which he could observe the operations of the other ships in the formation]. The gunship platoon leader's ship because that ship probably with few exceptions never went anywhere by itself. A Firebird fire team -- our gunships -- would have a fire team leader and his wingman and they would go out and do their thing. Sometimes on assaults the platoon leader would come along with all those rockets and he would back up what they were doing. So yes the ships weren't assigned except that one. That policy changed, other companies would have pilots assigned to ships. Crew chiefs were the men who took care of a specific helicopter and that was their helicopter. They were assigned to it, that helicopter was assigned to them and they were assigned to the helicopter. So you had aircraft commander, pilot, crew chief and gunner. The crew chief flew every minute that we were in the air because we're a four-man crew. In addition to that, they fueled that thing, they checked all the lubricating levels and they worked on the inspections. I don't know when the crew chiefs slept. I have no idea when they slept because some of those inspections could take two hours, some of them took eight hours, changing things every hundred hours. If there's ever a group of guys -- now everyone's got their unsung heroes -- I don't know when crew chiefs slept. And we talk about that at reunions, like, "When the hell did you guys sleep?" ... the 501st did not have [organic] gunners. If you open our book about who we belong to, no gunners. We got our gunners on temporary duty out of the 25th Division in Hawaii. So here we get -- and they came twenty-five at a time with either a first lieutenant or a very junior captain as platoon leader, temporary men and they would fly back there. Now these were young

men, they were infantrymen, and these are the guys who could take apart and put together a machine gun blindfolded in the middle of the dark night, that they were very good at. So in Hawaii, at division headquarters, there's a lot of chicken stuff going on. Such as let's paint the rocks blue this week, let's paint them white next week. We'll shine our shoes this way, we're wearing the red dot boots today. All that chicken stuff you would hear at division headquarters. That's what they had to deal with every day. Now granted they were in Hawaii, but they're still putting up with all of this guard duty. They volunteer for Vietnam. First of all they go on flight pay, another \$55 a month, then all they have to do, all they have to do is clean their machine gun at night, which for them was a ten-minute job, clean the crew chief's machine gun that night, and if the pilots wanted their pistols or rifles cleaned, they cleaned those. That's all they did, which is a LONG way from being at division. For lack of something to do, they would help the crew chief maintain the helicopter just like, "Give me that rag, give me that quart of oil," just that stuff, and I'm sure some of them learned how to be a crew chief. In fact, a few of them switched out and stayed with us and became crew chiefs, I don't know how we got away with that because the Army in the States would have gone bananas if they found out we were doing that without formal training. But we did it and they were all great guys, to a man they were great.

We worked with Special Forces and [one day] had a [very] unique mission. We had three slicks, two gunships and four...A1-Es [propeller driven engines, close air support] whatever you want to call those for support. We took the Special Forces A Team into a bridge they wanted to knock out, so we landed close to the bridge. This was just a small bridge, not like it spans the Mississippi River. We dropped them there and he told us to back off a click -- about a half a mile -- and wait with our rotors turning and the radios on. It came over the radio, "John, do you want a sword?" And I'm thinking, who the hell's this? I asked "What kind of sword?" Well, it turned out to be a Japanese sword from when they occupied the country during WWII. I said, "How many you got? If you have enough of them, I'll take one." Then everyone else piped up, "I'll take one, I'll take one, I'll take one," the Air Force wants their four. The Special Forces guys didn't need that so when they blew up the bridge they just left the crates there. What I should have done, looking back was hover over, got all three crates, then hovered back and let them blow it. But it didn't work out that way.

The American advisors had the frequencies of our FM radios, we had three radios: FM, UHF and VHF. FM is the combat talk radio for the ground pounders. If they wanted to talk to us and we wanted to talk to them we used their FM channels. We had 46.9, I'm not sure what the 118th had but it was not unusual for us to be flying somewhere, maybe flying out forty-fifty miles to work, it was not unusual to fly over a certain place and you'd hear on the radio "Army helicopter over 'Trang Bang' can you show up a certain frequency"? We'd switch to their frequency and ask "What do you want?" "We've got a man rotating this afternoon, can you take him to Saigon on your way home?" Well sure, so



coming back we'd call him, tell him we're ten minutes out. We'd get a lot of re-supply missions, not only to the units who were engaged, take water, ammo, bringing the guys that got wounded bring them out. We also supplied American advisor camps, Special Forces camps, and the one mission we didn't like was when the Big Red One landed. They had their 8-inch Howitzers and their 175 guns at Dĩ An, which is north of Saigon. They were going to road march them into Sông Bé, which is driving them up the highway -- the Army calls that a road march. We had to fly cover for those heavy weapons. Now they had tanks with them too. All day, we went up for the night, slept at Sông Bé and then we came down the next day to meet them and drove the rest of the way up there. And we're thinking now wait a minute, you've got artillery guys with all kinds of weapons, tanks with some of the best weapons the Army's ever had, and we're flying in aluminum and fiber-glass helicopters, what are we going to do if we become engaged? What can we possibly add to the battle? We never understood that one, but that's what they wanted done. One week we loaded everything we had and it's easy to say that a helicopter company can move itself. That's not exactly right. What do you do with the extra rotor blades? What do you do with the extra engines? What do you do with all the tools that are normally in the maintenance hangar that you need? You don't need it for this helicopter right now but in the course of a week you're going to need this kit, you're going to need that kit, how do you get it up? So we're going up to Buôn Mê Thuật for four or five days, and the Air Force -- we used two C-130s and a C-123 -- landed at the Buôn Mê Thuật civilian airport. We landed at Buôn Mê Thuật where the 155th Helicopter Company was. We shuttled the gear from the C-130's and the C-123 over. When we landed, the 155th was out on an operation...the man that came to fuel our helicopters with the 155th fueling truck asked us where we were going. We told them that we were here for a week to support them and he goes "Oh, we don't know about this." Okay now, the most immediate logistics problem is the fueling guy doesn't know. And if the fueling guy doesn't know, the club officer doesn't know. And if the club officer doesn't know, there's not enough beer. This is a fact of life. This is the major problem. So my roommate grabbed his helicopter, went over and caught the Air Force 123 before they took off and told the pilot we have a problem. He went to Nha Trang, got us a pallet of beer and brought it back so we made it through the week okay. The first day we didn't do anything, the second day we didn't do anything because the 155th didn't know we were coming. This is a cluster in its finest. The third day we went swimming in a river. There was a river half a mile away, we went swimming in the river and two of our guys got intestinal problems from the river. The fifth day we went on an operation that I think the 155th ginned up just to say we did something then after that we went home. The two guys who got sick, Chuck Grant ended up on an airevac [air evacuation flights] to Japan and spent several months there while they were trying to figure out what happened to him. Jim Moore, the Air Force took him back to Biên Hòa where they had an American hospital. I can't remember the names of the

hospitals, there was one in Saigon and one south of us in Long Biên, the numbers just don't come to me. Jim Moore got brought back by air and spent a couple of days in the hospital. Our flight surgeon put him on something stronger than just Pepto-Bismol for another week and he was okay. We never saw Chuck Grant come pack up his stuff.

We had some terrible screw-ups. My flight class commander, and this is my opinion, probably should not have graduated from flight school. He was afraid of the little helicopter in Texas. It's fine to be respectful of a machine, like if I make mistake I'll die and all that, but he was shaky around that stuff and when we got to Rucker and started flying the H-19's and the Huey he just didn't like it. When we got to Vietnam he wrangled a job at headquarters as the Public Information Officer. We had a battalion commander Chuck Honour, Lieutenant Colonel Honour, who was the most hypocritical guy you'd ever want to meet. When you got to Vietnam the first thing you did is cut off your sleeves and buy slip on arms sold by the hooch maids. We'd roll them up, we wore gloves, and that's not real good for aviation safety because if there's a fire you're gonna have burns all over your arms because they're totally unprotected, but it was comfortable. So you can be safe and uncomfortable or not as comfortable as you would be. Then we had a new company commander already and then a month or so later we also got a new battalion commander. So Chuck Honour looks at us with our short sleeve shirts and says, you guys have to get long sleeve shirts. Now where are you going to get long sleeves, we only had one set of fatigues so we took shirts and had the hooch girls make slip on sleeves with the elastic up here, and when we were in Biên Hòa where this clown could see us, we'd have on our slip-on sleeves and as soon as we took off they'd come off. Well everyone knew this. Right across our street from the villa we had three helipads that were built, our second company commander built them so he could brown-nose the battalion staff and the guys inside him. We had a nice mess hall, he would invite them to our mess hall. Rather than land at our heliport they could come right into our pad and walk in, have a nice meal and buzz off. Well Chuck Honour had a girlfriend nurse, Chuck's thirty-five-thirty-seven years old, married in the States -- he's a geographical bachelor -- well he's just as proud of this nurse as can be and the nurse is like, "I'm dating this battalion commander," Well hey, good for you." So he'd fly her from the hospital in Saigon where he was based out to our pad right across and bring her into our dining hall for lunch and dinner. Nothing like this, except she's in her little nurse's outfit with short sleeves and Chuck's got his sleeves rolled up. Now come on Chuck, either you're flying with long sleeve shirts or we aren't. On a Friday morning --February 18 of '66-- Chuck Honour was in the right seat, Alfred Smith was in the left seat -- he was my flight class commander -- they had two gunners, two nurses and two Donut Dollies. The U.S. tried to cover it up, the official Army report for a while was they were going on a medical evacuation mission to Vũng Tàu. If you're in Saigon and going to Vũng Tàu you come out of either Hotel 1, Hotel 2 or Hotel 3, make an immediate turn to the south and head down to Vũng Tàu. How about going to Vũng Tàu run

