

UNITED STATES ARMY
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

INTERVIEW OF

JACK L. TILLEY
Sergeant-Major of the Army

28731

CONDUCTED BY

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AT

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TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

P R O C E E D I N G S

CSM ELDER: Today's date is the 4th of February, the year 2001. This is an oral history interview with the Sergeant-Major of the Army, Jack L. Tilley, the 12th Sergeant-Major of the Army. The interviewer is CSM Dan Elder from the Center of Military History. I am conducting this interview at SMA Tilley's quarters at Fort Myer, Virginia.

Sergeant-Major, can you please tell me, what is your date of birth, and where were you born?

SMA TILLEY: 3 December '48, and I was born in Vancouver, Washington.

CSM ELDER: Okay. Can you tell me about your family life growing up in Vancouver? And did that affect your -- your desire to stay in the Army?

SMA TILLEY: Probably not. I grew up in -- of course I grew up in Vancouver, Washington. But you know, none of my -- my father was in the service, but he was drafted and only stayed a couple of years. But nobody in my military background was ever in the military -- I mean, in my family was ever in the military. So there was nothing back home that really made me decide -- other than, when I got out of the service, I ran into a good friend of mine.

His name was -- I won't tell you what his name is, but he asked me, you know, why I got out of the service. And I said I was just sort of tired and wanted to see, you know, different parts of my life. And then he said, well, I hope you never go back in. And so I said, well --

In fact, the way he phrased it was, if you ever go back in, you're not a friend of mine. And what I said was, well, I guess I was never a friend of yours, because I plan on going back in the service. So that's where I came out on it. I just enjoyed what I was doing in the Army, so I decided to come back in.

CSM ELDER: When you attended school -- tell me about maybe high school or junior high. How was your school like?

SMA TILLEY: You know, it was okay. I don't think I really was too involved in school. I just

sort of went through school, and I did probably the minimum to get through. I don't think I ever took books home; I just enjoyed life, and went through school.

I've always liked people, so I enjoy dealing with people. But I was really -- I was really never too focused on schoolwork.

However, I got into boxing. I boxed for about five and a half years. And I always thought if there was somebody back in my life or back in history of my family that I associated with, that I would really like sports. But I just never did much other than just go through school.

CSM ELDER: Have you ever boxed since you've entered the military?

SMA TILLEY: I did. I fought -- in fact, I fought about 15 or 16 times as a kid. In fact, I used to go work out with the pros every once in a while in Portland, Oregon.

And I fought -- I never fought bouts, but I worked out at Fort Knox, Kentucky, when I was in the AIT, about four or five rounds. And there were some pretty tough guys there, and I said, hey, I don't want no part of that.

But throughout the time I've been in the military, I've trained a couple guys -- one was in Germany, one was in Korea -- to box. One of them took the Army championship, and one of them took the Korean championship. I mean, I did this sort of as part-time stuff, (inaudible).

CSM ELDER: When you entered the Army in 1966, the draft was going on at that time. Were you drafted? Or --

SMA TILLEY: No. In fact, it's really sort of funny. I graduated when I was 17, and when I graduated, there was a bunch of friends of mine, and there were probably five or six people -- one guy was named Dennis Burchette (phonetic), and Ted Kravos (phonetic), and a guy named Boykin, Prentice Boykin was his name. We called him Barney Boykin. And there may have been one other.

Anyway, we graduated, and we were just sitting on the beach one day, and everybody said, hey,

what are you going to do? And nobody seemed to know or have a direction where they wanted to go.

And I already told you, I wasn't -- you know, school was okay, but I really wasn't pumped up about going to any more school. And so somebody brought up the idea, say, let's join the Army. And then -- and quite frankly, we didn't think about Vietnam. We didn't think about anything.

So we all elected to join. And then out of that, the only two that really went in were me and Prentice Boykin, or Barney Boykin. Came to the service on the buddy plan.

And so, you know, I went through basic AIT -- in fact, I'll even tell you, when I went down and took the tests and stuff to come into the service, I had seen pictures of tanks on TV movies when I was a kid. And when the recruiter says, how would you like to be a tanker? And I says, you know, geez, it sounds like a good idea.

So I -- I mean, I didn't even have a focus of what I wanted to do in the Army. I just said, you know, whatever comes up, comes up.

And then the only thing I wanted to do was I wanted to jump out of airplanes. I thought that would be just a lot of fun. So I went through basic AIT, and then of course to Vietnam.

CSM ELDER: Did you have any expectations when you came in the Army? And if you did, did they turn out like you expected?

SMA TILLEY: You know, my -- you know, I tell you, my expectation of the Army, I've always thought, just do what your job is. You know? Sort of focus on, you know, if you're a PFC or a SPEC-4.

I never really even thought about promotions until I was probably a staff sergeant, where I saw other people getting promoted and I thought, geez, you know, I need to -- I hope I get promoted. And that's when I started thinking about promotions, more than any other time.

But no, I just always just wanted to do my job and just get it done. I mean, that may sound sort of corny, but you know, I mean, just to do the best I can, and whatever happens, happens.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me about the induction process that you went through when you entered the service, and then how your career field was chosen?

SMA TILLEY: The -- you mean when I was sworn in at the --

CSM ELDER: Yeah, from the time --

SMA TILLEY: That was sort of funny. That's a long time ago, now. I'm trying to remember here real quick.

We were just all in a room. In fact, at that time there were a lot of people that didn't want to be in the Army. I remember going to the MEP station and they took all the tests and stuff, and there were a lot of comments about the Army.

And so it was really -- it really wasn't the best environment, I guess, that you could say. But you sort of fall in with everybody else. You sort of say, okay, just shut up and do what's right, and (inaudible).

And so they put us in a room, just probably like every other private. And they had a flag, and -- I don't even remember, I guess some officer came in there and we picked up our hand and we swore into the military.

And at that time I -- me, in fact, me and Prentice moved out and went to Vancouver, Washington, went through basic training. And I mean to tell you, that was the biggest shock in my life. Just getting off the bus and initially -- back in those days, you know, when you got off the bus, I think I did my first 50 pushups in the reception station straight. I mean, so I got real good at doing pushups.

It just -- you know, there was nothing big that happened. I swore in, went to basic training, got off and my entire life traveled about a 180. You know, I wasn't ready for this.

So luckily, I just sort of fell in with the crowd and just moved out.

CSM ELDER: Were you introduced to drill sergeants as soon as you stepped off the bus there?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, absolutely. Sure. In fact, I remember my drill sergeant there. His name was

DSM Lewis. Holy mackerel -- if I remember right now -- this has been years ago -- he was sort of a tall, thin guy, and very professional. Didn't -- you know, it's probably the wrong choice of words, but he didn't demand respect, but he got respect based on his professionalism.

And he lived in the barracks with us. He stayed right there, he stayed upstairs on the floor, and he knew that you never went towards that room. And when he turned off the lights, everybody went to sleep.

So yeah, I remember his name, DSM Lewis. I don't think I'll ever forget it.

CSM ELDER: And where did you say that you attended basic training at?

SMA TILLEY: Fort Lewis, Washington.

CSM ELDER: Fort Lewis, Washington. Have you been to Fort Lewis, Washington, in recent years?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, absolutely.

CSM ELDER: Can you compare Fort Lewis, Washington, today, to then?

SMA TILLEY: You know, and it's funny you say that, because every time I go to Fort Lewis, I try to go back and -- and really, I go back over there where I took basic training. No, there's no comparison. They tore down a lot of the old buildings. They're modernizing, putting up better facilities and stuff. So it's a lot different.

But I'll also tell you, there are a few of those little buildings still there.

CSM ELDER: Were you billeted in the old World War II-style barracks?

SMA TILLEY: I was. It was just an open bay, gang latrines, you know, gang showers. So everything was just sort of open, so -- and I wish I could remember, but there was probably 60 people in the barracks or something like that.

CSM ELDER: Did you have metal wall lockers, or footlockers?

SMA TILLEY: We had -- I had -- in fact, I had a metal wall locker and I had a footlocker at the end where you displayed, you know, your razor -- all the stuff you never used. I displayed all this stuff and rolled my socks up.

So yeah, we had an inspection every day, there's no question about that.

CSM ELDER: Just a few years before you entered the Army, Secretary of the Army Stephen Ailes directed the development of the drill sergeant program. Can you tell me about the drill sergeants and cadre who conducted your initial entry training? And how would you compare them to today's drill sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: All right. First of all, I thought the ones that gave me basic training did a great job. In fact, what's funny about that -- when I came in the Army, I was a staff sergeant about two-and-a-half years. After I went through basic AIT and got promoted to staff sergeant, I ran into one of the drill sergeants that was a drill sergeant when I was a drill sergeant. He also was a staff sergeant. And so that's funny.

But anyway, I think the difference today versus years ago is the drill sergeants years ago had -- they focused on your development process within the training system. You had committee groups that tested you and stuff like that, so everyone -- like, there's range committees and G-3 tests, you know, all that stuff.

And so even though I think it's a little bit of the same, I think it's a little different now because, you know, the drill sergeants now are doing all the tests. They're doing all the development process. So I think -- I really like it better where they can sort of take a break. I think the ones today are really, certainly working very hard and they're very focused. But I think they're probably just as good as they were years ago.

CSM ELDER: There's a perception, particularly from soldiers nowadays, that training -- maybe in the time period earlier in your career, compared to today, the drill sergeants don't have authority, or they don't have -- they're not able to do the same things drill sergeants were able to do earlier.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah.

CSM ELDER: What do you think about that?

SMA TILLEY: I think it's true. I think it's -- I'll also tell you, when I came in training, to do basic training, it was okay to stomp on your hand or kick you in the back, or smack you upside the head. And as you get older, you realize that that's not the way to deal with leadership.

And I think that the ones today, they do have the authority. But there are just different techniques of using their authority. I mean, you don't have to beat somebody to death to get them to do something, but there's leadership styles that have been developed throughout the years that they ought to be using.

And so, are they different? Do they have different authorities? I think they have the same authority; I don't think they were authorized years ago to kick you and stomp on you. In fact, I really remember when I was doing pushups one time, that the drill sergeant placed his boot on my hand. And if I didn't push fast enough, he just kept pushing harder on my hand. And so obviously I kept going fast, and he sort of let up.

But I'll tell you -- no, I think the ones today are better. But I think the ones of years ago were probably -- in today's Army they would be abusive and probably charged with something.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me about your graduation from basic training? Was that a big event, similar to how it is now?

SMA TILLEY: It was a big event. It's been years ago. We marched past the stand, my family was there. It was a big deal, because -- I was so proud of the fact that I got through basic training, because we had lost some people through basic training.

So it was a big deal. I was very proud, and I was very proud really to wear the uniform of the Army. I mean, I was just tickled that I could go to the PX, that I had free authority there, that I had just a little bit of money in my pocket.

And I'll also tell you, I mean, even though I graduated from school, I thought it was a big accomplishment in my life. I mean, I really felt pretty proud of graduating from basic.

CSM ELDER: With the war expanding in Vietnam, were you and your fellow soldiers expecting to

head to combat after your training? And if so, did you feel prepared?

SMA TILLEY: This might be crazy -- you know, sure you heard a lot about Vietnam. And I thought a lot of people in basic training thought they were going to go.

But you talked about it, but then you just sort of forgot about it. You sort of decided, hey, if it comes, it comes.

Where I really talked more about going to Vietnam was probably in AIT, when I was going through AIT. We really discussed it a lot.

But you know, I went to jump school about four days before I graduated. I never graduated from AIT. I mean, I did graduate, but because the jump school was starting a little bit earlier, they allowed me to take my test and then move right to jump school.

And in jump school, I think there were 413 people that graduated with me out of jump school. Thirteen went overseas, and seven went to Vietnam. I was one of the seven. In fact, me and Barney were one of the seven.

CSM ELDER: Well, speaking of AIT, did you get a break between basic and AIT, or did you go straight in?

SMA TILLEY: No, I got a break. (Laughing.) I think every trainee coming out of basic training wanted a break.

I think it was about two weeks. You know, I think it was the right thing for me to do, because I just took a break. I went home and sort of, you know, just relaxed a little bit, went back. And again, I was very proud. And of course, when you get out of basic training -- at that time, everybody talked to you about Vietnam. Everybody talked about the expectation.

And then, since you were in the military, you really started watching news a lot more, even reading papers about the things that were going on.

So yeah, I had about a two-week break, and then went straight to AIT at Fort Knox.

CSM ELDER: Tell me about your AIT at Fort Knox. What were you -- what was your MOS at the time that you had trained?

SMA TILLEY: Well, it was -- I believe it was 11E. I was trained on 48s.

CSM ELDER: And that is the M-48 tank?

SMA TILLEY: That's the M-48 tank. So I trained on 48s at Fort Knox.

It was probably more of a relaxed atmosphere, I think. I mean, it was very stern. You understood as soon as you got there, you still had drill sergeants. But there was a lot more alcohol drinking. I mean, there were a lot more people sort of partying, had a lot more freedom. I mean, if you did everything correctly, you would get a pass.

I remember going down to Louisville, Kentucky. There were about 15 of us, and we went down to Louisville -- and I'm still 18 years old -- went down to Louisville and sort of partied. Of course, you couldn't drink downtown anyway, but had a good time. Then we all slept in one room in a hotel, because we didn't have enough money to stay anywhere else.

CSM ELDER: Was the Koppel Club (phonetic) there, Sergeant-Major?

SMA TILLEY: The what, now?

CSM ELDER: The Koppel Club?

SMA TILLEY: Jeez, it's been so many years ago, I can't remember.

CSM ELDER: It's one of the places that I recall in the early '80s that the trainees would hang out at.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. You know, I tell you, one other place I went, I remember going to the USO club down in Louisville. Because it was always a good atmosphere; you know, if you went in there you

wouldn't have any problems, and people were polite to you. So I remember going there, probably a few other places. Of course, about 1:00 a.m. (inaudible) go on back.

The ironic thing about that is when we got back, one of the guys that stayed in the room had the measles or something like that, and we were all concerned about catching the measles. So we worried about that; of course, we never caught it.

CSM ELDER: Did you have drill sergeants when you went through AIT?

SMA TILLEY: I did. I did. I had drill sergeants.

You know, it's been so many years ago -- I think I had drill sergeants. I know we had the hardhats, the (inaudible) drill sergeants. And we had the instructors on the tanks, and stuff like that. But I think there were some drill sergeants there.

CSM ELDER: You said "hardhats." Was that like candidates?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, they're -- normally hardhats are candidates that they take that wear the turtle shell, I guess you'd call it back then, for getting ready to go to drill sergeant.

CSM ELDER: The helmet liner?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, the helmet liner.

CSM ELDER: Have it painted up?

SMA TILLEY: Yep, all painted up with a stripe on the front and drill sergeant badges on the side. So they looked pretty good.

CSM ELDER: The type of training that you received for AIT, compare that to today's training that we train soldiers in, one-station unit training.

SMA TILLEY: Well, I -- you know, it's sort of hard for me to compare. But I think because of Vietnam, and because of the amount of people that was coming into the Army at that time, probably the

training today is a little bit better. It probably is better. Because at that time, you know, there were a lot of people going overseas, there were a lot of people going to Vietnam. So we were moving right through, and that place was packed.

And of course, I don't know what the number was. But it was packed. So -- I don't think they cut corners, and I felt pretty confident about what I was learning. But I'm like any other 17- or 18-year-old kid; you know, you sort of go in stages. You understand what you're doing today, and then tomorrow you dump that and you go to the next task. And then, you know, at the very end you hope you remember all that stuff.

CSM ELDER: You had mentioned after AIT you went to Airborne school. Can you tell me about your airborne training, and maybe if that helped you any for your assignment in Vietnam?

SMA TILLEY: No, I tell you what, the airborne training, it certainly did help me, because it got me in great shape. I remember the first day, I was worried about it because I was doing gravel drill. When I got there and I reported, and you got in your uniform, there was lieutenants and senior NCOs, and I was just a private.

I remember doing gravel drill. And like -- I think his name was Mackey, who was the drill sergeant, or the cadre that was there, was just squared away. You know, not mean, but very professional, and really smoked you if you didn't follow the standards and all. Really quickly I understood that this is just another phase of my training and I'm going to make sure I'm ready to do whatever I can do.

Did it prepare me to go to Vietnam? That's a good question. I would probably say no, it had no comparison. I mean, I could jump out of planes, I could do, certainly, whatever I had to do. But as far as preparing to be physically fit, and also mentally prepared, I think it helped me, because I felt real confident about myself when I came out of there.

CSM ELDER: Do you think that that was one of the benefits, maybe, gaining confidence?

SMA TILLEY: I think so. I think that one of the good things about -- there's a lot of good things

about jump school. But you feel good about yourself, and you do gain a lot of confidence, because you've accomplished a great deal -- not just of jump school, but really from AIT and basic training, it was the same thing. You know, the phases that you go through, every time we would go through a phase, I felt pretty good about myself.

And I thought it was -- you know, this was a heck of an accomplishment. Now, what's left for me now? So I went through basic, AIT, and then jump school, same thing.

One of the things I was really surprised, though, is when I -- I always told myself I would do everything once. You know, and I was always nervous because people would break their legs or fall out for some reason in jump school. But I always said, if I made it, I made it; but if something happened, I would just sort that out as I went on. But I was lucky enough just to get through it.

One of the things I really remember through jump school was at the end of the week you had to run. And I don't remember that, necessarily, the distance. But it seemed to me it was a long ways. One thing I do remember was on Tower Week, the cadre that I had, that I was with -- there were about 50 Airborne soldiers there -- we had let all the formations move out, and he sort of waited for us to move out.

And I thought, now, what's this guy going to do. And he sprinted us to the back of the formations and would run us around in circles, and sprinted us. And we did this for -- I want to say this was like, it seemed like five miles. I'm not even sure what the distance is. But we sprinted and ran around circles and sprinted and ran around circles and sprinted -- we did that for the whole duration. Nobody else did it but us.

And at the very end, we were running, and I remember we only had like a quarter of a mile or an eighth of a mile to go. And there was a soldier that was in between us that was running. And so I reached, me and this other guy reached over and started grabbing him by the shoulder to keep him going. And the drill sergeant said, if you help him, you'll be recycled. You know? So we just let him go, and he fell, and of course he didn't make it.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me about jumping out of airplanes? How did you think about that?

You said that was something you wanted to do; tell me your feelings about that.

SMA TILLEY: Well, first I was scared to death. (Laughing.) 18-year-olds all in there. I want to say it was a boxcar, a 134 or something like that.

I was scared. I mean, it was something I certainly never did before. In fact, I want to say the first couple of times I jumped, I don't think I ever counted -- you know, one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, and you reach up and see (inaudible) -- I don't think I counted, I was that scared.

But it always seemed like it opened up. In fact, it did open up. But it always seemed like everything turned out right. But about the third time, I felt a little bit better. But I was certainly nervous and scared every time I jumped.

CSM ELDER: Have you had the opportunity to jump since J-school?

SMA TILLEY: No. I have had the opportunity, but I've never jumped. Probably as I get older, I say, I don't want to hurt myself.

CSM ELDER: Did you have any other assignments after graduating from jump school?

SMA TILLEY: No. I went straight to Vietnam. Again, out of that 413, seven went to Vietnam, I was one of the seven. And so was Prentice Boykin.

Prentice was killed in Vietnam, too, just to let you know. He was a -- we went to Vietnam. He -- we arrived in Pleiku, we were assigned. And I stayed about a week, but in the 1st Infantry Division they had a big firefight, and quite a few people were killed. And so because of my MOS, they took every other person -- I was one of the every others. So Barney stayed there, and I went to the 1st Infantry.

CSM ELDER: "There" being -- was that the 173rd?

SMA TILLEY: He stayed in the 173rd, and I went to the 1st Infantry Division.

CSM ELDER: Can you describe the sequence of events from the time you left the United States until you arrived in Vietnam? Kind of the processing you went through?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, yeah, I sure can. I want to say -- it's hard for me to remember, but I want to say, I think I went into Oakland, California, and went to Vietnam. When I got there, we were reporting into Saigon, and then stayed there a brief amount of time. They put us on buses -- no, I stayed in Reception Station there, maybe one night.

And you know, it was probably the most frightening thing I can remember, because I can remember going in this room, and there was just box springs, and sort of laying on the springs. There wasn't a mattress on the beds.

And so I stayed there one night, and then we moved from there to a base camp -- it may have been Zeon.

I take that back. Wherever I stayed the first night -- I can't remember where it was -- I remember laying on a spring, and I put my duffel bag behind my head, and I just laid down and went to sleep.

And I remember that evening, some guys coming in drunk and fighting over a mattress. And I thought, geez, I'm never fighting over a mattress.

And then I just sort of stayed by myself, and just took care of my little area and didn't bother anything. Just wanted to get through this stuff and move out.

And then after that, I remember going from there -- it must have been Zeon that we were at. But I remember going from there, and they gave me an M-14 with no ammunition, and put me on the back of a truck with my bag, my duffel bag, and drove me from Zeon to Phu Loy. No ammunition. And I thought, man, if anything ever happens, I'm dead meat anyway.

And then I got there, and then they put me in a tent. They wouldn't put me in the billets, because there was a training phase that you had to go through. So they put me right in a tent, and that was a little bit

better, and I sort of went through that.

In fact, the other day, it's sort of ironic, I talked to one of my company commanders in Vietnam -- his name is LTC Shirley -- that happened to e-mail me, and we sort of would reminisce about some stuff.

Let me back up again here. I got an e-mail here, probably about four months ago, from a young lady in California that her father was killed in Vietnam. And so she contacted me and asked me if I knew her father. You know, that had been years ago.

So -- I couldn't remember, so I asked her if she would send me a picture. That's because there are so many people that come through there so fast, you know, that I just couldn't remember her father. I said I was sorry.

But what it turned out to be is I was there when her father was killed. Again, you stay focused on your area, so -- I didn't know her father, and I probably didn't know him personally. So I just said I didn't know him.

But anyway, out of that, LTC Shirley had gotten my name. I talked to him probably 20 years ago. And he called me, and I returned his call. So we just sort of reminisced about some stuff.

CSM ELDER: You said that they put you in a tent. Was that when you were assigned to the 173rd, or prior to -- still going to the 173rd?

SMA TILLEY: No, I came out of the 173rd, and when I went to the 1st Infantry Division, you know, I did the whole thing again. I went from 173rd, I came in at Saigon, went to 173rd, I guess, at Pleiku, and then went down to -- it must have been Zeon. And then I stayed the night in Zeon, sleeping on the boxsprings with duffel bags. And then went from there to Phu Loy. And then at Phu Loy was when I got (inaudible.)

Yes, If I remember right, there was like a two-week training period or a one-week training period that they put you through about mines and jungle warfare and all that stuff. And then you were assigned to a

tent.

CSM ELDER: Okay, just to make sure that I'm clear, when you arrived in Vietnam, you were on assignment to the 173rd?

SMA TILLEY: Yes.

CSM ELDER: Did you actually report to them for any period of time?

SMA TILLEY: Yes. Yes, I did. I reported up to the 173rd -- again, just the three sections, station kind of stuff -- started going through whatever kind of training they had right there. And then again, something happened with the 1st Infantry Division. And not me, but a few other guys that were pulled out and moved out to the 1st.

CSM ELDER: So it was just a matter of days for (inaudible).

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, it was just a -- it wasn't, probably no longer than about a week.

CSM ELDER: And then once you arrived with your new assignment -- and what division was that?

SMA TILLEY: 1st Infantry Division.

CSM ELDER: 1st Infantry Division -- and once you arrived at the 1st Infantry Division, you went through a period of time of training. That's kind of where they oriented you to -- I guess to the country?

SMA TILLEY: Yep.

CSM ELDER: Tell me about when you left there and you were assigned to your very first unit.

SMA TILLEY: Well, I went from Zeon to Phu Loy, and the first unit I was assigned to was Alpha Troop Quarter Cav. And if I remember right, the Cav was on some kind of mission out in the jungle. And after I went through that training, they just packed me up and moved me out. In fact -- I don't know if I flew or went in a truck. But I went out to the field, and they already knew where I was going to be assigned, and

they assigned me to -- geez, I want to say it was the 1st Platoon. That's been years ago. They assigned me, I believe it was the 1st Platoon.

And my platoon sergeant's name was SGT Oshbosh (phonetic), was his name. They assigned me to that platoon. I was made an assistant gunner on an APC, even though my MOS was tanker, because you know -- because of the amount of people they had in the platoon, they just made me an assistant gunner.

CSM ELDER: So were you on the M113 series chassis?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. Yeah, whatever the -- yeah, I think it was the 113. It was -- you know, like the old 327 Chevy engine?

CSM ELDER: Yeah, the gasoline-powered.

SMA TILLEY: Yep, gasoline-powered. The thing ran pretty good, too; it was pretty fast.

And what happened there is I stayed with them, and I can't remember the length of time that I stayed with them. But we went up to a place they call -- I can't remember the name of the place. It may have been (inaudible), but we went to -- I stayed as an assistant gunner for not that long a time. And then we went up to a base camp where we were pulling security on an airfield.

And what happened then was the VC had come in during the day and set up what they called a Frenchman's house. And when they sit -- I still have an article about that, that LTC Shirley had written. You may want to contact him, if you can get his number. But he wrote an article about the event.

But anyway, they came in there during the day, slipped in. And then at night they went through and killed half the platoon I was in. They killed the -- threw a satchel charge at the two-liter tank, and I think it blew out his eye or something, or killed him, maybe. Shot the platoon sergeant in the back of the head and then hit his tank with an RPG.

And so -- I mean, this all happened very quickly. And what had happened that night, it was sort of ironic -- I was on the other side, and I just happened to be pulling guard on a tank. And so when all this stuff

started happening, you heard the quad-50s fire and you heard, you know, things were just shooting all over. And SGT Oshbosh got up. And I said, well, I'll get off and I'll go back to my PC. And he says, no, stay here. Because at that time there was only a three-man tank crew.