around and swim along the beaches all day, I don't care. What they we're really doing was going up to Đà Lạt which is a town, a nice little resort town in the second tactical area. It's up in the hills, you don't need air conditioning and at night you need a feather blanket. Nice rooms, nice food at the Đà Lạt hotel. Gee, how do you know they're going up there? Well, there's one set of power lines in Vietnam which ran from Saigon to Dalat. It brought the power down from Đà Lạt. Somewhere very close to 8 o'clock, one way or the other on a Friday morning Colonel Honour came out of Saigon in a brand new C-model Huey, best Bell was making, Fast as blazes, lots of horsepower. Four guys, four girls and Chuck Honour had to be flying very low level into the sun and he never saw the tower. Never saw it because we tried to re-create it the next day and where he hit coming out of Hotel 3 he would have been flying directly into the rising sun. There's no way he saw that tower. There's ashes on the ground. Over the radio we got a call, "There's been an accident, no hurry just bring body bags." So, that was that, now who was on it? All little old ladies, all the radio calls are about that trying to find out, well, Chuck Honour and Smith. So an American died, we had a stand-down Sunday. Friday was the 18th and Sunday was the 20th of February. They stood us down because they wanted all of us to go to the funeral service for these eight Americans, which is being held in a soccer field in Saigon Monday morning. I don't know why they stood us down. We were all in our villa playing pool, getting haircuts, whatever you're doing and our company commander got a phone call and it was the first and last time we heard the word, "Scramble," So we threw on our fatigues and our boots, grab our pistol belts, hop in the truck, and go to the flight line. A couple of guys didn't make it for various reasons. There was a phrase called "Brief-on guard" - you don't have an evening briefing, you don't have a morning ground briefing just everyone takes off, comes up a certain frequency, and hear this is what we're going to do, this is the formation, this is how many people were taking, this is how we're going to take them and blah-blah-blah. Everything has to be covered. Okay, by the nature of the beast, the five most experienced aircraft commanders were in the first flight of five and the youngest aircraft commanders made up the second flight. I was in the first flight, Moore was in the first flight, [Jerry] Withers was [in the first flight]. We landed and it was in dirt --Vietnam has a fine red dirt some of the roads are made out of that -- and we came in and flared and dust was everywhere. How in the hell are we going to get out of here? We had a thing called a Rattler Break [i.e., unmistakable phrase to communication lack of visibility, on radio] and if we were going somewhere -- when it was dusty you couldn't see anything, you couldn't see the end of the rotor tip -- someone would call Rattler Break. The guy in front would continue forward, number two and three ships would break about 20 degrees, and number four and number five would go at something greater than 45 degrees. Get out of the dust and form up. So we got out of that and formed up, and now the radios get very serious because we would start figuring out who's in what ship. Now the second flight is led by Jack Horton, leader of the

second platoon. As they went in one of the pilots in the first five ships "26", which was his call-sign, "recommend that you come in one at a time". Jack Horton was one of these guys that had been a National Guard instructor, airplane driver and he didn't like any advice, he ignored that, he pulled pitched [i.e., he applied take off power] and the place went dusty. He's got two helicopters on each side of him in a "V" and without saying anything he put his helicopter on the ground. This ship, the number three ship was climbing out. He went through the rotor system of Horton's helicopter, obviously, the pilot on the left side probably got cut in half, the pilot on the right side -- Steve Martin -- got his left foot all but severed and cut his hand which was on the collective [i.e., it changes the pitch of the blades equally and it contains other equipment]. He caught it right here the blade came through and got him. When we went to see Steve in the hospital, he had his hand on his chest and that's the way they were keeping as much of this alive as possible. Steve said that they took him, brought him back to the States, worked on him for a year and they finally moved this finger to his thumb. So he's got that much and a finger. Steve went on to become a very successful lawyer in Georgia. He does a lot of biking, his golf game isn't that good but he enjoys playing it, married to a great wife, but that never should have happened. And to this day, none of us can remember what we did then, Lefty climbed out and bought it. Those two helicopters it almost looked like a napalm bomb going off. All this fuel going up and there were some heroics done in that cloud. The guys that went in and pulled them out of the mess, but none of the pilots who were in the air can remember what we did after that. Did we put the troops back on the ground? Did we take them somewhere? We don't know, none of us remember.

Hansley: It's a black hole in your mind.

Mateyko: Yeah, I can understand me, but it happened to everyone! Twenty guys in the crews up there, what happened? We don't know.

So another mission I had and it was, let me go back to how we were scheduled. We would get that information at about 8 o'clock each night. We flew three kinds, three formations, three groups of missions. One would be combat assaults or combat extractions where all ten of our slicks would go up together and we flew a formation that fit the landing zone or the pick-up zone. If it was long and narrow we'd fly a V of three, then another V of three, V's of three, sometimes we went V's of 5, sometimes we'd go in a line this way and another line that way, sometimes we went single file lines. It depended on what the geographical limitations were. If we knew that, in our big hallway we had a board and as permanent as it would be were the last three tail numbers of our helicopters, boom, boom, boom, and then there'd be aircraft commander, pilot and take-off time. So it might read, Mateyko, Smith, 0500. And then we would get, not on the board, we would get where to be after I took off at five, a radio frequency and a call sign to contact whomever I was going to contact. Single ship missions were

unique, but sometimes we'd end up with a two, three, four ship mission. My most serious mission was a single ship mission and the board had an off-the wall name for my pilot. My platoon leader told me that's so and so and he's on the battalion staff. Uh-oh, well it's got to be an easy mission because those guys aren't going to fly tough missions for their flight pay. We were flying between 100-120 hours a month, the guys at battalion would fly four hours a month and they would choose the easiest, safest missions to fly. So I had him meet me at the helipad, at whatever time. I got out there, there's my crew chief but where the hell's the gunner? He says Sergeant So and So's flying gunner. What?! That's our operations sergeant. This has to be the easiest mission in Vietnam. I've got a battalion staff officer for co-pilot and our operations sergeant, who's not going to get shot at, for a gunner. I must be flying to Japan or something, this is the easiest mission today. I'm proud, so we go fly around, this is cool I could do this a lot, last stop is at Cu Chi where the 25th Infantry Division had a brigade and is the same unit that used to furnish us our gunners when they were in Hawaii. We dropped some guys off and out came a captain. He was one of the captains, a platoon leader at the time who came over to Hawaii for us. He said, "John, am I glad to see you!" We had coiled rattlesnakes [painted] on our doors. He said "Boy, am I glad to see a Rattler ship." Oh-oh this doesn't sound good. "What?" He replied, "We have an artillery unit that just got hit, they've got a bunch of wounded will you go get them?" "Yes, give me a frequency and a call-sign, where are they?" He said, "Over there, just call them. Take off down there." I said "Okay". Then on the intercom I asked if there anyone who doesn't want to go do this? No, and I said I would let them off if they didn't want to do it. So we made our approach, this is where it starts to get interesting, we landed and it looked like something out of a Civil War horror scene. Bodies and wounded everywhere, "Whoa! What the hell is this?!" So we took on four and I told the artillery men I'd be back in twenty-five-thirty minutes because I've got to go drop them off in Saigon, and Saigon doesn't even know I'm coming. So we climbed out and I called the air traffic control, told them where I was, and to get a hold of the hospital that we have four badly wounded, just have someone meet me." Where do you want me? Hotel 1, Hotel 2 or Hotel 3? I don't need the answer right now just let me know when I get there." I called Dust-Off [i.e. Mateyko radioed Saigon Control Center to send more medevacs helicopters -- called Dustoff -- in order to speed up evacuations], "Guys I need some help, I've got more than I can handle here." Then I called, I don't know if I called hospital or one of the hotel pads, but I made a third call. We got those men to medical people then we turned around to go back. My co-pilot captain from battalion asks, "Where are we going?" I'm like, "Where do you think we're going? We're going back." He says, "You're going to get us killed!"

Hansley: What was your rank at this time?

Mateyko: I was a First Lieutenant, he out-ranked me. He said, "You're going to get us killed!" I said, "Well not if I can help it. But this is what we do, this is what we get paid for." And he said "I'm not gonna let you do that." I say, "You touch those controls, and you will leave this aircraft dead." So we went in a second time, got shot at going in and coming out, and a third time, same radio contact. Third time we came out and there's three dust offs coming in and they tell me, "Thanks guys, we'll handle it from here" and I thought, boy am I glad to see you guys, because the first time you go into some place like that it's really easy because you're stupid. You don't know how many guys there are and if they're going to shoot at you. Coming out you're just as ignorant as can be. The second time going in, you're starting to worry about it because you know what happened and it's the same way coming out. The third time is worse, when they --Dust Off [acronym for Dedicated Unhesitating Service, US Army air ambulances] pilots-- said they've got it I was so relieved, I was so happy that I didn't have to go in. And that's something that I've thought about over the years. Did I have the gahoonies to go in there a fourth time? I don't know if I would have gone in or not. A couple years ago, I was in a man's house in Georgia, he retired as a General. I asked, "Mike we've got to talk." I said, "What do you think?" He says, "You would have" and he understood what I did as he made eleven passes in a Mohawk one day, getting shot at both ways. I said "What the hell were you thinking?" I've thought about that a lot.

Cantrell flew into that LZ, I think those guys made eleven trips in and out. I was worried about the fourth one, oh wow.

We'd haul priests on Sundays to the different Special Forces camps and advisor compounds. [We were transporting a]...priest one day and after a few stops he got on the headset [and talked to me on the intercom] and he said, "Mateyko" I said, "Yes, Father?" He asked, "What origin's your last name?" I said, "Hungarian." He asked, "You Catholic?" I said, "Yes, Father." He...[asks] "How many masses have you attended today?" "Well, we've been to six places," and then he...[said], "And you haven't been to one, yet have you?" [Laughs] I said "Nope, but I'm going to the next one!"

We took on these single ship missions, we'd take USO girls, four or five or six and they go and do whatever we do then we take them to their next camp or bring them back to Saigon. We took the flight surgeon once a month to the leper colony north of Saigon, we'd take the flight surgeon there he'd say, "You want to come in?" "I'll take a pass on that, I know it's not contagious, I'll just take a pass." I went to R&R; I had two R&Rs, in Bangkok, one R&R in Hong Kong, seven days at Clark Air Base in the Philippines, five days at Đà Lạt up in II Corps, seven days flying with an Air Force Forward Air Controller in Tan An. [in IV Corps Area].

Hansley: Tell us a little about these, going to Bangkok.