And so I stayed on the tank, versus just running back. And we stayed for a while -- and I'm not necessarily sure what was going on on the radio. But he eventually cranked that tank up and backed up. And we moved down to where, of course, the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant had been hit, because they were close to each other. And we started firing at that tank.

And we fired -- you know, I don't know. We fired a whole bunch of rounds. And you remember, I told you the lieutenant's own tank had been hit? Probably the first order I ever refused -- you know, everything sort of calmed down when we fired. I was pulling rounds out of the hull and I was throwing cases out, so I mean, we fired a lot of rounds.

And I'm not sure if everything just hadn't stopped, and we were just sort of firing because we were scared, or whatever was going on. But every time he said, load one, or every time we'd fire one, I'd load another round.

So once everything sort of calmed down, you could see that, you know, of course there was a 23 that was probably burning, because one of the tracks had taken a satchel charge and killed most of the people on it.

So anyway, the tank had got a hit, which was the platoon sergeant's tank. SGT Oshbosh had told me, he said, you go over there and check it out. And I said, I'm not going. I just --

It wasn't that I -- I probably wasn't afraid to go. It's just I didn't want to go. I mean, obviously I was afraid to go. And it was probably the only order I think I've ever refused in my life.

And I says, ahh -- and he says, Tilley, go over there and check it out, check 25 out. And I said, I don't want to go. I think that's all I said.

And he was a pretty smart guy. He realized that one, I was scared or whatever. But he didn't say it twice. He just said, get up, and I want you to fire this .50-caliber and just recon by firing every once in a while, maybe every couple of minutes, just fire up there (inaudible). And I said, okay.

And so he jumped off, and I got up there. And I may have fired one burst and he was back, because what he had seen when he went over there is the RPG had taken the chest out of the loader -- because it hit on the side -- took the chest out of the loader, took the -- when the TC was killed, the platoon sergeant who was shot in the back of the head was killed, laying on the floor. And the RPG, when it came through and took the chest out of the loader and it took the leg off a gunner. The only one that really survived was the driver.

And so he went over there, and it was just -- you know, it was all messed up inside of the tank. So he just went and looked, came back. He never, ever said nothing about it.

CSM ELDER: At the time, or maybe even in hindsight, how did you feel about the preparedness of your platoon, your squad, or the people inside that compound at the time?

SMA TILLEY: You know, I tell you the truth, I felt pretty prepared. I mean, I really did. Even though -- I probably didn't have as much confidence in myself, because, you know, how can you prepare for a firefight? I mean, you train and you do all the things that you think you need to do. But until you're in that actual situation, it's sort of hard to prepare for.

And so I guess I felt as confident as everybody else did. But you know, I always knew that I'd do what my sergeant told me to do. And so if he said, Tilley, load the gun, or load the weapon, that's exactly what I'm going to do.

So you know, I felt really confident in my tank commander, because my sergeant, he knew what to do.

CSM ELDER: That, obviously you took some lessons away from that attack.

SMA TILLEY: Oh, sure. Yeah.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me how they affected you maybe later on in your career?

SMA TILLEY: Well, you know -- yeah, the -- probably always making sure that you're prepared. That's the biggest one. I think sometimes we get complacent, we forget how things can change, you know, so fast. So that's probably the biggest thing.

CSM ELDER: Okay. I'm going to go ahead and change the tape right here. We're at a good stopping point.

(End side A, tape 1.)

CSM ELDER: This is side B of tape number one, continuing on with the oral interview of the Sergeant-Major of the Army, Jack L. Tilley.

Okay, Sergeant-Major, we were talking before about your tour with -- Alpha Company or Alpha Troop?

SMA TILLEY: Alpha Troop.

CSM ELDER: Alpha Troop Quarter Cav. You told me that you arrived to the Quarter Cav after leaving the 173rd. Can you tell me, what rank were you when you arrived?

SMA TILLEY: PFC, at that time. I think when you went to Vietnam you had to at least be a PFC, so I was a PFC. So that wasn't too bad. I felt pretty good.

CSM ELDER: And what time of the year was that? I believe --

SMA TILLEY: You know, I want to say it was June, something like that. I'm not sure really what the date was.

CSM ELDER: Okay. So it was in June?

SMA TILLEY: Millennium-hmm.

CSM ELDER: In what year?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, in the middle of the year. I believe. I guess you'd have to go back (inaudible).

CSM ELDER: Was that in 1967?

SMA TILLEY: It was in '67.

CSM ELDER: Okay. You talked a little bit about the training that you had to go through when you first arrived in country. Can you -- do you recall anything about that? Anything that stood out in the country training?

SMA TILLEY: Booby traps. Holy mackerel, there were more booby traps and stuff that you had to be afraid of. And I remember telling me about things like what to be worried about if you see kids begging for food and there are family members out there, you know, you're usually pretty safe. But if you go through a town or a village and there's nobody out there begging for food, you better buckle up and get ready because something's going to happen.

So, little things that you pick up about how to use the terrain, how to look at terrain. They taught us a lot about monsoon season, what a tank could do, what a tank couldn't do. They -- you know, they went into just a lot of stuff, a lot of general knowledge stuff that better prepared you to go to the field.

One of the things that I forgot to tell you was that the sergeant that had taught me in AIT, when I went to the field, he was killed, probably -- probably about three weeks after I got there. So -- that was probably the --

(Interruption to tape.)

SMA TILLEY: Probably one of the things that scared me most is he was killed about three weeks after I got there. That just really scared the hell out of me. Because I thought, here is a guy that trained me -- even though he didn't do anything wrong, it was just sort of something that -- where I started going back and sort of thinking about my own training, and saying, man, I hope I'm ready for whatever happens.

CSM ELDER: Let's talk about -- where you single or married when you went over to Vietnam?

SMA TILLEY: Single.

CSM ELDER: When did you meet your wife?

SMA TILLEY: I met my wife when I came back from Vietnam. I met her in Columbus, Georgia.

In fact, this is funny; I came back out of Vietnam, and at that time there were a lot of people coming back.

And so you went to a processing center -- primarily, coming in, they talked about assigning you as your

MOS.

So I, you know, went in for an interview or whatever, and the guy says, well, just to let you know, he said, the armor unit that you are supposed to be assigned to is full, and so we can't send you there. And I said, okay.

And then he said, can you sing? And I says, well, if I do sing, people will probably leave. And then he said, well, okay, you're going to be a drill sergeant. So that's -- that's really how I fell into being a drill sergeant. So that was in '68. So that's how I processed into it.

So I went to -- I think it was Sand Hill. I can't remember the particular unit. I think it was like A-10-1 or something like that. And I went to Sand Hill. I stayed -- in fact, our first sergeant was named 1SG Johnson. I went there, and I stayed about a cycle, and then they sent me to drill sergeant school at Fort Jackson. And then I came back, and then of course I met my wife after that.

CSM ELDER: Okay. Let's go back to your time in Vietnam. Can you tell me, what were some of the normal military operations your unit was involved in?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, geez. Well, we were always on search-and-destroy missions, every day. And a lot of times you'd be on security missions for roads. You'd go out and you'd sit on the side of the roads, so that roads could be traveled. Each morning, you'd sweep the roads, make sure they were clear for mines and stuff like that.

So that was probably a normal day. But you did a lot of (inaudible), stuff like that, of course, out in the jungle.

CSM ELDER: How about the vehicle that you had assigned to you? You mentioned you had the personnel carriers.

SMA TILLEY: Well, we had -- in a scout platoon, I want to say you had seven, eight PCs and three tanks. After we had gotten hit up there, I went from an APC -- because I was a tanker -- to a tank. So the rest of the time I was in Vietnam, I was on a tank.

Initially, when I got on there, I was a loader. And you really didn't sit down inside of the tank as a loader. But for a very short period of time I was a loader, and then the rest of the time I was over there I was a driver.

CSM ELDER: Was that a scout vehicle driver? Is that what you were classified as?

SMA TILLEY: You know, I don't remember. I don't remember what they call them. It was just -- in fact, the tank was a '48 A-3. I remember -- you know, in Vietnam they used to put mines on the sides of the road. And so you would center yourself as a tanker, you know, you center yourself right in the middle. And as you drove through there, you got very good about getting real close to cars. You know, you'd almost force them to get off the road, because you didn't want to get off on the side of the road, because if you did, obviously, you could run over a mine. So you tried to stay dead center.

And I got real good about leading, too. I liked to lead.

CSM ELDER: Was it typically, the operations include -- you said five vehicles in your squad or platoon, or section?

SMA TILLEY: Right. It was usually ten, because you had, like I say, seven APCs, and I think it was three tanks. I think that was our structure. Yeah.

And so it was normal that you went -- you know, as a platoon or a troop, and that had some kind of

mission where you secured something, or swept through a town or whatever.

CSM ELDER: Can you talk about the reliability of your equipment, your vehicles?

SMA TILLEY: You know, I probably wasn't real good on maintenance and stuff, but it seemed like it was always up. But you learned how to -- you know, just keep it moving. I guess then it was just -- you know, it certainly wasn't better equipment, but it seemed like it never broke down. If it did break down, it was fixed real quick; the maintenance personnel would get out and fix the vehicle real quick.

In fact, I remember one time I threw both tracks on the tank. Coming up on the side of the road, one popped out. Popped it back on, the other one came off. It wasn't the tracks' fault, it was mine, because as the driver I hadn't adjusted the tension very well. So, things like that. But it was a pretty good vehicle.

CSM ELDER: And what about the logistics for sustaining you guys? You feel like you had good logistical support?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, we did. I never really -- again, remember, you've got to understand, I was a PFC, then a SPEC-4 -- but we never really, it never seemed to me we had a problem, as far as getting the kind of stuff that we needed. It was always there, and if it wasn't there, they would certainly get it real quick.

CSM ELDER: When you were the driver, tell me about how your normal day would go.

SMA TILLEY: Usually as a driver, you never got out of the driver's compartment. And so you would, you know, get up in the morning and the sergeant -- I'm not sure they ever told me too much about what was really going to go on. But you would just sort of get in, crank your vehicle, check the oil levels and make sure everything was ready to go. And once the sergeant said, Let's go, you would start to move out.

So a normal day, we would go out, sweep roads, secure roads, or if the mission met, to secure the town. You were normally up pretty early, and moved out pretty early.

CSM ELDER: There continues to be a lot of discussion about the quality of draftees that fought in the Vietnam War.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me your impression on the claims of discipline problems, drug use, and racial tensions?

SMA TILLEY: You know, there was a lot of drugs. Obviously there was a lot of drugs there, and there were some guys -- and I think, again, the reason they used drugs was because they were scared. A lot of guys were real scared and stuff like that. I personally never got involved with any drugs, but I knew they were there.

But I remember one guy, I can't remember his name, he was always high on something. And I remember one day he went around -- he rode on an APC, he was the gunner, and he was sitting on a C ration box. And he went around a corner, and he fell off and broke his back. So that was probably the thing that I remember about the drugs and stuff like that. But again, there was drugs there if you wanted them.

It was probably the weirdest thing in the world. I just didn't -- I never wanted to mess with drugs, I guess because I was probably scared. But I never dealt with any of that stuff.

CSM ELDER: What about racial tensions?

SMA TILLEY: You know, that's the other thing. I didn't -- maybe I had tunnel vision, but I didn't -- in the troop that I was in, there wasn't, there didn't seem to be any racial tension. Again, I'm a young kid and maybe I'm not looking at the right things, or maybe I didn't notice those kinds of things. But I didn't see any.

Was it there? I'm sure there was. Was I involved with anything? No.

CSM ELDER: How about discipline problems?

SMA TILLEY: I think discipline problems at that time, there were probably discipline problems. But for the most part it was (inaudible). I mean, who are you in charge of? You know, a PFC or something like that. And on a tank crew, I mean, I was the lowest ranking person there. So there's no discipline

problems on my part.

So again, there were probably some there, but I never got involved with anything.

CSM ELDER: Can you describe what it was like to employ armor in Vietnam? Were there considerations, like paddies or roads --

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, there were always a lot of considerations. Again, during the monsoon season, you didn't come off the road. You tried not to come off the road.

In fact, I can tell you an instance where we went up and secured an infantry company to come in and get on helicopters and get out of there. And we secured them, and we went out probably 100 meters off the road. Probably shouldn't have gone that far. And it was okay. And as soon as I cranked the tank up to move, it sunk all the way up to the turret ring.

And so it took an 88 to get me out, and it sunk. No, it took another tank to try to get me out; it sunk. Then the 88 sunk. And then the only way we ever got out was another 88 showed up and winched us from the road out.

So yeah, that stuff was bad. But you learned real quick where you can go and where you can't go.

CSM ELDER: During your first enlistment in the Army, during the Vietnam period, the Army reduced physical and mental standards as part of Secretary of Defense McNamara's Project 100,000. Did you see any problems with the quality of soldier coming in?

SMA TILLEY: Well, I'll tell you, you know, I was a drill sergeant, I think, at that time. And in fact, I remember McNamara's 100,000.