Mateyko: Oh! Bangkok's neat. There's a lot of things to see and that's about all we're going to talk about [laughs]. Hong Kong, or Bangkok,

Hansley: Tiger hunting.

Mateyko: Oh yeah, when I was in instrument flight school my flight instructor said, "When you get to Bangkok, look up Tom So and So, he flies for Air America." I looked up Tom, went out to his house. Tom had a two-story house in town, Filipino wife, couple kids, and we got well into the sauce. About 3 o'clock in the morning he said, "Do you want to go tiger hunting?" And hell, at 3 o'clock in the morning anything's a good idea. He said, "Okay". So later on it became not such a good idea. We took an Air America helicopter north of Bangkok, I don't know eighty-ninety miles, and the crew chief had a three or five pound loin roast, threw a rope over a tree, hoisted it up, and we just sat there in the helicopter. I'm in the left seat of an H-34 with an M-14 rifle and along came a tiger. Got him twice in the back. That was it. The chief went out and skinned him, left the meat, and brought home [in the helicopter]. The skin. Tom's wife took it downtown and had it tanned and dressed, whatever they do to them. One of the guys brought it from Bangkok back to Vietnam for me. My mother cannot stand cats, she CANNOT STAND THEM. I mailed it home and she had a sewing club over when the package arrived. This is when the mail would come twice a day, and she opened this thing and the gals said she let out a scream like you wouldn't believe it. I had it up on [the wall of] my home in Cincinnati, up on the wall. I didn't take care of it at all. During the summer some of the sun would come and hit it on the wall and it got pretty dry. When I moved out of that house my brother-in-law, he's pretty good with outdoor stuff, down in Texas, so I sent it to him and he did whatever you do with tanning oils and it's in one of the guestrooms down at one of his ranches, so it's still around. In Bangkok I know I got a silk tie, Thai silk, I also bought, everyone, not everyone but a lot of the guys that go to Bangkok come back with, it's in a box made out of teak wood and it has tableware in it. About every kind of spoon that Queen Elizabeth ever knew about. Several knives, three or four forks, then the big serving spoons, they're in the lid. There are prongs with, mine's a Teak, it's a reddish tint Teak, and there's also a black, I'm not sure if it's ebony or black, but I've got a setting for twelve. My wife doesn't like using them because she's afraid of something happening to the wood. Well, I didn't buy it to be afraid of something happening to the wood. If we have eight people over and we have seating for twelve, we can ruin four of each. On the actuary tables [i.e., calculations] that's not about to happen but it's just one of those things. Clark Air Base was a wind-down, I had very close to two weeks to go and I had enough combat hours to fulfill anybody's wildest dreams. I went to the CO [commanding officer] and said, "We've got plenty of pilots, you don't need me." And somewhere we had an informal policy, we had a third company commander. We had an informal policy that if you're within ten days of coming home you really didn't have to fly. Well, I'll take that option real quick. So I went to the Philippines and stayed in the O Club and did some swimming and walked around Clark Air Base and came back.

The third CO we got was Kerry, and Kerry was halfway between the first and the second. But he knew we were all short, and obviously every month you've got guys that are short, and August we've got all these guys leaving. So we were on a, he sent about three of us, three ships, there was a Vietnamese, what's called a "Vietcong Road Block," they put an oxcart across, Vietnam roads are not like they are in the United States, okay, when you read books about the European powers raping a country, it's hard to understand what that means until you see an example. The colonial power had been there for eighty or ninety years. There is no school system worth talking about. There's no water system and if there is no water system there is no sewer system. The roads if they're two lanes wide are a wide road and they're made out of this ground-up, whatever this red stuff is that's all over the place. So it's really not hard to block a road just by literally pulling an oxcart across it. The Vietcong referred to it as a tax, you'd go by it and they'd ask how much you have, and you'd go, "Well, I have a 1,000 piasters on me," their local currency. "Well, give us 10% of it." So the Vietnamese farmer or whoever it was would give 100 piasters and he'd go around the road block go on their way. Well, three of us went up [i.e., we took three helicopters of Vietnamese troops to the roadblock] because... [they needed] to capture them [i.e., the Viet Cong]. Well, for an example, let's say, it was 11 o'clock in the morning when we got there. We waited three hours for an American general to come up to brief us. In those three hours, the road block was gone and the general got a Silver Star for briefing us. Welcome to Vietnam. So that was, a couple of incidents like that just don't sit right with the guys. That bridge mission, I had kept the tactical map, I cut out a piece of that [required for the mission] and which had the call sign of that the Captain who was a Special Forces guy out of Tay Ninh...[it has] his call sign, his name and the frequency. Well, you have to have the frequency on it. And I don't know why I kept it. You know, throw it in the box [and bring it home with you], and that mission kept running in my mind, I mean, how many guys found Japanese swords in Vietnam? So I kept it. And then the first Rattler Reunion I went to, Jim Moore was there, and on the back of the map sheet I had [indicated on the map] Rattler2-1 which was me, Rattler2-2 who we didn't know, and Rattler 2-8 which was Jim Moore. [i.e., Radio call signs, used in helicopter communication were so ingrained due to urgent nature of them] So Jim and I are talking and he asks me if I remember the sword mission. I said, "Yeah," and he goes, "Who in the hell was with us?" "I don't know, who was Rattler 2-2?" He said, "I don't know." So we went to the Denver reunion and Jerry Withers from California was there. He says, "Hey John, you remember the sword mission?" I said "YES, tell me you were Rattler 2-2" He says, "Yeah." So then we filled in the blanks that was cool. That's about it for Vietnam unless you have any questions.

Hansley: There was an F-5 pilot who went down.



Mateyko: Oh yeah, my roommate picked him up. We were, Dick and I had separate missions but I was going to follow him wherever he was going or he was going follow where I was going and either he would drop off or I would drop off, whoever the easternmost point. So we climbed out of the Snake Pit and we starting our flying. We stayed south of the jets coming out at Biên Hòa, and the Tiger flights, the F-5, Bob Kennedy was a leader of a Tiger flight and if I'm not mistaken his call-sign was "Tiger 2-1." My roommate Dick was Rattler 1-1, I was Rattler 2-1. We saw this jet go by, well two of them go by and then there's two more behind them. He wasn't, maybe a quarter-mile in front of us when the chute goes off, he bailed out. He had a double flame out, tried to start it three times and then left the aircraft because it wasn't going to start. [i.e., If canopy of airplane gets blown, then the ejection seat shoots pilot out of aircraft]. Dick and I are asking, "Do you want to go low or high?" I say, "You make the pick-up you're in front." So he [Dick] made the pick-up and he took the pilot back to the Snake Pit. Someone came over in a Jeep so he didn't have to walk back to his section of Biên Hòa Air Base. When we got back to the villa that night, Bob Kennedy called and said, "I want to see you tonight at the O Club." Boy, did we drink, OH GOD, whoa that was a good day!

Hansley: November 8th, 1965, you were shot down.

Mateyko: Yeah, I was in the left seat, which basically means you're the co-pilot in a gunship and Pat was a CWO-2 and a really good pilot. November 8th the 173rd Airborne Brigade got into one heck of an operation. They put them in there not knowing the size of the bad guy's forces, they completely missed it and it got terrible real quick. On a B model Huey, you've got two blades. Above the main blades is a bar 90 degrees to the blades, it's on the rotor mast. Those are stabilizer bars and there's two screw-on counter-weights that balances the blades horizontally. That's not the aircraft maintenance term but that's what it is. Above that, the highest points on the Huey, are two weights about the size of that white bulb [about four inches in diameter]. They are held by a bolt and if you can play with these you can adjust them. We took a bullet [from the ground from the enemy] through that bolt, so that weight with the force of gravity on it came down and hit the stabilizer bar which is about that long [thirty-six inches] on each side of the blades, bent it and got kicked outward. The next blade coming around hit it which took a gouge out of the blade. The leading edge of a blade is aluminum and it creased about half of it out there, so it lost it's structural integrity and then it just cleaned out the honeycomb behind it. If you could get a Huey inside an air-tight hangar and you let the blades go so it's just there, those blades will automatically level themselves. If you climb up a ladder and drop a dime, set a dime under one of those blades, that will come down, that's how balanced the rotor system is, and that's part of the crew chiefs job is keeping the rotor system in place. Generally, if you track them right and they're in balance, generally, you're okay until you change the blade. It's not something you have to adjust

every hour, if you have a blade that's out of balance out of track you know it, if it's out of track you're bouncing like this, if it's out of balance you're going like this, and that's with a dime. Now, when that thing took off and took the stabilizer bar, it took a gouge out of the main blade, that helicopter was shaking so bad we could not read the instruments. It was like something out of a movie where we're going land on Mars, that's what our cockpit looked like. Pat did a good job there was only one place to land it was a little trail, he did a good job of putting the helicopter on the ground. We hit a little hard. I got out, Pat stayed on the radios, the crew chief got out and the gunner got out. The gunner took one of the machine guns off the helicopter's armament system and I had two holsters on my gun belt with my .45 pistol on the right and on the left I had the trigger housing of a machine gun. The gunner put it on the machine gun and here, I am, twenty-five years old, I'm not even sure how to hold this machine gun. I don't like this at all.

The H-43 Air Force helicopter came over from Biên Hòa and we talked to him. He couldn't do us any good. Within a half hour our maintenance ship came over and because it was for Rattlesnake helicopters and maintenance fixed them, he was called, "Snake Doctor." He came over with a blade and when they looked up and saw the other damage, he took the main blade out, went back for some more parts, and came back. His co-pilot was a brand new in country Major, and here he is in the middle of, "D Zone" which is not a good place to be. I don't think he got out of the maintenance ship, in fact I can't remember him on the ground and then when I went back to the maintenance ship he was strapped into the right seat. I think it was about three hours.

Hansley: How many helicopters and other cover aircraft did the forward air controller send?

Mateyko: Oh that was cool! He came over, he was on us right away and he got four A-1's [AD prop fighters]. They were low, they must have been somewhere between two and three-thousand feet because they need some room to roll in. He put a flight of jet-fighters but I don't know if they were Air Force or Navy, they were at about 10,000 and then up high we had another flight so that's a good feeling with those guys.

Hansley: You had a lot of cover.

Mateyko: Yeah, you know and then after we flew out they went on whatever tactical missions they were supposed to go on. So, once we got everything going, the ship must have been vibrating when they picked it up because the blades weren't tracked, they weren't balanced they're just thrown on to the back, now you can fly on this it probably won't fall apart, it was a twenty minute, half hour flight we were on. Then I went back to the maintenance ship and I was behind them and when Pat landed we were getting close to the trees. He didn't have

any choice where to land it. The helicopter was going down everybody knew that but if he could land it that's better but this helicopter's going down, so the maintenance ship came in behind us, it was better for them to be second ship out so they could back up and go this way, well I'm not about to overfly them so like they teach in every kiddy-book I'm going to back up. Well, this major [his first day in country] he's in the middle of D Zone. People, are walking around with machine guns, we've got all kinds of aircraft on top of us and Mateyko's about to back this thing out of here. [The major has to] be thinking, "What am I doing here?" I flew out then I started circling. [Pat flew]... out and I started following to the Snake Pit... this major...was an aircraft maintenance engineer. He built the unattached bar at our villa. Our villa was L-shaped, at the crotch of the L that room was never enclosed so it was an open area. That's where our bar was, a lot of fun times there. So this major built a separate bar, a lounge, behind our villa. Inside the wall but behind our villa, and the bar would seat, ten soft-leathered chairs, leather barstools, teak is free in the far east, teak bar, leather barstools, leather chairs. He got a Legion of Merit for that! That's pretty high up. I was in Germany after this and I was at my desk on the second floor of battalion headquarters, and he looked at me. He knew I knew and I knew he knew me and I think in the three weeks before the battalion commander got me out of there, I know we didn't say ten words to each other. He comes in with his Legion of Merit and everyone thinks it's for combat but really it was for building a bar.

Hansley: I do have one more question about Vietnam, you were still stateside when this happened and I'm wondering if you heard any scuttlebutt when you got there in August. On May 16th, 1965 a B-57B exploded on the ground and it was at Biên Hòa and had you known at that time, had you known you were going to Biên Hòa?

Mateyko: I didn't know I was going to Biên Hòa.

Hansley: At that point when you got there in August were they still investigating the incident?

Mateyko: I don't know, that was an Air Force -- bad choice of words -- that was an Air Force ... [investigation]. We have enough problems of our own, to not get involved with Air Force, it was a mortar attack.

Hansley: Okay because my next question was going to be, previous to the explosion of the plane, the South Vietnamese Army was in charge of perimeter security, and almost immediately after the 173rd was brought in to secure the perimeter. What were your feelings about that? Did you feel that maybe the South Vietnamese weren't doing their job which is why this happened?

Mateyko: Okay, let's go back to John's, 'I should have been General Patton'. I don't know how long I was there, probably more than six months, before I thought there's something wrong with what we're doing. It just didn't feel right. I don't know what war is supposed to feel like, but something just doesn't feel right here. And I know the North Vietnamese Army came down right through South Vietnam, and Ho Chi Minh was a great leader for his people, and Giap was a great general. Why didn't...the North Vietnamese -- Bell Helicopter was making helicopters for the U.S. Army. They were also making helicopters for U.S. Steel, Kaiser Aluminum, Petroleum Helicopter whoever wanted to buy one -- [buy one] for \$250,000? Why didn't they [NVA] form ABC company and buy a Huey? Ship it to Brazil, ship it to Cuba, ship it to Hanoi? By this time, it looks like a U.S. Army helicopter. A Huey is nice to fly, it's well coming out of the H-19's and the H-23's and the A model and the B model Hueys, then when you step into that D model it's like stepping into a Cadillac Eldorado. The seats were all nice, they were new, it was nice. The NVA could have gotten one of those, painted U.S. ARMY on them. Brought it down right to the DMZ, fill that thing with fuel. Skip Đà Nẵng, go into Nha Trang, then fly over to Bam Be Thuet [i.e. Buôn Mê Thuột], where you can probably get it fueled. There's enough round eye Frenchmen that will do anything for \$1,000. Fuel at Bam Me Thuet [i.e. Buôn Mê Thuột], when you're leaving Bam Be Thuet [i.e., Buôn Mê Thuột ] put satchel charges in the 155<sup>th</sup>'s helicopters. Bounce down to Biên Hòa where you've got the 118<sup>th</sup> and the Rattlers. It would appear like a mortar attack [of large helicopters' attack, rather than as a rogue helicopter, going from place to place] because nobody's thinking about it; you would call traffic control...it looks like a mortar attack. Bounce over to Saigon and get the 120<sup>th</sup> and the 197<sup>th</sup> you don't even have to land you just shoot 'em up. Bounce down to Vũng Tàu to blow up the maintenance facilities. Go to Vĩnh Long and Sóc Trăng and you've just wiped out every helicopter company in the country. I mean big-time, for \$250,000, I didn't understand that at all.

Then when the big American divisions came over, the Cav, the 1<sup>st</sup> [Cav, Airmobile] and the Big Red One [1<sup>st</sup> Division Infantry] and the 25<sup>th</sup> [Infantry Division] started coming over, [had the NVA and VC] laid down...their...weapons, put them in the bottom of the rice paddies, [there would have been nothing for these divisions to do]. You get this huge American war machine with all the merchant ships with their howitzers, their tanks, their APC's and their trucks, and there's nothing to do. Nothing. I don't know why they didn't do that.

Hansley: When you left Vietnam what was your rank?

Mateyko: First Lieutenant.

Hansley: After you left Vietnam, did you have time to go home and see your family?

Mateyko: Yes. I came home, I was supposed to go to a course in Fort Eustis that was starting somewhere around the first of November, 66. I had the middle of August to the middle of September to the middle of October to the first of November, so I had three and a half months where I could have stayed at home. This isn't going to work, you can only stand so much of Mom and Dad. I bought a new car and I had a girlfriend and we went down to Florida and stopped at Fort Rucker, seeing some of the guys and she didn't fit in. My ex-roommate's wife said she didn't fit in. She said, "She's not the one. This isn't the one you're marrying." Okay, yeah, so I came back and I drove to Fort Eustis and I walked into the personnel sign in office. The old chief back there says, "Come in about 8 o'clock in the morning and I'll find you a job." Well, they're going to put me in post headquarters doing something. I said I'll be here tomorrow morning and I'll tell you what I found for a job. So I visited the airfield and I asked, "Where's the crustiest warrant officer we've got on this air field?" He said, "Gil Scheff." I said, "Hi Gil, I'm your new co-pilot over the upcoming five weeks we're going to be good friends." He said "Okay, glad to have you." He called post headquarters like, "I've got John out here for five weeks." That's when I learned what Army aviation was about when they aren't out in combat. Gil had an H-21, the "Flying Banana", which was in Vietnam before the Hueys and he would fly around to get parts. We'd go up to New Cumberland Army Depot by Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We'd go to Bluegrass Army Depot which is near Lexington. I know we flew down to Benning and College Park, Maryland though I don't know why we flew to College Park, Maryland it's University of Maryland there's no Army depot around there. So anyway we're flying one day and Gil asked, "Where're you going?" I said "I got a great assignment, I'm going to Fort Knox. I've got a new sports car, I've got this honey in Indianapolis." Cool. He says, "You're going to Vietnam." I say "Gil, I'm going to Fort Knox." He says, "If you're going to the 11th Cav, you're going to Vietnam." No way, how can he possibly know this? But there's a chance so I say, "But I don't want to go back to Vietnam." He said, "If you are going with the 11th Cav, you're going back. Why don't we get your orders changed?" What? So we landed at [Fort] Belvoir and hopped in what the Army calls military taxis, but they're leased cars. I don't know what the deal is. You don't pay, you just hop in. So wherever we went we walked into this large building. It was a nice hall, wood everywhere and sixteen feet high ceilings and probably had twelve foot doors. Walked right past the receptionist, probably thought what the hell are we doing? Gil knocked on the door as we were going through it and there's a bird colonel behind the desk with this many ribbons on him, and he says "Hi Gil!" So Gil salutes, I salute and he asks what he can do for us. Gil says, "John doesn't want to go to Vietnam"

Hansley: He's been there already.

Mateyko: Yeah, and I'm thinking "Wow," so the colonel asks, "Where in the dug-dun would John like to go?" I'm not even sure where the Army is, let alone where they had

people, much less, helicopter pilots. Gil asked. "What do you have in Germany?" The colonel reached into his desk for a binder and flipped it open. Gil's looking it over and says "Colonel, is that Mannheim?" He says, "Yes, send John to Mannheim, he'll like it there." So that's how I ended up in Mannheim, Germany.

Hansley: And what unit were you with?

Mateyko: 205th, if you look up the 205th you'll get a bunch of different answers. 205th Aviation Battalion -- fourth echelon aviation maintenance -- was at Coleman Barracks which was the Army airfield for Mannheim, and it was just a cool thing. The battalion commander's name was Ed Sergeant and he was a Lieutenant Colonel. So he's Lieutenant Colonel Sergeant. And you know we have sergeant majors, brigadier generals, lieutenant generals, but we don't have lieutenant colonel sergeants and that was something else. We had a company outside of Munich, a company outside of Stuttgart and a company...west of Frankfurt, about fifteen miles, and we could use our big helicopters to keep in contact. So I worked at Battalion then I got transitioned at Augsburg to learn how to fly the H-34's and the H-13's. I fell in love with the H-34 just a joy to fly that thing. And the H-13 since it's small, I think it has a four day course how to fly it, and I had a hotshot Army captain teaching me to fly it. Augsburg has the airstrip where the Luftwaffe jet planes flew out of, one of the two strips. Germany was running out of petroleum based products so when they built this strip they used asphalt but to spread out the asphalt they put pulverized pieces of coal in it which doesn't mean much for the handling of airplanes, but when you come in at night and you hit it with your landing light and it looks like a gajillion diamonds glistening. It's one of those sites you don't forget. My instructor pilot is so keen and I start to feel a little cocky; combat experience, H-34 pilot, I can do anything that he's teaching in this course. Military instructor pilots -- regardless of what Tom Cruise says in "Top Gun" are God. You don't lip off to a military flight instructor. It's just one of the rules, and those guys are so good that they know what you're thinking and feeling, they really do. They've been there, done that. So he had a maneuver, it's called "light on its skids." You pull in enough power so you're on the ground, but just barely, another little bit of added power and you're in the air. He took us around the pattern, now we're going to land on asphalt with crushed coal compacted into it. When they compact it in they don't get it 100% in, they get it 99.12% in. Came around, he put in that power and we did a running landing onto this thing, and as soon as we touched down he kicked it full pedal and we're going down the runway like that --spiraling.