I had a platoon, the average educational level was 3.4. And I had about -- in fact, I flipped a coin and lost, and so I had to take the (inaudible) in my barracks, and then the other 20 that was in the bottom in the other barracks.

So the answer is, yeah, there was a difference. It took you a lot longer to teach them things. It was a

little harder to understand. But they did a great job. Once they understood what was going on, they did a great job.

And I'll also tell you that a lot of them were very smart people, but in a lot of cases they didn't have the opportunities to go to school, for a variety of reasons, or chose not to go to school. But for the most part, I thought they were pretty good soldiers.

CSM ELDER: What about retention of those soldiers? The auspices of the program was to bring in those who didn't have the opportunities that you mentioned. Once they got those opportunities, did they tend to stay in the military?

SMA TILLEY: I think they did. You know, I've got to look back and check. But I would assume that probably a lot of them did. I think a lot of them -- in fact, I've talked to a lot of people, even current sergeant-majors in the Army, that came in and got their GED, and now they've got Master's degrees and stuff. So I think probably a lot of them stayed in the service. I've never tracked anything like that, so I really don't know.

CSM ELDER: The Army began noticing a reduced number of non-commissioned officers because they were faced with back-to-back assignments to Vietnam. They began the NCO candidate course -- some call it the shake-and-bake course. Did you have any leaders, or were you exposed to leaders who attended that training?

SMA TILLEY: You know, I was exposed to some of those NCOs that had that type of training, and -- and you know, again, I was a young SPEC-4. And they did a pretty good job, you know, because -- I'm not sure my knowledge level was very good about the Army at that time or not.

But the things that I've heard, a lot of them got killed, though, because they were in the process of learning. But it was at a time when we needed a lot of good non-commissioned officers, a lot of people to fill in those positions because we were short. So, they tended to get --

In fact, I've got a personal friend that went to shake-and-bake school, who is still in the Army. Very senior non-commissioned officer in the Army.

CSM ELDER: That would probably be CSM John Beck?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, CSM Beck is a -- I don't know if he's very open about it. But he went to shake-and-bake school, and he's an outstanding non-commissioned officer. So here's a perfect example of somebody that went to that school and certainly did very well in the military. Exactly.

CSM ELDER: Looking back over your combat tour, what would you classify were your greatest challenges, and do you have any lessons that stuck with you?

SMA TILLEY: Well, there were a lot of lessons. I never got all the way through Vietnam when we were talking about it. But the thing that I learned more than anything else is listen to my NCOs and pay attention to detail. Understand what's going on.

And also understand that things can change real quick, and you don't know what you don't know. And so you always have to be prepared.

I think what happens over a period of time is that if nothing happens, people get complacent, and they think that nothing is going to happen. And that's normally when you get hurt.

One of the things that I didn't talk about was, I was in the Tet Offensive in 1968. And this is hard to believe, but our day started off where we were up on Highway 13, and we got rocketed by our own gunships that evening, about 2:00 a.m. in the morning.

And so as soon as it got light, our entire squadron moved out towards Saigon. We stayed off the road. And then GEN DePew (phonetic) came down on our troop net, or squadron net or whatever, and said, you guys are too slow, you have to get on the road.

Now the roads -- remember, I told you we always sweep them? -- had not been swept. And so -- I was the second vehicle. The first vehicle hit a mine, and then so they just moved him off or whatever, we

went around him and kept going. And I never really wore my body armor, even though you had it. But I remember -- my body armor was down inside the driver's compartment -- I remember putting it underneath and sitting on it, because I always thought about if I ever got killed, I didn't want that hatch to come up and blow off my backside there. So I wore that.

But we went down into Saigon, and I remember going into Kansanute (phonetic). And there were bodies laying everywhere. I mean, they had napalmed, and there was -- I mean, everywhere you went, there was a body. It was just incredible.

In fact, I had talked the other night to somebody about this. And I remember -- in fact, I talked to, because we were on the same plane, I talked to a psychiatrist or something like that. And I told him that I could never visualize this. And you know, I couldn't see -- I know I was there, but I can't remember it and I can't see it. And she said that normally what you do is you have a -- you just block that out of your brain. You just don't see.

But I remember sitting there, and there was probably, again, 300, 400, 500 dead bodies laying all around. I remember eating chow and just sort of thinking nothing of it.

So those things in my mind I will absolutely never forget. Because again, they can happen so fast. Because if you are ill-prepared for what your job is -- in my mind, I have always thought that, you know, if you go play football or you play baseball and you lose, so what? You can come back tomorrow. But in our profession, if you lose, you die.

So I have always -- you know, if I am going to do something, I am going to do it to the best of my ability, and I am not just going to play. It is going to be what I need to do and how I need to get it done. And if I have got to fight or do whatever I've got to do, I am going to make sure that I am absolutely the best I can.

And the people that I am with are the best. You know, when you think about it, there are probably a lot of things that stuck with me over the years.

CSM ELDER: The Tet Offensive of '68 went on for a period of time. How long would you say that your unit was engaged?

SMA TILLEY: We were engaged pretty heavily down in Saigon. In fact, Tet was sort of interesting because they were fighting in little pockets in Saigon. So you would come out, and you would go that day and you would sweep an area and make contact with somebody and engage right there. And then that evening or whatever, depending on what the contact is, you may fall back to your assembly area or something like that.

So the length of time, you know, I don't know. The only -- I don't know, it was about a day, so every day you went and did something, there were people out there you would be shooting at. You know, I can't give you the length of time.

Initially went down to Saigon -- you know, you went out and there was still a lot of North Vietnamese there. And you would go out and you would sweep the area and you run into somebody, you would fight with them.

And it was really pretty slick, because they would come up, shoot at you and run away. A lot of times they would not stay and fight, which was what we wanted to do. They would sort of hit you and just move on out. So that happened a few times.

In fact, I remember one night, we used to run the roads after we moved into what we called the water plant. We would run the roads at night for a show of force. And I remember one night we got ambushed. And the tank commander we had -- we were all the way down in this little draw, and we were getting hit. And finally I said, you know, let's -- I told him on the intercom, I said, man, that sounds like .50-calibers coming at us. Because it was, you could hear the difference in the sound.

And so -- in fact, I talked to him and he wouldn't say nothing to me. And so I came out of the driver's compartment, I crawled around on the side and told him, hey, this is in the wrong area. Something's

wrong if they're shooting that big of ammunition, because they're not going to carry a .50 on their back.

And as I looked, the rest of the tracks were backing out. And what had happened was the VC had engaged in between us and some kind of compound. And so what we were doing was fighting with another compound over there -- you know, Vietnamese compound that was fighting the South Vietnamese. So we're firing back and forth, and they're gone.

And then also at nighttime when we would run the roads, I remember them putting up the barriers in the middle of the roads. I remember just knocking them down, running over them. Even when we were running (inaudible) going down into Saigon, after that first tank got blown up, if there were barriers in the road I would run over them and just keep moving. Because you weren't going to stop. And when you got down in Saigon, again, when we went into that (inaudible) airstrip, there were bodies laying in the wire and everything also.

CSM ELDER: Did you have the same vehicle the whole time you were assigned as a driver?

SMA TILLEY: I was on the APC and then on the same tank. And remember, I told you those guys who had gotten killed during that firefight? I got on that tank. And I don't know this to be true, but I've been told this on more than one occasion, is that the people before I got on that tank were killed, and then after I got off they were all killed.

CSM ELDER: Wow.

SMA TILLEY: Mmm.

CSM ELDER: Was there anything else about your tour in Vietnam that we haven't discussed, that sticks in your mind?

SMA TILLEY: Well, you know, I got a Bronze Star. I was put in for a Silver Star. What it was, it was still during Tet, and we were sweeping through an area, and we came into a textile plant. And there were VC, I guess, in this textile plant.

So we went in and we were going to engage them. Well, a PC had dropped off about an eight-foot cliff and damaged the PC, and they left the PC down there.

No, I take that back, no, they didn't. They dropped off the cliff, and then we pulled out and we all ran out, or I drove out, because it was too deep. Well, at the other end, we decided to go in where it was a little more level. And so they knocked the wall down, and when the PC went in, it pulled past a tower, and in the tower, there were VCs in the tower, and they hit them with an RPG. So they left the track there. They did get off and run.

Well, they decided that we would go in and get it. And what happened was, we would fire a few main gun rounds and nobody was moving. So the platoon leader made the decision that our tank would bust through the wall and fire, and then the two PCs would come through, and one would engage, too, and the other one would hook up this PC and then pull it out.

Well, what happened was, we went -- the tank I was on went through, but nobody else came with us. And so we were in there by ourselves firing main gun rounds. And you know, there were still VC running around in there, I guess. I could never see them, but there were still VC moving around in there. So we fired a few main gun rounds back up to the APC. We were still engaged, sort of fooling around, and moved out.

It happened -- it seemed like forever, but I'm sure it happened real quick. So that's one of the reasons, I guess, I got a Bronze Star.

CSM ELDER: Field recovery method?

SMA TILLEY: Field recovery. In fact, once we got out, that PC would still move. We could have driven it out. (Laughing.)

CSM ELDER: That's great. Any other comments on your time in Vietnam?

SMA TILLEY: No. Again, that's just something, some part of my life that I will never forget. I mean, there are just things that -- you go back and -- even when you go over and look at the wall, the

Vietnam Wall, I mean, man, I can still look up names of people I know. That was really a -- for a young person to go through the things I went through -- and I'm sure there are a lot of people that went through a lot more -- that's just something I will never forget.

CSM ELDER: Do you keep in contact with any former buddies from --

SMA TILLEY: Nah. Nah, not at all. You know, that's the funny thing about the Army. You go through so fast, and you're focused on what you're doing a lot of times that -- you know, I've got some great friends in the military. But you just go on and do something else. I mean, so every job you go to, you are sort of focused on your job. And what happened before, it just happened. But the answer's no.

CSM ELDER: After Vietnam, you were assigned to Fort Benning. And you had mentioned that you were in drill sergeant school. What rank were you when you left Vietnam?

SMA TILLEY: I was a SPEC-5. I came back as a specialist five, and very proud of that. And when I got to Fort Benning, they converted me over to be a sergeant E-5.

CSM ELDER: How were you selected to be a SPEC-5. Was there any process?

SMA TILLEY: (Inaudible) on the tank. In fact -- I probably shouldn't tell you this -- when I got ready to -- they were going to have, I think, a promotion board in Vietnam. But something had happened somewhere, I was in that water plant, and they needed volunteers to do something, to go and take some equipment somewhere.

And so I said, well, you know, I'll do it, I don't care. And when I came back, I was like number four on the promotion list. So I never went to the promotion board for an E-5. So, that was sort of interesting.

But anyway. I obviously did pretty good on the board. (Laughing.)

CSM ELDER: To be ranked number four, you must have.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, yeah. And there probably was only four people there.

CSM ELDER: Did you take any type of leave or break in between Vietnam?

SMA TILLEY: I did. I came home, and -- I want to say I was on like a 30-day leave after I came back.

And boy, that was quite a time. I think I drank as much beer as I could. You know, probably (inaudible). And you just sort of geared down, and I went back and visited all the friends I hadn't seen, and of course you talk about Vietnam. It's all over then, so you can flex your chest a little bit and say I'm done with it. But I just sort of relaxed a little bit.

The one thing that was sort of funny, I remember I had an MG. I bought an MG, and I was driving down the road, and I couldn't figure out why everybody was passing me. I had just gotten into sort of a trance, I guess -- until I realize that I'm doing like 25 miles an hour. And that was about the speed that you would run in those tanks.

And so that's probably the only thing ever really, that I thought was funny.

CSM ELDER: When you went on to Fort Benning, after you were selected for drill sergeant school, you said you did a month, kind of like a candidate --

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, a month, month and a half, something like that.

CSM ELDER: -- and then you went on to drill sergeant school. Tell me about your time in drill sergeant school.

SMA TILLEY: That was probably -- in my mind, probably one of the toughest schools I ever went to. One is, because -- maybe not now, but then I didn't like to talk in front of people. If you had asked me to get up and say anything, I would probably say hey, just thank you. So that was, emotionally it was really tough for me, because I had to get up and talk in front of groups of people, and I didn't feel very comfortable doing it.

But I though it was probably a school that sort of pulled me out of being a young adult. It sort of

pulled me forward to maybe step forward a little bit.

In fact, I remember the first presentation I had to give was the high jumper. And I remember getting out there, and I practiced and I practiced. And I did -- I mean, I practiced and I thought I really had it. So I got out there, and I did the extended rectangle formation. And I remember saying the high jumper's on a four count -- I mean, I was just all messed up.

So at the end of this the sergeant gave me like a 68. Of course, that wasn't passing. And there was a guy named -- Harold Moore, I believe his name was. He was a staff sergeant. And he asked me, he says, hey, look, did you study? And I said, well, I did. I had everything down pat, and I've talked to trees, and I did all this stuff. And I really had it down pat.