Hansley: Doing donuts.

Mateyko: No, or yeah but we're just spinning down there, I thought this is cool! It gets your attention because he didn't say "Hey John we're going to spin around on the runway," I said, "Boy, can I try that?" That's what's nice about military training. They've been doing it for so long that they have seen almost every mistake and if you bang up the helicopter well so what, there's another twenty go pick another one.

So I went from the battalion staff to every temporary job available. Colonel Sergeant called me his "TDY. Captain", any temporary duty that had to be done for the battalion I'd do it because he didn't want me near this major from Vietnam. So I was going TDY here and TDY there.

Hansley: What does TDY mean?

Mateyko: It's Temporary Duty Yearly, they take you out of your normal work environment and you'll go help someone for five days or seven days or three months, whatever it takes. I was always a TDY and you always get an extra \$55 a day, something like that. When this finally died down I was TDY in Darmstadt, Germany for better than ninety days, 101-102 days and I was flying with a Medevac outfit. Normally it was little medevac stuff. We would take the wives of servicemen to the Frankfurt general hospital for delivery. If someone broke an arm we'd go out to the field and get them. We got a call one day and they say, "Go over to Landstuhl," the big hospital in Germany, "go over there to Landstuhl and pick up a medical team." They've got two doctors and two nurses plus we had a medic on board. So there's two doctors, two pilots, two nurses and our medical corpsmen. We didn't have gunners in Germany. We went up to a Canadian base and fueled, then we went up further to some medical facility that was either U.S. Army or Canadian. A young soldier was cleaning his armored tank, painted the insides white and was cleaning off the dials using gasoline. He cleaned the dials and with the hatch open he sat back, admired his work and lit a cigarette. He was obviously a bundle of gauze when we picked him up and they put him in the Huey. I don't know what the medical name is for it, but it has a hammock support and where the part you lay on it had obviously the pivot points and then it split and there was very tight webbing, much tighter than a hammock, that they laid him on and then they put the gauze all over his body so whatever was going set in wouldn't set in. We took him to Landstuhl then six or eight weeks later we came back to get him for a flight to San Antonio but that was horrible.

Hansley: When you first got to Germany, compared to hot and steamy Vietnam, did you have any difficulty changing over to non-combat, and the relatively nice weather?

Mateyko: No, in fact I got to Germany the 14th or 16th of December, '66 which was four months after Vietnam, so I calmed down. I never had the, "Gee, everyone's out

to get me". I called my mom at home, from Philadelphia, said, "Mom, tell Dad I'll be at O'Hare in about an hour and a half and I'll be in my Army uniform." She said, "I can tell you without wearing your Army uniform," I remember that on the phone, and it's amazing how there's a lot of things I don't remember but I remember talking to my mom. So they picked me up at O'Hare in the middle of the night. I knew what kind of car I had. My uncle had it waiting for me. So I bounced around a little in Calumet City, Illinois. Looked up a guy I knew in college, I called him and he said he wanted to know if I had dress greens. I said "Yeah." He said, "Well put all your stuff [awards and decorations to show that he had a buddy had been in conflict] on." I went over because he was in the Guard unit in the Indiana Harbor he says "come over to the Guard unit armory." So I walked in with all my stuff on and that'll get a Guard unit's attention real quick. Al and I had a couple beers afterwards. With nothing do so let's take a trip south, and then I came back and sitting around the house and I don't know maybe I had two weeks leave. Then I drove to Fort Eustis, thinking let's get this thing going. But the thing where the guys talked about being spit on and disregarded, and it doesn't even come close to that. The only thing I found different was when I got off active duty and stayed in the Reserves. My assignment was at Falls Church, Virginia, which is about twenty minutes up the road from the Pentagon. In 1976, [for the Bicentennial] I was told not to bring a uniform because they didn't know what the idiots are going to do.

Hansley: Another quick question back to Germany, in the late 60s, Greece and Turkey were doing some saber-rattling, was your unit or anyone you know involved or higher alert?

Mateyko: As close as we came to that when I was TDY to the medical outfit at Darmstadt, the men who were assigned to that medevac outfit - we had three helicopters and we had two permanent captains there and I was the third captain. We would fly pilot and aircraft commander but a lot of those missions you flew sing pilot because you were completely off for one day. You were on either an hour or half-hour standby for the second day, then you were on standby for the third day and the airport was ten minutes away -- from the BOQ --so we stayed in our regular quarters and if something came up I was at the airport in ten minutes, seven if I really had to get there. That unit, the Darmstadt contingent, we flew the helicopters up to Rhein Main Air Force Base, which is Frankfurt, and put them on Air Force C-124's which are a bear load because the front loading ramp is steep and long. Someone asked me if I was going with them and I said, "Well, no. First of all I'm not really in this unit, I'm TDY." Secondly, I'm not transferring, they were going to Turkey but it wasn't Ankara [it would not be in the capital city]. I don't know where they went but I remember pushing the Huey's up that ramp. It wasn't that hard because they've got a winch up there. I remember loading those Huey's up and saying, "Bye guys," but that's the closest I came. When the Israelis in '67 had their hoo-rah moment, Germany went bananas real



quick. It's hard to say this tactfully, Vietnam had all the press and casualties and TV pictures and guys coming home and war stories. In reality, before...during... and after Vietnam, 7th US Army...domiciled in Heidelberg, was the Army because of the Russian threat. This little thing that's going on in Vietnam, that's crazy, Korea, so what? The 7th Army ran the Army. Now someone's going to argue with me about that so that's one of those things we'll have to agree to disagree on. Because of the way the 205<sup>th</sup> was in Germany, we had the parachute rigging unit attached to our battalion. The Army Post Office unit was attached to our battalion for quarters, food allowances, travel pay. No, we didn't handle the pay, and [we did do] administrative stuff having to do with the Uniform Code of Military Justice,

I was the only bachelor test pilot in our battalion, so if someone needed something they'd say, "Send John up there because he doesn't have a wife and kids to worry about." Now being a bachelor's great for an extra \$50 a day I can handle this. I got to know the CW 04 who was a glider pilot in WWII. Now this is '67, twenty years after it stopped. CW 04. Johnny Dewar, who was probably a bachelor for the third time around, and we'd be at the club every night, only for the wine. He also arranged the parachute jumps for the staff at Heidelberg. Parachutists have to jump every three months to get their jump pay. They would come to Mannheim to Coleman Army Airfield because we had H-34's to take them up and Johnny had the parachutes. We dropped them once for pay for the last three months and another time for another three months and then they'd be done for six months. It was a Sunday morning drop and Saturday morning after work I went into Base Ops and asked, "What's the weather look like tomorrow." He said, "You aren't going to be able to see your hand in front of your face, it's going to get too foggy." Go to the club, 6 o'clock in the evening I check them, 10 o'clock I check them. Ain't going be able to see the hand in front of your face. Well, I was well oiled by then. Midnight went to sleep. Hell, I could have slept until noon. 6 o'clock in the morning - Bam, Bam, Bam, Bam on my door. My bed was over there and I opened the door and there's Johnny Dewar standing there with the biggest sun you've ever seen right silhouetted. I asked "Where'd this come from?" He said, "It just cleared." "Oh man!" So I grabbed a cigar, grabbed a handful of cigars, went out to the airfield, and we had maybe a dozen bird colonels from 7th Army headquarters to drop. I had an unlit cigar in my mouth and we're in the parachute folding room, big NO SMOKING signs up. So all these colonels are looking at me just waiting for me to light up and I'm not going to light up. This is breakfast and hopefully nothing else. So we dropped them, dropped them both times. When I was sitting on the ground to pick up Johnny, a bird colonel climbed up the right side of the helicopter and if I would have breathed on him he would have fallen off. He said "I really appreciate you giving up a Sunday morning for this," I thought dog-gone that's really nice. He asked, "You like those cigars?" "Yes, Sir, yes Sir!" About a week later he sent me a box of pretty good cigars. That was nice.

Hansley: How did you spend your down time in Germany?

Mateyko: [Laughs]. Germany has things you don't learn in the guidebook. Each little village, or at least a lot of them, has its own winery. Everywhere you go in Germany, well, I had a little blue English sports car and in the back -- there was this much space in between -- I carried a case of twelve flip-top beers and four bottles of wine that's the basic load. That's the least you went anywhere with. You could have four but that was your minimum. I did some sightseeing, it was between the time I got there which was the 14th or 16th of December, it was the time before Christmas break, another officer and I went to Innsbruck to ski.

Hansley: Were you married when you went to Germany?

Mateyko: No, she was an American school teacher over there, teaching at one of the American schools.

Hansley: So you met her over in Germany?

Mateyko: Yes, the second biggest mistake of my life. When I went to Innsbruck, you know you're skiing in the Austrian Alps. So I come back [to the United States] and they ask, "Do you ski?" "Oh, only in the Austrian Alps." One of the husbands said, "Were you in Vietnam?" I said, "Yeah." He asks, "Did you kill anyone?" "Probably." He says, "I could do that." Yeah, right. "Were you in the military?" He says, "Yeah," I say "what'd you do?" He says "I was a deck officer in the Navy and I carried a .45." Oh, okay that's fine, we all need deck officers in the Navy, but, well that was it.

When I came back from Germany I flew construction helicopters for Carson Helicopter in Vermont and New Hampshire. We were taking concrete up the hills to set for the base, the chairlift systems. Those towers would go into the base of the concrete that we were setting and the most memorable guy I met was Sherman Adams, who was Chief of Staff for President Eisenhower. He was running some ski lodge in New Hampshire well hidden away. I don't know if you remember it or not but he's the one that got a Vicuna [fur of a rare animal] coat. I think that's when President Eisenhower was like, "You really can't be that flashy around here." Then I got hired by Sikorsky Aircraft. My wife was from Cincinnati and I was from Calumet City, Illinois and it was very difficult to come back for any weekend at all or even take a week off to see some people in Calumet City, see some people in Cincinnati, and drive back from New Haven, Connecticut. I went to work for the Kroger Company, took a couple of promotions.

Hansley: Where at?

Mateyko: In Cincinnati, Ohio. I started in the warehouse then they brought me to the general office.

Hansley: Doing what?

Mateyko: Traffic and transportation. After that I worked for small companies in transportation.

Hansley: When did you go into the Reserves, how soon after?

Mateyko: Probably at the most, four months. A lot of people at Sikorsky Aircraft are in the Reserves. I went up to Hartford, Connecticut to join the Connecticut National Guard and I walked in with my military flight records. The commanding officer had like one-third or one-quarter of the time in the air that I had and was like, "Is this real?" "Yeah, it's real." He said, "Okay, we drill every such and such come up for the next drill." So I went up there and there was an airplane driver up there he said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, how about we go up to Vermont and ski?" Oh okay. So next month we went up to Vermont and skied. After that I got the talk that said, "You don't know understand how this goes around here." It's what I don't understand. So I was coming back from either Alaska or Seattle... I scheduled a flight to St. Louis which is where all the Reserves, I think all the records are kept there. I called the Army and said, "I want to out of this to get Guard. What do you have?" I gave my MOS. They said, "How about Corpus Christi, Texas as a test pilot?" I said "Ya, I can do that." So I went down there twice and I was thinking, "Wait a minute - it's nice to be a test pilot but the Army has units in the Reserves and they also have Individual Readiness Reserve, IRR. I was one of those. Which means I would drill at a time that wasn't necessarily the summer; it was whatever was convenient for the unit I am going to and for me. And I'm sure there is some extreme for what couldn't be worked out but it worked out well. So I went down to Corpus Christi which is where they would send the helicopters that were really damaged in Vietnam. They fit a cocoon around them, filled them with gases in Vietnam which could kill everything, whatever that process is called. And then to cool them and put them on C-133s flying into Corpus. We unloaded the Hueys and Cobras and cut the wrapping off them. I'm sure someone picked some dead snakes out of them. Not me! The production line would get one and couple weeks later we'd have a remanufactured Huey. So I'd test one and I was thinking in Germany I was a pretty good test pilot. Here I am not doing it every day, every week, every other day. It's just twice a year, two weeks a year, I was going to lose my skills doing this.

I was coming back from the West Coast, I stopped in St. Louis [at the Reserve Center] and I walked in. I sat down with a lady to talk to about my military service. She asked, "What do you want?" "Well, I need transportation, my degree has a major in transportation. What do you have in transportation?" She

pulled out those IBM printouts, she pulled out a stack of them and she asked "Where do you live?" I said "Cincinnati." Now this is a person who assigns officers. She says "Is Cincinnati closer to the East coast or the West Coast?" And I said, "What do you have on the East Coast?" She says "Headquarters, Traffic Management Command at Washington DC." My name is spelled J-O-H-N M-A-T-E-Y-K-O. That's me. So My first year there I was in my 7<sup>th</sup> year as a captain, it was my last year as a captain, I went all the way being a major for seven years, went all the way to being a Lieutenant Colonel. So for nine years, my wife, children and I went to Washington DC. I stayed in the hotel literally across the street from the Nasiff Building on Route 50 in Falls Church There was a luncheonette across the street. I was on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. I'd have lunch in the coffee shop. By 4:30 I'd be back to our room. My wife would get up with the kids whenever they wanted to get up. 6, 7, 8 AM. Go for a swim, have breakfast, Drive or hop on the bus to downtown Washington. Come back if they were going to take a nap they would come back early. If they weren't going to take a nap, they'd be back by the time I got off. We'd get a babysitter and the wife and I would go to downtown Washington. That's not a bad way to spend your summer camp.

Hansley: How long was summer camp?

Mateyko: Two weeks. Once I showed up, my boss' name was J. Conrad Townes. I reported in the next Monday, the office was empty. I was like "Where's Conny?" "He's on vacation you can run it!" "Okay!" All those people, they were professional transportation people. I didn't have much to do.

Hansley: How about in DC when you were a logistics officer?

Mateyko: The slot I had in Traffic Management Command was a Major's slot. They put me into it as a senior captain knowing I was going to be major the next year. They let me stay one year as lieutenant colonel which gave me basically two weeks to find a home for the next years. I asked the men I had been working with for nine years what they thought I should do? They made a call, saying next year you are going to the office of Deputy Chief of Staff of Logistics which is at the Pentagon. I did that for a couple years. Before I had reported to my first summer camp, there was what is called a MAC Users Conference at Military Airlift Command. It used to be held at Scott Air Force Base which is East of St. Louis, a little bit. Once a year for a week, DoD [Department of Defense] would bring in generally military people from all over the world. The top people from Europe, Korea, several from South America, wherever the Navy has several overseas logistics places, 22<sup>nd</sup> Air Force, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Force, all the top logistics people. They'd bring in about 150 very qualified people to Scott Air Force Base and say here's how we're doing it for those of you in the Pacific, here is how we do things in the North Atlantic. For those of you in the North Atlantic, here's how we do things in Sri Lanka, and how do you get the part that's the size of that door to the aircraft carrier in the

middle of the Pacific Ocean that needs it. It was a great five days I don't know if they have them anymore but I met Colonel Clarke, who was would be my boss at DCSLOG [Deputy of Chief of Staff Logistics]. It was a nice assignment plus you get a snazzy broach to wear on your uniform. The story behind [the broach] is when General MacArthur, in the early 1930s, while sitting at his desk thought there ought to be something that shows you are/were on the Army's General Staff. He called the Quartermaster General and explained his wishes. Two years later he bumped into the Quartermaster General in the...[hall] and said, "General, what do you have for this badge I asked you about two years ago?" This two star told General MacArthur, I hadn't had time. "You're fired! You can resign between now and 3 in the afternoon!" It's a cool badge. Janet will wear it, sometimes.

Hansley: Besides that medal did you receive any other service awards? Like the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry?

Mateyko: Yes, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. When the US forces pulled out in '73 everyone who had been in Vietnam and probably some of the waters was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. It was awarded everyone, it became meaningless it was like putting on a shirt. There it was. When I got to Vietnam the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry was truly a combat award for valor. Most of the Special Forces man already had theirs. A lot of the American advisors had theirs because they had been engaged in combat and when it hits the fan at 3 in the morning there is a lot of valor. In the 145<sup>th</sup> Battalion we had four helicopter companies and General Ky, Vice President Ky, wanted to award helicopter pilots the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. So we took all of the battalion of pilots and we were at a soccer field in Vietnam. The military has a ritual where you line up and then they say if you are taller than the man in front of you step forward. Right face if you are a tall man, and you would end up with the tallest guy in the top right of the formation. And then it goes shorter, shorter, shorter, and with a hundred guys the increments are that small. We were lined up and here comes Vice President Ky with his wife and these Vietnamese medals, these Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry with Palm. They only brought twenty-five. So the twenty-five tallest pilots in the 145<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion got Vietnamese medals or Crosses of Gallantry. So that's how I got one. When we got there, there were Vietnamese and I'm pretty sure Special Forces men wearing a yellow rope around their arm. That was the second award of the Cross of Gallantry with Palm. The first one was the medal and ribbon, the second one was the rope. The rope was authorized to wear on any uniform including their fatigues. We'd fly into a Special Forces camp and see some of these ropes. The US Army being the US Army said that you could only wear one award of the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. The Special Forces men could no longer wear their yellow cord. If the Vietnamese Army wanted to wear it fine, but in the US Army you were only allowed to wear your medal or ribbon. If they hadn't put that in, the American guys who were given one and another one at the end --

that would have been our second one -- so we could have worn that spiffy rope. But that's not going to happen. You will only wear one Cross of Gallantry.

Hansley: You also received the Distinguished Flying Cross?

Mateyko: Yes.

Hansley: The Purple Heart. When were you injured?

Mateyko: I was doing the dumb thing, we were on approach and the pilot in the right seat was flying. I reached up to do something up here, play with one of the knobs. The armor plating only comes up so far and I reached up and a bullet came through the aircraft. I caught part of it in there. I got to Germany and sometime in July or August and they put me in the hospital for a week for a battery of tests. Our flight surgeon wanted to know why I went from 165 to 205 pounds and I told them it was beer and bratwurst but he thought there was something wrong so they put me in a hospital for a week. They were taking X-rays all over. The X-ray guy says, "You get hit in Vietnam?" How did you know that? He said "You still got some metal in your right arm." Why don't you take it out if it is not too much trouble? So that was that.

Hansley: You also received Air Medals?

Mateyko: Yeah they are kind of like Cracker Jack prizes.

Hansley: What were they for basically?

Mateyko: Hours in the air, dependent on type of mission. There were combat missions, combat support, and combat service support. So combat is obviously going into landing zones and extracting men out of landing, pickup zones. There is a high probability that you will take some rounds, so from the time we crank our helicopters and we dropped them and we were back that was our longest combat time. And that might be, it's either combat or combat assault I'm not sure which. Combat service was on these missions where we take, we cut out the Special Forces camps. We go out to Army advisor camps we go from one camp to another, that was all combat support because those guys did combat on a daily basis and we were supporting them. Okay, Combat, the gunships the helicopters with few exceptions logged every minute as combat time. The Combat Service support, we would either log combat or combat service report. I think I logged a half hour an hour of combat service support because I had to follow a ship that had to be turned in. I had to follow it to Vũng Tàu and bring the pilot back. That and I was up so high I was up there, we were both up there. We didn't have any guns on board, we were just two guys flying helicopters. So that was my only combat service support. What made the distinction for every

twenty-five combat hours you were awarded an Air Medal. For every fifty combat support hours you were awarded an Air Medal, I think it was for every 100 combat air service support. Flying for an example, it's a pretty good one, if a pilot flew a hundred gun ship hours that month, he got four Air Medals. Now here it becomes unique is -- people talk about who's the most decorated man in Vietnam? Well, it was obviously Colonel Bob [Howard] with his Medal of Honor because he's got one of each. And no one is disputing that. He should have whatever he had, everyone says, "Yes, his were right."