And so Harold said, hey, look, I think what you're doing is studying too hard. And so that evening me and Harold went out and relaxed a little bit, probably came back in about 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m., and lights on at 4:00 a.m. I didn't even sleep on my bed that night. I laid on the floor, got up and got dressed, shaved and cleaned up.

And the following day I had to do left-face or something like that. And I remember doing that presentation, and the guy said, Student number -- I can't remember the student number -- fall out. And you have to do this presentation.

And I remember doing it. I said, Left face, left face is a two-part command that -- you know, I went through everything. Anyway, I got a 100 on the presentation. And so from that day on -- I mean, I learned the material, but I wouldn't stress myself, because I stressed myself so much I just don't think I could have gotten through it.

But Harold sort of pulled me through and helped me out there at that one part there. So he was probably the reason I got through drill sergeant school.

CSM ELDER: Besides that, did you experience any other difficulties while you attended that

course?

SMA TILLEY: No, no. You know, I'm one of the guys that say, you know, I'm probably not a top performer; I'm not the worst guy in there. I guess I'm probably one of those guys sort of staying in the middle. You know, I do as hard as I can. Is it better than everybody else? No. Would I like to be better than everybody else? Well, sure, you know, I like to win. But I did the best I could.

I never had a study hall, I always got through. So I thought I did pretty good.

CSM ELDER: How long did you serve as a drill sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: Well, I served as a drill sergeant twice. I served at Fort Benning for I guess a couple of years. I extended 30 days in the Army before I got out to complete a training cycle, so I guess it was probably close to a year and a half or maybe two years, if you count Vietnam. Probably more like a year, a little bit over, a year and a half.

I got out and stayed out a couple of years. And when I came back in, I volunteered to go back on drill sergeant duty. So I was a drill sergeant not only at Fort Benning, but also at Fort (inaudible).

CSM ELDER: What led you to get out of the Army?

SMA TILLEY: Company commander. A company commander I thought was a terrible leader. He was very abusive -- he just lacked leadership. And so he just did things that really didn't make any sense.

And you try to rationalize it -- of course, I'm a young sergeant. And when you see the senior NCOs become very frustrated about what this captain was doing, you know, you certainly think, well, this guy is bad.

And so I was -- probably more than anything else, probably him. I just didn't like his leadership style. And I thought, I'll show him. I'll get out of the Army. I'll prove to him he can't -- which was absolutely the wrong thing to do. So when I did get out, I went to work for a -- I guess I did a bunch of jobs.

I went to work for a paneling factory, and a chemical factory. And I had some good jobs. But one

day I was just thinking, and I said, here's a guy that has readjusted my entire life, that has made me do things that I don't want to do. And I really liked what I was doing.

So -- in fact, it was sort of funny. I was on vacation -- or going somewhere up around Seattle, Washington -- and I remember driving on Fort Lewis, and going and watching trainees train. And I thought, geez, I like that. I mean, this is (inaudible).

In fact, one of the drill sergeants came up to me and started saying, hey, what are you doing here, what's going on? I said, well, you know, I used to be a drill sergeant, I got out of the Army. And so we talked.

I knew probably at that time I wanted to go back in the Army. And so I used to go by the recruiter's office -- I think I probably went by a couple of times, or maybe -- I don't remember how many times I went by. But I stopped by and I talked to him, and got to be friends.

And then one day this guy called me on the phone and said, hey, look. He says, I know you've been talking about coming back in. He said, but if you don't do it within two or three days, he said, you will have no rank when you come back in. You'll come back in as a private. And I had made staff sergeant before I got out of the service.

And so I sad, hey, I appreciate you letting me know. I think it was the next day I went down -- I took a day off or something from my job -- went down, went over to Portland, Oregon, did all the tests, did all the stuff I had to do, and really swore back in the Army. And then I went back and said, hey, I'm going to retire from my job. So I went back in the Army.

CSM ELDER: How long were you out of the Army for?

SMA TILLEY: I want to say two and a half years. My wife says about two years, so you better go with her. About two years out of the service.

CSM ELDER: Did you plan, early on, to make the military your career?

SMA TILLEY: No. No, I didn't. I don't think -- I don't think anybody plans on making the military their career. I mean, if you come in and say, I'm going to be a soldier for 30 years or 35 years -- you know, I don't think you can do that. I think that you certainly got to take life as it is.

You know, if you come in and you like what you're doing, obviously you ought to do it, continue to do it. But I had no aspirations to stay in the Army. I really, quite frankly, thought I'd come in, stay a couple years, and get out, and never come back. But again, because of things I did, because I liked what I was doing -- I just liked the majority of the people. I always thought it was a challenge, and I thought, here's something that I just like doing, and I like moving around. You know, I really do. I love the fact that you don't stay in one place in the military. And I have been to so many different places in my life. But I like the fact that I could pick up and move and go to different places.

CSM ELDER: You had mentioned about that company commander who affected your career decision, or at least to stay in. Was that your company commander when you were a drill sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. He was -- yeah. Yep. Right there at Fort Benning. Now, I'm not going to mention his name. But he was right there at Fort Benning.

CSM ELDER: Gotcha.

SMA TILLEY: And I had another company commander I thought was outstanding. But -- and he probably wasn't a bad guy. It's just that -- you know, young captains, young sergeants, there's a process that you go through to learn. And unfortunately, sometimes you make mistakes. And his -- again, I just didn't like his leadership style.

The way that he talked to you, he sort of talked down to you when he talked. It wasn't on a professional basis, it was sort of talking down to things that he wanted you to do. You never felt real comfortable. In fact, I wasn't the only one. He talked down to everybody.

CSM ELDER: So would you classify that he was of the average abilities of a company-grade

officer at that period, or he was just an unusual kind of guy?

SMA TILLEY: I thought he was less than average, and he was unusual. He wasn't the norm. I think that one of the things that makes the Army real good -- and I'm going from the past, all those times -- is the relationship you have with officers in the Army. I think that that's the strength of our Army, the way that the -- one is, the officers understand the importance of the sergeant, and the sergeants also understand the importance of having a good leader, a good commander. So -- yeah, he was unusual.

CSM ELDER: You jumped ahead, and you spoke about the relationship between the commissioned officer and the NCO in recent history. But tell me, back when you were a drill sergeant, during that period -- there are a lot of folks now who look back and say, the NCO corps lost their strength, or they gave it away, or their authorities were given out, because of the things that were going on in Vietnam and in the country.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, I think that's true. I think in Vietnam what happened was a lot of the officers took on the role of NCOs. I mean, they would do the things that NCOs would normally do. And so that's true, that's absolutely true.

Again, I'm a young specialist, and so I can't see all those things. But I know at that time that when you would go somewhere as a staff sergeant, a lot of times you would have to prove yourself, your abilities, that you could do the job.

And again, the draft was on, and there were some sergeants that got promoted that were really good fighters in Vietnam, but weren't probably the best guys in garrison, you know? So there was a lot of stuff going on.

So I think -- in fact, I don't think; I know that a lot of authority from NCOs was taken away.

CSM ELDER: About the time during your first enlistment, something new had happened to the Army, which is kind of why we're here. The position of Sergeant-Major of the Army was established. SMA

William O. Wooldridge was selected as our first one. Did you have any consciousness of the fact that there was a senior enlisted guy helping the chief? Were you even aware of that at that time?

SMA TILLEY: No. Absolutely not. I -- you know, again, I'm just one of those guys that sort of stayed focused in my lane.

Now, I knew who my sergeant-major was within my unit, or my senior NCO or my first sergeant. But no, absolutely not, I had no idea that there was a position like that.

CSM ELDER: Okay. We kind of breezed over your break in service. Was there any other incidences or events that happened in that period of your life that either affected you later on in the Army or was something that stuck with you?

SMA TILLEY: During the separation?

CSM ELDER: During your break.

SMA TILLEY: No. No, I don't think so. In fact -- well, me and Gloria got married. That's a big deal. I had gotten out of the Army -- in fact, it's a funny story. I had gotten out of the Army. I was sort of, probably a little frustrated. I was going to stay in Georgia, down there working.

So I went to this place and said, hey, look, I'll work. I don't want to work long, maybe 40 or 60 days, but I'm probably going to leave. And I said, can you give me a job? And the guy said, well, since you're so honest, I will. I said, well, how much are you going to pay me? He said, \$1.25 an hour. I said, I'm not going to work for that.

And so one day I had gotten bothered, me and Gloria had some kind of disagreement. And I said, I'm leaving. So I packed my bag and left Georgia, and started going home. And I moved out, and it took me forever to probably drive 300, 400 miles or whatever the heck it was. And all the time I'm thinking about Gloria.

And so I got that distance, and I called her on the phone. I said, hey, look, you know, I'm sorry I

was upset -- I don't remember what I was upset about. But if I come back, will you get married and come with me?

She said sure, so I turned around. I got back in probably two hours, and we went down, got married, and been together now, geez, over 31 years.

CSM ELDER: Great. Before we move on to when you re-enlisted back in the Army, you mentioned you were a specialist-5, then you were promoted to sergeant, hard stripes.

SMA TILLEY: Converted, yeah.

CSM ELDER: How did that work? How did the conversion work?

SMA TILLEY: For me it was pretty easy. The first sergeant says, Tilley, you're going to be a sergeant E-5. Here's your orders. (Laughing.) And I just converted over to sergeant E-5. There was no ceremony, there was nothing. They just converted me over.

CSM ELDER: Was it because you changed duty positions, or --

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, because I was going to be a drill sergeant. And at that time, they thought that a sergeant E-5 was a leader, a drill sergeant leader. And so I was going to be a sergeant E-5.

CSM ELDER: Do you recall if the Army still had temporary promotions at that time, or --

SMA TILLEY: Temporary promotions as far as sergeants, like --

CSM ELDER: Now, I don't mean acting sergeants. I meant, before the Army went to the semi-centralized, centralized, and decentralized promotion system, the promotion system that was in effect around that period were temporary promotions. And the unit owned the stripes.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. Yeah, I do remember. In fact, I want to say that even at the brigade level, I think, they promoted to sergeant first class. You know, I don't know how high they went up to that. So the answer to your question is yes, they did have some temporary promotions.

But they must have moved them real quick, because I got out of that arena real fast.

CSM ELDER: And then you mentioned you were promoted to staff sergeant before you got out.

SMA TILLEY: I was. I had about two and a half years in the Army. I was boarded at the tank. I think they had three allocations and I was probably third, you know. But I got selected for promotion right there at Fort Benning.

CSM ELDER: So this is about 1971?

SMA TILLEY: No, no. In fact, that's -- you're talking -- '66, '67 -- that's in the '69 time frame. Sixty-eight, whatever, '68 time frame, I guess it was, 1969.

CSM ELDER: So, you attended a promotion board. Would you compare that to today's promotion boards that we have for staff sergeant and sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, it's the same kind of stuff. You went in, sat down, made a report to them, they would ask you a series of questions related with your job and stuff like that. So I think they are -- again, that's years ago. I think they are about the same. The ones today may be a little bit tougher, but I think it's probably pretty close to the same.

CSM ELDER: Okay. You return back in the Army in --

SMA TILLEY: Nineteen seventy-one. September '71.

CSM ELDER: September '71. And you went to Fort Knox as a drill sergeant again, is that correct?

SMA TILLEY: I went to -- no. I went to Fort Polk, Louisiana. I went to Fort Polk, Louisiana. In fact, I asked to go back to the East somewhere. I went to Fort Polk and stayed there a couple years as a drill sergeant.

And just to let you know, I left Fort Polk because my oldest son got pneumococcal meningitis. Left him totally blind, totally deaf, 20 to 30 convulsions a day, had encephalitis.

Anyway, he got the meningitis. So when we came back, we had to be compassionately reassigned, or get a compassionate reassignment to Fort Lewis, Washington. So he could go to a hospital where they could give him the needs, stuff that he needed for special education.

And so we went there. And ironically, when we got compassionately reassigned there, the stuff that they had on Fort Lewis, they did away with it, so we had to go to the University of Washington, I think, and the school system there, to get him into the school system.

CSM ELDER: Now, how long did you say that you spent at Fort Polk?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, geez, probably about two years, something like that. You'd have to go back and look at the records and see. It was something like just a couple of years as a drill sergeant.

CSM ELDER: Did you notice a change in quality from the type of soldiers that you were training when you were first in the Army, and the soldiers that you trained in '71?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, because we went to the volunteer Army. And there were some things there -
- I mean, everybody was trying to feel out how they should or shouldn't do certain things.

But there was a big difference. Here, you go back to authority; even the way that drill sergeants were handling trainees. It was a lot closer, the commanders were a lot closer, as far as trainee abuse and stuff like that. They were -- not watching, but there was more discussion about that, trainee abuse, and things you could or couldn't do.

So yeah, there was a big difference. In '67, you got the job done. You didn't abuse trainees, but you could be tough on them and get it done. Here in '71, they were watching a lot closer, and were probably looking for more mistakes and stuff like that.

CSM ELDER: Now, were you a staff sergeant the entire time that you were at Fort Polk?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. Yeah, I was. I was a staff sergeant, because I came back in as a staff sergeant. I lost all time in grade, so I started like I was promoted the day I came back in. So I lost all that

time in grade, so I was a staff sergeant.