Hansley: You're talking about Robert Howard?

Mateyko: Right.

Hansley: The Medal of Honor recipient.

Mateyko: Right. What he did and all those Special Forces guys they really earned theirs. There was a crew chief in the Rattlers. The ground forces got different medals. One of these, five of these, six purple hearts, however many buy that. Okay, when you add those up it is hard to get up to fifty medals. Crew chiefs by nurture of the system, when that helicopter's in the air, they are with it. Even though the pilots may be held to 100 flight hours a month, that bird might fly 125, 135, 150 and up for an average number. Crew chiefs were getting five air medals a month. When I left Vietnam one of our crew chiefs had just ended his first six month extension and signed up for another six months extension. When I left after his eighteen months of service, he had ninety-nine air medals. So if anyone wants to go that route, and there is only two pools to draw that from, the Rattlers/Firebirds; and the Thunderbirds/Bandits, which was the 118<sup>th</sup> [Helicopter Company]. Because we were the high time mission guys, other companies did not fly like we flew. They may have a 150 hour month but they don't have it consistently. Sooner or later someone's going ask who had the most medals when you count all these air medals.

Hansley: Was there a moment or an experience that you think exemplifies your overall time in the service, your active duty and your reserve duty? Anything in particular pop out?

Mateyko: There were a lot of fun things. When they teach you how to fly helicopters, first of all that first flight is nothing like you've ever seen and what am I doing in this thing. Then they drop the power and you start sinking like a rock. I remember that and I think every pilot remembers that. If any tells you they don't, they probably aren't stretching the truth. When you go to the bookstore, you get all this equipment... your flight suit, all these TMs [technical manuals] and that helmet and sunglasses.

You stand in front of the mirror and see how pretty you are. Then when we step up to the Huey, you know that flight training is for real, that D Model was just like a Cadillac. And even though you solo yourself, when I got my wings and I was becoming a tactical instructor whatever they wanted to call it. I had to go down to Pensacola. You just go to the first ocean and turn right out of [Fort] Rucker. They sent a sergeant with me, and that's when it got serious.

Flight school is fun - the instructors are terrific, outstanding flight instructors. And soloing is fun. Here is a quarter million dollar helicopter, go fly around the sky. Hey this is cool. But the first time you have a passenger, and someone else's life is in your hands, that is when it became real.

And then Vietnam that's just a completely different ballgame. The first couple of times it is exciting. You are with all these professionals that know what they're doing and guys who had been in country for three months, six months, eight months, nine months. And they are all nice guys. And they are all good, I mean really good. A little while later you are the one the guys you were looking up to. In Germany, we put a Huey together which had been a hangar queen. It was a B-model Huey. I phoned Lieutenant Colonel Sergeant "Sir, are you doing anything?" He said, "No, what do you want to do?" "Let's go flying!" Well for him that's the magic word to get out from behind that desk. I flew down to Coleman Army Air Field at Mannheim, put Colonel Sergeant in the right seat, and said, "It's yours." He hadn't been in a Huey for more than a year and he hadn't been to Vietnam yet. We went flying - up, down, up, down. Basic school traffic pattern stuff. I called the tower and asked for the whole runway for an hour. No, fifteen minutes.

So I used the grass part [of the airfield], I put it [the Huey] through some of the stuff that we did in Vietnam and he said, "You know, I heard you guys were good but I didn't know how good." And it's every guy. Every guy who flew out of Vietnam said something like that. When you pick up someone and take them to the hospital, that's a very good feeling.

When you talk to young men and you can guide them into service. You may get a really good technical inspector, E-6 enlisted man. "Have you ever thought of becoming a warrant officer? Here's some programs for you." Some guys you can encourage to stay in the service and other guys encourage them to get out just as quick as they can. Just get out. We had a first lieutenant in Germany, got his PhD. from MIT at age eighteen, John Jay Croft. Smart, oh my God. But he couldn't button his uniform blouse right. I was like, "John, we got to have a talk." I said, "You don't belong in the military, if you want to stay in DoD, go to the Pentagon, you will skyrocket but you do not belong in a military uniform." I think he understood that but boy he was brilliant.

Hansley: Did you use the GI bill when you got back home?



Mateyko: I did some grad work at the University of Bridgeport, I already had a B.S.

Hansley: Are you involved with any veterans' organizations?

Mateyko: Yes.

Hansley: Which ones?

Mateyko: I'm a member of the American Legion and there are enough guys who have been running that post for years that they don't need my help. The VFW, I was the quartermaster which is the treasurer. I was the ... the first guy since 1946 -- all those veterans who [served as quartermaster] ... did it as bookkeeping job. And some didn't do such a hot job at that, but they did the best they could. When I took over, I was probably the first guy who had a degree and three accounting courses. I said, "Guys, this is hodgepodge. Why don't we do this, this, and this, and this, this, and this and take all these accounts with three different Federal ID numbers? We'll consolidate in one bank with one Federal ID on them." So that's what we did.

At the Military Order of the Purple Heart, I stepped into that when one of the guys realized that officers can teach better and make better speeches because they've been to college and have had different jobs than the man who was enlisted and had a blue color job. He wasn't exposed to making speeches. We had one dedication and I made the speech for it and at the next meeting one of the guys stood up and said, "That was really good." I held my tongue and didn't say, 'Well, I'm a lieutenant colonel in the Reserves, what the hell did you expect?'

Hansley: What about the Rattler Firebird Association?

Mateyko: Well that's a cool association! I don't know how many members we have, but we have a reunion on each even numbered year and it bounces around the United States. Five years ago I was one of four directors, it's either a high honor or we got someone to do this dumb work. I was elected, appointed, whatever. It did not take a lot of time. There are some policy things that sprang up, that may or may not sprang up every two years, How to handle someone who's really pushing the end of the loop on some commercial venture, they want the association to get involved. Someone has to make the decisions and the National Director would rather have some guys he can talk it over with...but it's a great association, great bunch of guys. And in the Rattler Firebird Association at reunions we have a mixture of men who were private E-2s and private E-3s, draftees in for their two year commitment, and some of them were with the Rattlers only ninety days because they came TDY out of Hawaii. We have other

men who were career active duty people right up to sergeant majors and bird colonels on active duty. One of our men made General in the Washington, DC guard. Tom Griffin graduated from WestPoint. Spent two years on his mandatory ground service, three years as an Army pilot, including [one year with] the Firebirds. He transferred to the Air Force and [was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General], three star general. So we have people from two year E-3s who were with us ninety days to a one star general in the Guard and one three star Air Force General. We show up, we sit around and talk and everyone says... Everyone who goes into the military, the first thing that you hear from commanding officers is this is the best unit in the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, everyone's got the best unit. And that could be true for the time and place you are, that's the best. But when you get guys -- what was it forty-four, forty-five years after the fact? -- sitting around a bar, sitting around a cocktail lounge, sitting around a buffet table, with their wives talking about the Rattlers in '65 and '66 saying, "Guys, that was the best unit." They wouldn't come back to reunions. If it was a slop unit, no one would show up. There was something about the Rattlers that had to do with the way Major Henderson brought them over from the States, how he set it up and the attitude he ended up with. Why is it that we sit around? About Major Henderson, how did he not make general? It defies your imagination!

Hansley: What do you think is the importance of the organizations today? Like the VFW, the American Legion? Are they important today?

Mateyko: Yes, but they have a recruiting problem. When the Legion started, there were some restrictions about who could join and they have some time envelopes for when you were in the service. My cousin's husband wanted to join the Legion, but his service was in one of those windows where he can't.

As for the VFW, living in America has changed so much in sixty years. When I was growing up, the exception was for a woman to be working outside the home if she was married. That was the exception and whatever the income tax was, seven, eight, nine percent. All this was affordable. You came out of high school, you married your high school honey, you went to college, or went to military. Came out and you went to work for US Steel, Republic Steel, American Maize, Standard Oil, Sinclair Oil, whatever. Hundreds of jobs. And you bought a used Chevrolet. If your wife needed the car that day, she'd take you to work and pick you up at 4:30. A couple of years after that you got a new Chevrolet and later you got a new Pontiac, and then a new Oldsmobile and then a new Buick and by the time you are an old cuss at sixty-five... you got the Cadillac. Now you can change, Ford, Chrysler, but you work your way up. Now, it's not the two bedroom starter home. It's the four bedroom, three car garage and more windows, windows the size of that wall, and they are all up fifteen feet. You know the wife is not getting up there to clean those windows. And tax structure that's unbelievable. The only way to have all that is for the husband and the wife

to be working full time jobs. And this is going to sound terrible, but when you have a child, the mother should be there. And I know that sounds about as sexist as it comes, but my wife and I know a couple that used to live behind us. The son used to live behind us until he got married and hit the road. They plan on having a baby, planning on putting the child in day care from the third week on. Now there's something I remember coming home to my mom, whatever grade I was in fourth, eighth, ninth, whatever, and mom was there. And when I opened that back door and the aroma of whatever she was cooking, it was coming home. And her arms were there saying, "How were you?" That has changed so much. Now with the husband and the wife working and these young men and women were coming back from their 'combat zones' [i.e. daily grind] and their spouse is working and they got this house with a mortgage and a half on it, she or he [the non-military spouse] is not going let John or Jane go to the VFW or Legion a couple times a week and BS and tell war stories. That's out, that's done, those days are long gone. The last VFW picnic we had was at least five years ago, if not six or seven. We had catered beef, fried chicken, potato salad, beer and soda pop. Free, just walk through. Bring your kids, we had those jumpy things. Six members showed. We called our post bar, said to close the bar, tell everyone to come out here and start drinking it up.

It's not just the Legion, it's not the VFW, it's not the Purple Heart. Purple Heart is fifty dollars Lifetime Membership. Most of these guys had seen service officers and whatever they are getting from the VA, whether it is \$1100 or \$3,000 a month. You'd think they would kick in fifty bucks and join The Military Order of the Purple Heart. It's not just the Vietnam Veterans of America. The Masonic Lodge is having trouble, the Knights of Columbus are having trouble and I'd imagine that groups similar to that and there's got to be, there's a bunch of them I don't know about. I'd imagine they are having recruiting problems.

Hansley: Where and when did you meet your wife? We discussed it a little earlier.

Mateyko: Number one?

Hansley: Yes.

Mateyko: Okay, first wife was a school teacher in Germany. She was an American from Cincinnati, Ohio. She taught two years in New Jersey, then applied for teaching the American School System in Germany and England. Italy, Germany, England and it used to be France -- until we got kicked out -- had US school systems from first grade through high school. There were University of Maryland branches, I am not sure where. We had American school teachers in there and the only thing different between the colors in the street cars in Germany, basically, you were in a little American enclave. And there you were. I was TDY at Darmstadt, this cute blonde walked in. We dated off and on for six months and I got my

orders to go back to Vietnam. The first tour is just like you don't know what you are doing. The second time you've got all this time to think about it.

We were married in Germany. You have to be married in a civil ceremony before you can be married in a religious ceremony. That is in the Status of Forces Agreement [SOFA] signed in 1948 or whenever it was signed. We drove to Switzerland and were married, because if you married in Germany their government gets ten percent of your monthly pay. Switzerland does it for two dollars or whatever it was. We returned to Germany and married in the Church the following Saturday. My mom and sister came over. My wife's mom and dad came over. I said, "Okay, I'm ready to go back to Vietnam." She said, "Nah, get out of service!" Well, with all my Catholic upbringing -- did not believe in divorce -- I got out of service. Some people would say she saved you from getting killed. You know there's a lot of truth in that. We lasted twenty-eight years and three kids before she fell in love [with someone else]. Good. You know, every woman should be in love with someone. So we went through a nasty divorce which took four years and \$40,000 in attorneys' fees.

Online, I looked up my high school class, one of the [classmates] is a computer guru. He was in Air Force Technology Systems or whatever it's called for thirty years. So Bob's got this new web site, it's got class pictures and class reunions and all that stuff. I sat down in and looked through the site. No one in those pictures look good to me.

Hansley: Is that where your first wife was from? Cincinnati?

Mateyko: Yes. I asked Bob, "Who runs the class behind us?" [Bob] does, because he married a gal in the Class of '59. I said, "Well, let me have that website." I looked at it and here's a tall thin blonde on the right hand side - Janet Wind. We dated in high school. I sent her an e-mail, "Janet, are you married? John Mateyko, TF '58". No answer. Next day, "No, why do you ask?" I almost said back, "I'm ... taking a poll for Firestone Tire".

I had a job with a lot of traveling. I also had a model railroad. So we've got to get this in the open right now. There is a pretty good model railroad swap meet at DuPage County Fair Grounds every month. I said, "Sunday we are going to DuPage." She didn't say one negative thing and a lot of positive things. Now we got a chance. We married in a civil ceremony, luck of the draw that one of my high school classmates is a Cook County Probate Judge. I asked his secretary if a probate judge [can] perform a marriage ceremony. The answer is yes, [then] I asked if he would perform the ceremony for Janet and myself.

"I would be delighted to!" I said, "Okay, where do you park downtown?" He asked, "What are you doing Saturday morning?" Nothing that cannot be changed. He said, "Meet me at the house!" Saturday, we went to his house, he put on this black robe and married us. Our ex's were still alive so we could not get married in the Church unless we got annulments. Mine would have gotten

dirty, it would have gotten real dirty. Within a month of each other, our ex's died. That was four or five years ago. So from the church we were going to, I knew the monsignor. He was the parish priest at Sacred Heart and he'd been to our home several times. I phoned and asked, "Father Joe, would you wed us?" and he said, "Sure, I'd be glad to!" I drove to Sacred Heart [Church] with the paper work and he [Father Joe] said, "We have a problem." He said "You must be married in St. Mary's Church." I'm Greek Catholic. I did not....

Hansley: You'd been Roman Catholic over the years. Greek Orthodox?

Mateyko: So he says, "You've got to go to that. I said, "Okay". I asked if he would con-celebrate. He said, "Sure." All right. Janet and I drove to St. Mary's, we had a priest [Father John] that is our age. I said "Father, I know you [The Church] has a six month wait time. I'd been married twenty-eight years with three grown children. Janet was married eighteen years with five grown children, we got grandkids, she's got a great-grandchild, what do you think you are going to teach us about marriage in six months?" He said, "I know what I have to do but you have to take this 150 question test. Yes, no, yes, no" I had no idea what those questions were. He says, "I will get back to you within two weeks." A couple of days he phoned, "Come on over I want to talk to both of you." We drove Whiting, Indiana. He said, "I talked to the bishop." Good. "He told me to do whatever I wanted to." Good. What would he want to do he says, "Why don't we get you two married?" Okay, this is in the middle of January and I said, "How about this week?" I know Saturday's out and I know the next Saturday's out because it is just too close, okay? We can't get who's coming. Let's do February 7th. He said, "No, because the Bishop is coming over from Parma, Ohio." "Well, he can join in." Time out, we don't do that! I said, "Okay, how about the following week? In my mind February 14 did not register. Just did not register. All I wanted to do was marry Janet. So he beams, so does Janet. I am looking at these two thinking what's wrong with that? We arrived home and I phoned Father Joe and I said, "Father we're getting married February 14" and he said "Aren't you a romantic son of a gun?" That's a weird comment for a priest. I said, "What?" He said, "That's Valentine's day!" So that's how it happened. And there's such a difference in our marriage with Janet, she just absolutely amazes me.

Hansley: While you were overseas or in the military period, did you miss any major events during your time in the service? Did you miss your birthday, death of a loved one, maybe wedding of a sister, brother or birth of a child?

Mateyko: No, my father died after I was out of the service when I was thirty-nine. He died in 1979 and I was out of the service for eleven years. There weren't any births at home, mom's ninety-seven, alive and well in Florida. Not while I was in the service. While in the Reserves, I could pick the two weeks I wanted to go to

summer camp and schools. Oh, I know what I missed! When I was in Germany, the weekend that I was getting married my company [245<sup>th</sup> ] was going on a field exercise that weekend so I missed a field exercise. Everyone said, "You can't do that." I said, "No, I'm getting married." What are you guys, idiots? So that's the only thing, there was no personal or family thing I missed.

Hansley: That's good. Did you ever go back to Vietnam?

Mateyko: No. No desire. No desire at all.

Hansley: One final question. When you got your boots in boot camp, or any other time in the service, how did they fit? Were they comfortable? Did you have to work on them to make them comfortable?

Mateyko: No. Well, I was in the Merchant Marine Academy for two years so I knew how to wear a uniform. Everything fit and I went in, went into the service in August of '63. I went to Fort Knox, we had mail call right after lunch. We were in after lunch formation -- whatever that's called -- and they passed out mail. We had a very short time to read our mail. And the sergeant says, "Are there any questions?" I said, "Yes, I have one sergeant." he says "What?" "I just got my draft notice what should I do with it?" "Wrong question!"

Hansley: So you were in the military and....

Mateyko: I got drafted my fifth week of basic training.

Hansley: So it was five weeks after you enlisted.

Mateyko: Yes.

Hansley: How did that get handled?

Mateyko: Until I fell on my face after doing pushups. He said, "Drop." I did not do anything, I don't know if they did anything but I think the paperwork must have gotten straightened out. Yeah, that was a wrong question.

Hansley: Is there anything else you would like to add or if you thought I would have happened to ask and I didn't ask?

Mateyko: No, I heard a lot of guys put down the military. And probably from their experience I could probably see how they felt that way. I couldn't ask for a better five years when I was on active duty other than OCS and Basic Training. Once I got to missions. Being with the Rattlers in Vietnam with an air-conditioned villa, that's not too tough to take. Germany was fine because I had a lot of TDY for

another \$50 a day. It was a good experience. And here I am from a very modest family in Calumet City, Illinois. We never missed a meal, but we also didn't go first class to Rome every summer so yeah, the Army opened the doors. Travel. They sent us to Europe and said, "While you are here, here's a whole bunch of money and by the way you get thirty days off with pay" "WHAT? Where are you going to get a deal like that?" I talked to guys and asked, "What would you do with thirty days leave each year?" Oh, nothing!

Same way with the troops coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq. The Army changed because when we came back from Vietnam, somehow if we wanted to we could tell transportation and they would let us stop in Japan for a week, two weeks, four weeks, Anchorage, two weeks, four weeks, Hawaii five days, ten days, three days. You could stop en route. I don't know if the troops coming back now can do that. I know the reservists for Gulf War 1, when they came back -- I was in a logistics class with some of them -- a lot of them stopped in Europe for a month. They were lieutenant colonels and colonels and had their wives meet them and spent a month in Europe.

There is so much to do in the military and I've said it many times, if you want to learn to do something, join the military. If you want to learn nuclear power plants, join the US Navy and if you qualify they will teach you about nuclear power plants. You won't be able to absorb it all. If you want to fly, join the Army, Air Force, Navy, -- they will teach you how to fly. You want to learn how to handle a ship, US Navy and Coast Guard they got all these ships, someone's got to drive them, someone's got to pilot them. You want to learn how to prepare parachutes or take a diesel engine apart whatever you want to do there is a few jobs out there that are in the military, the five branches. I want to be in the Marines okay, someone in the Marines can repair those diesel engines. They don't take it over to Joe's Towing and Fix It Shop and do it there. Want to learn how to repair radios and computers? It's there. And they pay you. Go. Go and make good in combat now wait a minute! You know. They will send you to a combat arms school. Very few people in the armed forces are in combat units. Anything else?

Hansley: Not that I can think of.

Mateyko: Did I talk too much for you?

Hansley: Nope. Mr. Mateyko. Pritzker Military Library would like to thank you for sharing your story.

Mateyko: It was a pleasure, thank you.