CSM ELDER: Were you able to attend any NCO academies prior to the (inaudible)?

SMA TILLEY: No. No. In fact, it's funny you say that. I never went to a PDLC, a BNOC, or an ANOC. And that was -- because at that time, I was almost promoted out of that system. And again, I thought if you worked hard and got all that stuff done, then you were okay. So -- no. The answer's no.

CSM ELDER: Do you have any other comments or things that have stuck with you from your time while you were assigned at Fort Polk?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. I mean, I remember, there was a guy named Dan Mayes (phonetic), who was a drill sergeant. And a guy named Langston, and Larry Smith, and all these outstanding -- CPT Carter. I mean -- Will Harper. A guy named drill sergeant Kearney, which was a sergeant-major, he just retired a couple years ago.

It seemed to me that the quality of drill sergeants within that section was really strong, and they were very close. And I just really liked it. And so probably if I didn't learn anything else, I'm sure I learned a lot of stuff, there was a lot of good development.

The guy, SFC Langston and Mayes, they were the kind of guys I sort of wanted to be in the Army. Great guys. Really had it, I thought, together as far as leadership style, and the mannerisms and stuff that you wanted to be like. In fact, one of the things that I've always tried to do is sort of pick out a sergeant that has those good traits -- or an officer; it doesn't make a difference -- but pick out somebody that has the traits that you want to be like, and sort of put those in your rucksack.

(Interruption to tape.)

SMA TILLEY: If you do the same things they do, you know, probably just -- and that's part of development, I think, in the Army. You come in thinking you know what you should do, and then I think you -- you know, you realize when you get in that there are a lot of people -- (interruption to tape.)

(End side B, tape 1.)

CSM ELDER: This is continuation of oral history interview with SMA Tilley. This is tape two, side A.

Sergeant-Major, before we changed tapes, we were talking about your assignment, finishing up your assignment in Fort Polk. Did you have any additional matter to add to your assignment at Fort Polk?

SMA TILLEY: No. The only thing I'll tell you is, even, both times I was a drill sergeant, every time I was a drill sergeant, I always had to (inaudible) at PT and G-3. I was always -- you know, G-3 went back and forth. But I always had high PT average in my platoon, and I always usually won the G-3 testing.

Weapons, though, was something that was sort of -- you can't make people hit targets. So --
(laughter) -- I always did pretty good --

(Interruption to tape.)

CSM ELDER: This is a continuation of the oral history interview for SMA Jack Tilley. This is tape two, side B.

Okay, Sergeant-Major, we are continuing discussing when you were assigned as a first sergeant. Did you have anything else to add on your time as first sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: No, other than I was a first sergeant at three locations. I was a first sergeant at OSIP, 1st Training Brigade. And then I was a first sergeant at BNOC. And then I was also a first sergeant for one year in Korea, after coming out of the Sergeant-Major Academy.

CSM ELDER: And we'll talk about your assignment in Korea here shortly. But let's talk about when you were a chief instructor and division chief at the NCO academy. What were your normal day-to-day activities there at the NCO academy?

SMA TILLEY: Well, really, developing on -- well, you've got to go back. I was a BNOC chief first, and then a chief instructor. I was a chief instructor when I came back from Korea. And they thought I

was going to pick up and make E-9, so they put me in as a chief instructor.

And so I was -- in the first place, when I got to the Academy I was a BNOC chief, and I manned -- you know, 19th Delta and 11th Bravo, and the 19 Kilo BNOC school.

CSM ELDER: Now, for clarity, Sergeant-Major, this is before you went to the Sergeants-Major Academy?

SMA TILLEY: Yep. Yeah. Before I went to the academy, I worked at BNOC. And I was, like I said, the BNOC chief there. And I just, you know, monitored POI and made sure the training was done correctly, made sure our lessons were just updated.

Now, one of the things I did while I was there was SGM Stevens gave me the responsibility -- (interruption to tape) -- to rewrite all the lesson plans for the Kilo MOS. You know, so I had the responsibility to get them through the processes, the main process, I don't even know what you call it now, but to verify that they're okay and then out to the system. So I had to do that one (inaudible). (Inaudible) really a tough job, because it isn't easy.

In fact, the only way I ever got it done, I went back to him and said, hey, look, I have to go to these civilians to get them approved. Can I move them to my building, and then just all work together? And so we did that, and it really worked out very well.

CSM ELDER: And you mentioned Kilo MOS. Are you talking about the 19 Kilo, the MOS for tankers?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

CSM ELDER: So did you perform any instructor duties, or mainly supervisory role?

SMA TILLEY: No. No, supervisory role. When I was at the academy running the BNOC, I was just in a supervisory role. You know, I'd counsel soldiers, monitor training, making sure it was done correctly. And I stayed there up until the time I went to the Sergeants-Major Academy.

CSM ELDER: Did you have subordinate instructors who worked for you?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah. Sure did. Sure did.

CSM ELDER: About how many was that?

SMA TILLEY: It was probably -- it was probably twelve or fourteen, something like that.

CSM ELDER: What type of training presentation did they use? Was it stand up and lecture format, or small group instruction, or anything in particular?

SMA TILLEY: It was all small group instruction. Really, the class size that we had there was really pretty small. There's usually no more than about probably 15 students in a class, you know. They did both, the small group instruction, the hands-on training, then we would go to the field. So it was all incorporated.

CSM ELDER: Was this your first introduction to the small group training process?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, sure was. The -- yeah, it sure was. I don't think I ever -- you know, I had never been on that part of the house anyway, so -- yeah, that was the first time I had ever seen that kind of instructing.

CSM ELDER: Over the years, we probably all participated in lectures where the instructor stands up and speaks to a large grouping of personnel. Can you compare that to the small group instruction process -- particularly the ability for the students to retain the knowledge?

SMA TILLEY: Well, the thing is, is the interaction. What I like to do in the small group is call on people and say, here, here, here. But if you're talking to three, four, five, 600 people, I mean, what they get out of it is at different levels. I mean, some people understand and some people don't.

So I think the good thing about the small group instruction, it allows you to participate more and understand exactly where you're coming from. When the groups are so large, I mean, you just lose a lot.

And the other thing about that is people -- I mean, I remember going as a young sergeant to the things like that. And I would have had questions, but I don't want to embarrass myself. And so I never said anything. But in the small group instruction, I mean, everybody's clicking. And then you know who doesn't understand.

CSM ELDER: As we spoke earlier, the -- going to the M-1 was like from a Volkswagen to a Cadillac. How important do you think the small group instruction process was for what was obviously a technological piece of equipment?

SMA TILLEY: I think it was very important. Again, we're going from a system that a lot of us didn't understand into an M-1 tank.

I'll also tell you, there was a lot of discussion about how hard it was to learn the M-1, you know. And I mean, there was a lot of stuff in there, a lot of information. But once you're a tanker on a system and you understand a system, I didn't really think it was that hard. It was a better system. If you listened to the instruction and you read the lesson plans and stuff like that, I mean -- it was just like any other block of instruction. It was a system that you had to understand.

The thing about the M-1 tank in my mind is the turret and all that stuff moves so much faster. The gun tube moves so much quicker. The reaction time had to be a little faster, because the tank itself was faster. The suspension system -- so there was clearly differences, and so understanding the capabilities of that tank -- in fact, I remember there was a guy named SGT Day one time who was on a driving course. And you know, you hit a bump in a tank, I mean, it will just knock you over, I mean, it will really hurt you.

And we flew through the air, and landed on that suspension system. And I said, man, this is okay. So understanding the system, that was important.

CSM ELDER: Did you find that there was a percentage of soldiers who came in who had never been -- who were never experienced with the M-1? Did you find it was a medium mix, or --

SMA TILLEY: That never had any knowledge on the M-1? When I was at BNOC?

CSM ELDER: Right.

SMA TILLEY: No, because -- I want to say at BNOC when we were there, you had the Echo side and you had the Kilo side. So they didn't mix together. You know, you had two distinct groups, because that was still pretty early on in the phase of the tank in the Army. You know, so they were still segregated.

So (inaudible) 60's, you had a group for 60's and a group for M-1.

CSM ELDER: And then 19 Echo was the MOS for the M-60 series, and the 19 Kilo was the MOS for the M-1 series?

SMA TILLEY: I want to say yes. You'd have to go back and check that, but I'm sure that was it, Echo and Kilo.

CSM ELDER: Okay. And then after you completed your assignment as the BNOC chief, was there anything else that maybe I didn't hit on?

SMA TILLEY: No, that was it. That was it. There was a guy -- being at the NCO Academy I thought was rewarding for a lot of reasons. One is I got to see the PLDC, the BNOC, had a better understanding of ANOC. And I really started probably getting a pretty good grasp on the education system in the Army. I mean, I understood it before, but I really understood it when I left there. So that was very rewarding for me. It really -- I mean, when you think about being a tank commander and a platoon sergeant and a first sergeant-operations, I think that BNOC probably capped it all off for me, sort of really put that all in perspective.

CSM ELDER: At about this time, you were selected to attend the Sergeants-Major Academy. Had you been recommended for promotion, or were you sent as an alternate?

SMA TILLEY: No. No, I was sent as a master sergeant. At that time, if you went to the school --

you only had to have one year time in grade, and then you were eligible to go to school -- oh, and by the way, that's the way we're going back to.

And so I went one year time in grade, and I was picked up, and six months or whatever after that, went to the course. It was a six-month course.

CSM ELDER: Was it through the promotion selection process similar to how we have now?

SMA TILLEY: You know, I'm guessing, but I think it was. I'm not sure on that. In fact, no, it was. That was how you were selected to go to the course.

CSM ELDER: Tell me, when you attended the course, did you bring your family along with you?

SMA TILLEY: No, I didn't. And the reason I didn't is because remember, my son had the medical condition. I thought, this is not a good idea. I need to leave him where he's at. So I just left them there and I went down to school.

CSM ELDER: So did the family stay at Fort Knox, Kentucky, while you --

SMA TILLEY: No, they moved, we moved off-post. We moved to Elizabethtown, Kentucky. And they stayed right there; he still stayed in the same school system, so it was good for everybody. The only person really it was probably bad for was me and my wife, you know, being separated for, really, turned out being about a year and a half, because I went to the Academy and came back and then went to Korea for a year.

CSM ELDER: So tell me, what was your impression, your initial impression of the Sergeants-Major Academy?

SMA TILLEY: I was scared to death. You know, nobody wants to flunk when they go to school.

But I -- I had learned a great deal. But I had been to the first sergeants course already a few years before that, when I had gone on to be a first sergeant. So I had been to the first sergeants course. So I had a really pretty good idea of what was going to come about in the Sergeants-Major Academy.

So you know, it was something I was ready for. I was certainly excited about going. You know, because now in my brain I'm thinking, hey, maybe in fact they'll mess up and promote me. So, you know, I was really excited about going.

CSM ELDER: You mentioned you attended the first sergeants course. Could you compare the two? Were some of the topics that were taught at that period similar between first sergeants course and the Sergeants-Major course?

SMA TILLEY: I don't -- I don't think there were a whole lot of topics. There could have been some that were similar. I mean, you had writing assignments and stuff in the first sergeants. But the thing that was good about the first sergeants course was, of course, the interaction with other first sergeants. And the way that they taught the instruction was the same kind of method, so you know what you had to learn, you know, what the objective was and all that other stuff.

So it was better -- it was real good preparation to go. In fact, when I was in the school, people that had not gone to the first sergeants course, I thought were a little more stressed out, because they hadn't gotten, like, a preparation course to go to. And that was really what it was for.

But I thought the first sergeants course was outstanding. I got a lot out of that, a whole lot out of that.

CSM ELDER: What about the curriculum that was used when you attended the sergeants-major course. Did you think that was on target?

SMA TILLEY: I thought it was, pretty much. Now, there were some things, of course, that were taught that you may never use. But I thought it was pretty much on target. Some of these research papers that you had to do on different countries and stuff like that, they were okay, but it was more, I guess, using your knowledge and getting you prepared to be doing things. So I thought the time that I went through it was pretty much on target.

CSM ELDER: Sergeant-Major, some people still believe that sergeants-major should not be studying national security; that's commanders' business. Sergeants-Major should focus on tactical warfighting skills. What are your comments on that?

SMA TILLEY: I think there's a balance. Here you go again; I think there's always a balance. I think it's good for me to understand what my boss is doing, at least -- but I think -- it's good that I understand. I don't need to focus on it, but I ought to have just a knowledge about exactly how it's working.

But I'll also tell you that we need to stay focused on the warfighting skills. But I like understanding the system, and that's what you're learning about.

So, is it bad to teach it? Absolutely not. You need to understand the system. But I'll also tell you, when you get out of there and you start doing your job -- here you go again -- stay in your lane. I mean, what happens is -- I tell people that -- I don't know if you've ever heard this story -- I've had people come up to me and talk about theater strategy. And I'll say, I don't care about theater strategy. What I care about is what your responsibilities are.

So I think it goes to the individual. What happens is sometimes that that sergeant-major is sort of going to get out of his box. You know, he's going to care about things that -- he needs to care about them, but you don't need to stay focused on them.

So I guess the answer is, I think it's okay to teach it, as long as the understanding is they may not know it and this is an education part for you, so move out.

CSM ELDER: Do you think that the type of training you received on subjects like national security enabled you to perform at least with more information when you went to CENTCOM further on in your career?

SMA TILLEY: No.

CSM ELDER: No effect?

SMA TILLEY: No. The -- again, all that knowledge helps you. But when I went to CENTCOM, I had never worked at a Joint job before. Other than when I was in Bosnia as the Task Force Sergeant-Major, I would work with the Air Force and a little bit with the Navy. And so I had a general knowledge.

I mean, there's a culture difference there, you know, about how you accomplish certain kinds of missions. So no, I don't think it did. It didn't prepare me very good to work at a Joint command.

Remember, now, your responsibilities are a little bit different. I'm not the G-3 or the G-2 or the G-1. I'm there to work with the commander, and assist him in those kinds of things that he needs to have done.

And I probably need to tell you something else here real quick, is that, you know what makes you a good sergeant-major? If you were a good tank commander, a good platoon sergeant, a good first sergeant, a good sergeant-major -- you're good, and what we're doing is giving you knowledge when you go to school, to educate you a little bit.

But just because you're going to the Sergeants-Major Academy doesn't mean you're going to be a good sergeant-major. I mean, you already have those qualities prior to going. So that's all we're doing; we're just sort of fine tuning and giving you more information when you go to school.

CSM ELDER: There's a lot of debate nowadays about six months versus nine months at the Sergeants-Major Academy.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. No, I've heard that, too, and eventually we will probably get to find out what's the length of time.

The problem with us, normally, is that most NCOs are Type A personalities -- let's get it done. And when you tell them to slow down, take a little break, fall back, regroup, and sort of develop yourself, they're going to say, no, let's cut it down to two weeks. Let me get that information and move out.

Well, let's -- you know, you've worked hard all your military career. Let's take a little bit of time, let you take a little break. Almost, I'd say, get rejuvenated, and then go back out to the force. Because that's

what you've got to do.

You know, the problem with us sometimes, we work up until the day we get out of the Army. Well, this is a time when you need to take your time, prepare yourself to get ready to go to the force. So, whether or not six months or nine months, I don't know. We're going to re-look that here pretty quick. But enjoy it while you're there, because once it's done, you're not going back. You're not going to get recycled.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me, when you attended the course, were there any particular subjects that just gave you a heck of a time?

SMA TILLEY: The only thing that probably ever gave me a heck of a time -- (inaudible) -- they test you. When I went through, they would test you, and if you failed a test, they would not -- if you took the test in the morning, they wouldn't tell you until like 1900 hours that evening whether or not you even had a problem with the test. So you would sit there all day wondering how you did on the test, and when you take a break, people would talk about the test.

And so about noontime, you're thinking, I blew this. You know what I'm talking about? It didn't make sense to me. So the first test I took, I was -- by about 1800, I was a nervous wreck. And they never called me. The next day I'm okay, but the next day I went to our instructor and said, hey, look, you know, can we figure out a better system here? Because this is driving me completely bonkers. Because I've wasted that whole day, because I'm more worried about whether I'm successful or not.

And so what our instructor did was let us write the answers down, and kept them like that. We'd go out, come back in, he'd go over the questions, and you would know before you left. Then you would tear them up and throw them away. Which was okay.

But that was probably the toughest thing I went through, just the amount of stress.

The other thing I think I went through that was a little stressful was getting back good study habits. How I needed to prepare, how I dealt with stress a little bit. And everybody's a little bit different, as far as

dealing with those things.

So mentally being prepared to go through the school, and then again, gearing up or gearing down, depending on how you look at it, to go through the education process again.

CSM ELDER: Were there any particular -- either blocks or portions of the course that you were extremely pleased with?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, I think that any time you talk about leadership and development of leadership, it's always interesting to me to talk and discuss about leadership. Because it's neat for me to hear how different leaders accomplish different missions, and what they would go through that they think is good, and it's different.

I mean, when you look at the Army, and you look at combat arms versus CSS, and -- you know, different MOSs, everybody develops in a different way. And so for you to get in a group of people with different MOSs and different thoughts and different ideas, I just always thought it was interesting.

So that's -- you know, of all the things I always liked, I always like to talk about leadership, the development process and like that. So I think for me that was probably the most rewarding.

The other thing is that you just made a lot of good friends, and you learned more -- I mean, I met guys from Delta Force I would never talk to. Guys from engineers -- I mean, all these different MOSs. And then I realized there are other MOSs besides armor, you know? So that was the most interesting thing for me.

CSM ELDER: Well, sir, you bring up a good topic. You talked about one of the things that was -- beneficial I think is what you said, paraphrasing you -- being together in a group. The value of coming together in a classroom, do you think that that's at risk with distance learning initiatives that are (inaudible) now?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. Yeah, I think you've got to be very careful about distance learning.

One of the things that I have been talking to here lately is I think that as you get older -- BNOC,

ANOC, Sergeants-Major Academy maybe -- but I think there are portions that you can do with distance learning. I absolutely think at PLDC, leave it alone. Don't ever do any distance learning at PLDC.

I'll also tell you that if you do some, you know, at BNOC and ANOC, you've still got to come back into the education process, back in the school. But it's the wave of the future, we've got to look into it, we've got to go along with technology.

Will we ever reach a point where all we have is distance learning? I hope not, because I think you will just miss so much, as far as the development process.

And I've got to tell you something, the difference between our Army and all the other armies in the world is our non-commissioned officer corps. You know, I mean, we by far are way ahead of a lot of people.

CSM ELDER: If you could pick -- I'll let you pick two. What two things do you think have affected on that? Because when we started the discussion earlier, we talked about how the NCO corps had given away, or some of its authority had been taken away. Yet now we realize that we have the best non-commissioned officer corps of probably any nation that's out there. Without a doubt, any nation. What one or two things, in your opinion, over your career, have caused that?

SMA TILLEY: One thing I think is the NCO education system. I think that's one of them.

The other thing is -- and I sort of alluded to the fact before -- is officers really expect a lot out of us. They really know how to utilize us correctly. And the development process between -- and I'll tell you, and I've told people this before: once you get out of the Army -- for example, when I worked at CENTCOM, I realized how good a corps we have. You know, now we may complain about small things, about development, about distance learning, about this other stuff.

But if you really get down to the nitty-gritty about it, we really are pretty good about what we do. You know, and so those are the two things. Just the development process and the education system we have, I think, are the two critical things.

And officers -- again, officers understand that there are overlapping things. You know, you talked about theater strategy a little bit. But I think officers understand, I think they really depend --

You know, I'll give you a good example of that. The Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN Shinseki, you know, he will talk to people, and then at the end of that, he'll look at me, Sergeant-Major, what do you have to say about it?

I mean, that's the kind of stuff -- when I worked overseas with GEN Nash, you know, and not just GEN Nash, but GEN Carter, GEN Boyce, GEN Nash, and then also GEN Altz (phonetic) for a short period of time. Every one of them knew what your capabilities are, and they all really expected a lot out of you. And so, you know, those are probably the two things.

CSM ELDER: Do you believe that the responsibilities -- or if not responsibilities, the authorities -- of an NCO has changed over the period?

SMA TILLEY: Authority as far as how much authority he has, as far as enforcing standards and stuff like that? Is that what you're talking about?

CSM ELDER: Span of control, maybe. The people, or the missions that they're responsible for.

SMA TILLEY: Oh, I think it has changed. I think that he has more to do. I think that they're doing a lot more.

But also, your authority is based on your capabilities. Sometimes people either giveth and they taketh away. You know, sometimes you can cover a wide ground, and sometimes they sort of narrow it in.

So I think it's there. Sometimes -- and I hate to say it -- sometimes you've got to prove yourself.

You know, GEN Shinseki talks about his first non-commissioned officer. You know, when we develop lieutenants in the Army, or help to develop lieutenants in the Army, they absolutely don't forget it. They do a good job. But I'll tell you, on the other side, there is another side to that. If you do a bad job, they absolutely do not forget that you did.

And so as you go through the process and you run into an officer that doesn't necessarily believe in the NCO corps, if you go back and start talking to him, some sergeant within that NCO corps has given him a bad taste in his mouth. Or, on the other side, is he's gotten good sergeants all the way through and he really believes in us.

CSM ELDER: Very, very true, sir.

SMA TILLEY: Aw, it's got to be true. I think it's true, anyway.

CSM ELDER: Okay. Let's -- we're still talking about your time at the Sergeants-Major course.

SMA TILLEY: I maxed the PT test there, did I tell you?

CSM ELDER: While you were at the Sergeants-Major Academy, were you exposed to non-commissioned officers from other services? And if so, did that carry on to CENTCOM, where it was a Joint?

SMA TILLEY: I was exposed to other services there. There was some -- I believe it was Air Force and Navy. I don't remember whether there was Marine Corps in there or not.

But the answer was -- but again, I don't think that you can make a decision based on the environment of a school environment, based on a mission environment that I was into at CENTCOM. Different mission, different type people, different environment, different conditions, and everything else.

So the answer's no. I think that -- I think that preparing you to go to any kind of joint command, or any kind of other job, is just basic leadership, and understanding very quickly of what the focus is of your commander, and exactly what your focus is. And it goes back to, really, those personal skills -- whether or not you can communicate; whether or not you're talking with or you're talking down.

CSM ELDER: After the Academy, you went back, you went to Korea and became a first sergeant again. Can you tell me about that next assignment?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, I loved it. In fact, when I went to Korea, I'll never forget going to Korea. When I got to Seoul, one of the senior NCOs walked me around the area and says, hey, you know, I

understand that you're new here, and we're going to need a first sergeant.

And I said, oh, this is going to be great, I'm going to stay right here in Seoul. And we walked, talked for about ten minutes. And then finally he looked at my name tag, he says, "Tilley?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "We've already called. They've called about you. You're going to Camp Casey." And so they had already pinpointed me to go to that unit.

And when I got in there, coming out of the Academy the sergeant-major said, you want to go to headquarters company or Charlie Company? I think it was coming up there, too -- because he needed a first on both of them. And I said, this will probably be the last time, maybe, as a first sergeant -- maybe -- and I'd really like to go to a line company.

So I went to Charlie Company. And I had one of the best times I think in my life. Had a great group of people.

And I've got to go back. The unit that I went into, the first sergeant had been relieved. He was an alcoholic, and they had relieved him. And so they had a sergeant first class filling in there for him.

And I remember going up there, and I said, can you give me a little briefing about what I'm going to do? And he says, hey, I've only been here two days. I don't know anything going on.

And so I talked a little bit and I left, and they got me a hooch, and I went to my hooch and stayed there. And then -- I think that was a Thursday or a Friday. So that evening I came back in, they were having a meeting. So I walked in to the company commander -- Saturday morning, I did. Walked back in to see the company commander.

I said, hey, starting Monday I'll be here as a first sergeant. And I look forward to working with you. Talked for about ten minutes and left. And then on Monday morning I fell in as a first sergeant for PT. And then, you know, we just started doing things. We fired high -- here you go -- high tank gunnery, second on the MBC, second, I think, on the IG inspection for PT or something like that. So we had a really good

company. Again, a lot of motivated people, we had a lot of fun, ran every day, three to four miles. It was just a lot of fun.

And it was really good field training. I liked it in Korea. A lot of people talk about, you know, they don't want to go to Korea. I thought Korea was really a real-world mission that you could really actually see. I mean, when you went through checkpoints, they had guards on them with weapons at the border. I mean, everything there, I liked it.

In fact, I've got to tell you a funny story. I had a general -- I kept telling the division commander to come down and take PT. And -- you know, when I'd see him. Because I was always talking about PT, because I like PT.

And then finally one morning he showed up. We ran five miles, did like 180 sit-ups, 187 push-ups, ran wind sprints. I mean, we really worked out real hard. And everybody made it. And at the end, the general says, sergeant, first sergeant, I want to see you. And I said, yes, sir. So I thought, I'm in trouble.

I wish I could remember his name. So we got in the office; about that time the battalion commander shows up. He said, first sergeant, I want to tell you two things. I said, yes, sir. He said, one is, you tell that sergeant first class to quit chewing out those lieutenants when they don't do those push-ups very good.

I says, sir, I'll certainly do that. And he said, the second thing he said was don't worry. I said, sir? Don't worry? He said, don't worry, I ain't never coming back. (Laughing.)

So I mean, it was sort of funny. But you know, I mean, that was -- it was just, again, it was -- and I have certainly been very fortunate through my career -- is it was just a good environment, everybody was sort of upbeat. We had a good unit. You know, we had fun, and we got the job done.

In fact, one of the things that I liked doing is, when I first got there, we set up -- first I had to work on the training room. But we set up an SOP that helped us get into alert a lot faster. I had a truck (inaudible) pull up my supply room and load them up. That's the way they did it.

Well, I cut that out and made the truck go down to the motor pool, load up ammunition, put it in front of the vehicles first -- because it was a, you know, .50-caliber (inaudible) -- I put it in front of the vehicles first, and then come back up and load the supplies. So because of that, we were probably ready 45 minutes before everybody else.

I was eating breakfast, and the battalion commander come down. And I said, what's the deal? I said, do you want us to help anybody else?

I did the same thing in Germany when I was there as a platoon sergeant. I just like stuff like that. You know, I like -- you know, everybody likes to win. As you get older and older, sometimes you don't get to win as much, I guess. But I liked that competition.

CSM ELDER: Can you describe your relationship with your battalion sergeant-major when you were a first sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: Back at Fort Knox?

CSM ELDER: No, in Korea.

SMA TILLEY: It was okay. He was a very good golfer. Did a pretty good job. I didn't think the relationship between the battalion and brigade sergeant-major was very good. I'm not sure what it was.

But he was okay, he was a good guy. He used to talk to us quite a bit. But in Korea, you stayed moving all the time, so -- nah, he was a good guy. I probably didn't talk to him as much as I should have, but he allowed me to do my job. And again, he had a lot of confidence in me, I thought.

I'll also tell you, back in -- I wanted to go back to Fort Knox. I had a guy named John Kearns who was my battalion sergeant-major at Fort Knox, I thought was just a tremendous sergeant-major. I was always sort of disappointed that he got out of the Army as a battalion sergeant-major. He had a lot of assets, a lot of very good thoughts and ideas.

In fact, he had told me one time, he said, you have to be a guest speaker. And I said, okay. So I

went away and I got this other first sergeant to do it for me. And I came back and I said, I have this other first sergeant -- he says, I didn't tell him; I told you. And get out of here. You're going to do it. You don't get a choice.

He's a good guy. So the answer to your question is no, he was a good sergeant-major, we got along fine. But Korea is a fast assignment. You know, one year -- -- goes like that. So, I enjoyed it.

CSM ELDER: You had mentioned that the guy who preceded you left a little earlier than his one-year assignment. Do you think that affected your commander's relationship with NCOs?

SMA TILLEY: Right in that unit?

CSM ELDER: Yes.

SMA TILLEY: No. Because I'll tell you, what happened is the commander that was there -- when I came in as a first sergeant, he thought he was going to be relieved. And so what I told him, I said, sir, I said, all you've got to do is plan, and tell me what your plan is. I will make it happen for you.

And probably -- oh, I don't know, in probably about a month -- I want to say a month or six weeks -- we sort of got all of our stuff together and we were looking pretty good.

And so he came in one day and he says, you know, I'm a little bored now. I said, no, you're not bored. You make sure that plan is correct.

And that's what he did. I mean, he did all the other things a company commander did. But he certainly had the opportunity to command, versus trying to worry about a lot of things that the first sergeant should have been doing.

So I think he felt pretty good. And I think because -- you know, everybody makes mistakes. But I think because of our relationship, we got along very good and we didn't have a problem. In fact, the same guy I had seen probably six, seven years later or something like that, up here in D.C. at AUSA. And he was a contractor.

And his mother and father were there. And he ran to get his mother and father, said let me -- let me let you meet my first sergeant. So I mean, you know, that makes you feel good.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me -- you had already mentioned about Korea, and there was a mission there. How do you think that the lack of distractions -- or at least the reduced amount of distractions, compared with the States -- allowed you to train your unit?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah, it's tremendous. I mean, there were no distractions. You know, you didn't have the family members there -- you had a few family members that stayed right there in Tongdushon there. But oh, yeah, I mean, it was great. You know, I mean, you're training, everybody's focused. You go into the field.

So I think that was an asset. You know, that's one of the things, if you could ever figure out how you could not have those distractors, I mean, that's perfect. That's perfect training. You know, so I loved it.

CSM ELDER: Can you tell me what -- as you look back on that assignment in Korea, what are some of the most positive thoughts you have, every time you --

SMA TILLEY: I'm going to tell you, everything I had was positive. I mean, I used to play racquetball every Saturday morning if I was there. I used to run with the soldiers. I mean, I just had a lot of fun, because those are the things I've always liked to do.

And again, I'm dealing with people, they're all there. And so it was just a kick. I could not -- you know, I'm sure there were bad things that happened, just like anything else. But I'm like everybody else, you forget the bad and remember the good. So I thought it was a good assignment. I really enjoyed it.

CSM ELDER: When you went into the job, I'm sure you had some expectations. When you left, were there some things that you felt were left undone, or some things that you would have liked to have tried to accomplish while you were there that you didn't?

SMA TILLEY: Well, the expectation I had was, first of all, get the company out of problems, you

know. And I'm just like everybody else, I want to win. You know, I want to be number one in everything. And so my goal was to make the unit as good as it could be, as good as we all could be. And it's not -- again, it's not individually, it's how good you are. And so I want to think I accomplished that mission.

Are there things that I should have done? Sure there are. There always are. I probably should have established a better NCO professional development program. In Korea, you're always moving. The training schedule you've got is always being changed, so that was a problem. But again, for the most part I thought I did okay.

The one thing I didn't do, I think, is I wish I would have had more time to just have professional development classes for soldiers. But Korea is a fast-paced place, and it just never slowed down.

CSM ELDER: Okay, sergeant-major, we have taken your career up to the time when you were a first sergeant in Korea. The second half of our interview, we will discuss your time as a command sergeant-major, particularly with the 1st and 10th Cav. Do you have any other things to add about your career, or events that maybe I haven't asked you or discussed with you at this point?

SMA TILLEY: I don't know. I'm probably not. I think we have pretty much covered it all.

Yeah, there was one thing. Going back to Vietnam, there was a guy -- I was a body escort coming out of Vietnam. And I escorted Bill Boykin back. He got killed with a recoilless rifle. So that's probably -- that's one of the things that, as I look back, I certainly think that's important.

Everything else I think I covered. I mean -- and I'll think about it. But I'm sure there's something I missed. But I think we've pretty much answered all of them.

CSM ELDER: Okay. Great. Well, we'll stop it here.

SMA TILLEY: Okay.

(Interruption to tape.)

SMA TILLEY: -- in fact, quite frankly, the Kentucky school system is really pretty good for

special education children.

CSM ELDER: Any other further comments on your assignment in Friedburg?

SMA TILLEY: No, I just (inaudible) tank gunner.

CSM ELDER: I guess this would be a good time to stop.

(End side A, tape 2.)

CSM ELDER: This is a continuation of the oral history interview for SMA Tilley. This is tape 2, side B.

Sergeant-Major, we just finished talking about your assignment to Friedburg. Tell me where your next assignment was after you left Germany.

SMA TILLEY: Fort Knox, Kentucky. I went back to Fort Knox, and I was assigned back to Fort Knox, the headquarters company right there in the 1st Brigade, and I was assigned as an instructor down at (inaudible).

CSM ELDER: And what did you teach?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, I taught everything. You know, tank gunnery -- whatever they wanted me to teach, I -- in fact, I want to say I started off on the .45-caliber range. And me and a guy named Little, SSG, SFC Little, I believe his name was. And we were there on the range. And then I fired a pistol, and then eventually they moved me inside and I started teaching classes.

CSM ELDER: Who were your primary students that you taught?

SMA TILLEY: Trainees, AIT students.

CSM ELDER: Were you involved in training either NCOs or officers?

SMA TILLEY: There was training for reservist NCOs and officers that would come in for tank gunnery, stuff like that. But no, there was no NCO training or officer training down there. It was more or

less AIT students.

CSM ELDER: What were some of the other things that you taught while you were also there?

SMA TILLEY: Again, land navigation, .45-caliber pistol, .50-caliber -- I mean, just machine gun stuff. Again, tank gunnery. That's probably the majority. I can't remember all the stuff you had to teach down there, but that was sort of the gist of the instruction that I (inaudible).

CSM ELDER: Were you part of the Training Committee?

SMA TILLEY: I was part of the Training Committee. There was probably -- I don't know, 20 or 25 or 30 NCOs that worked right down there at Fort Knox.

CSM ELDER: Do you think the Army is getting away from training by committee? And if so, is that a good idea or a bad idea?

SMA TILLEY: The -- I tell you, it depends on -- first of all, I think that committee group training is really good, because it standardizes things in the Army. So I think it's a good idea.

But right now, of course, because of the shortages that we have at TRADOC, I think that -- like, for example, your drill sergeants in basic training are teaching the majority of the subjects that are being taught right there in basic training. I haven't been back to (inaudible), and I'm getting ready to go here pretty quick. So I'm not sure what the structure is, but I think it probably still is a lot of committee group instruction.

CSM ELDER: Do you think it's a lot to ask for a drill sergeant to learn 13 weeks' worth of material and be proficient in every single block?

SMA TILLEY: Well, I think it is tough. There's no question, because he has no stress relief in some cases. Before, when you had committee group -- and again, I haven't been associated with it, so I'm just sort of talking from the outside looking in -- but I thought the committee group did -- if it didn't do anything else, it standardized instruction. And now what you have, you have drill sergeants that have to get prepared to give the next block of instruction.

And you have, you know, evaluations, and maybe people look at things a little bit differently. So, again, I like the committee group instruction.

CSM ELDER: After you were an instructor at Fort Knox, you moved on to senior tank commander. What did you do there?

SMA TILLEY: I was the -- well, the reason I went down to senior tank commander was because I was in the first M-1 training program in the Army. You know, we had -- I was a senior tank, and we had the responsibilities of running the very first OSIT training cycle in the Army. And so I got involved with the -- you know, with the development process, as far as lesson plans, training devices, drivers' training -- everything to set up that very first cycle in the Army for M-1 tanks.

CSM ELDER: Was that your first experience with the M-1?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, it was. I came out of Germany on an A1, and then I got on the M-1 when I got back.

CSM ELDER: Tell me your thoughts on the M-1 tanks.

SMA TILLEY: Volkswagen to a Cadillac. (Laughing.) There's no question, I mean, the system is so much better, so much more proficient. I mean, it was -- you know, you get in the -- in fact, I went from NAV1 back to an A3 to fire with it. It's just a better system. The capabilities are so much better, the suspension system is so much better. Everything about that tank, in my mind, was just a lot better.

CSM ELDER: The -- so would you say that the Army's capabilities have increased because of the M-1?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, absolutely. In fact, I went down with a guy named COL O'Meara, who was the brigade commander, I went down to Florida to look at the very first UCAFT that was ever developed. And COL O'Meara took me down there, and said, hey, look, I want you to go down with me and look at this system.

And I went down there and looked at them, and he said, I want you to be the gunner. And I said, okay. So I was the gunner, and we went through a few exercises. And once we finished, we got out and he says, what do you think? I said, if you buy this system, I think it will take you to a different level.

And the Army -- this is just absolutely the best system I have ever seen in my life, because it allows you to do -- even though it's electric versus hydraulic and different systems like that -- it allows you to function like you're inside of a tank. So this is something that we could put more emphasis on and we can train a lot better -- you know, just raise the bubble in the Army, as far as tank gunnery.

And he sort of turned around and says, hey, we're going to buy it.

CSM ELDER: Now, you had mentioned the acronym UCAFT. What does that stand for?

SMA TILLEY: Unit Conduct and Fire Training.

CSM ELDER: Okay. And the unit conduct and fire trainer, UCAFT, is kind of a simulation for the M-1 tank.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, it's a simulation for the gunner's controls within the tank itself. I mean, if you get into a gunner's seat, and then get out of that gunner's seat and get into a UCAFT, you're still in a gunner's seat. So it allows you to do all the same kinds of things.

CSM ELDER: Now, you mentioned that you looked at the first generation of UCAFT. Have you seen later generations (inaudible)?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah, they got the unit conduct and fire trainer, the unit simulation system, where it's all linked together now.

And yes, the answer is yeah, I've looked at it. It's a better system, we're upgrading all the time, because of technology and stuff like that. So yeah, that's just -- things like that allow you to, one is save you a lot of money, and two is get you just as proficient. And so when you get out as a tank gunner, you can save those lines of ammunition.

But I think the one thing we have to be cautious of is not to put so much emphasis on the trainer that you take back a lot of ammunition when you still need to be firing in the tank itself. I mean, you've cut back a little bit, but -- you know, there's a difference between a trainer, a unit conduct fire trainer or UCAFT, versus an actual tank. So you've got to be careful about it.

I've got to tell you a funny story. I know you -- I was at a driver's training when I was down at Fort Knox as a senior tank commander. It was a wooden trainer, \$150,000 driver's trainer, and the tank. And so they wanted to run a comparison.

And so I took this mock-up, which was like \$500 or \$1,000, whatever the price was, and compared it to all the other systems. And it was sort of funny, because the guy that was on the wooden trainer did just as much at the guy that was on this \$180,000 driver's trainer.

In fact, he may in fact have known more, because as you talked to him about the driving system, you would add all the different things on the trainer, because you're standing there looking at it. In fact, one of the funny things was that the old driver's trainer -- in fact, even today, some of them you get in from the side. And so we put this kid in the tank, and he wasn't sure how to get into the driver's compartment.

So, I mean, it's just different things. So, it was funny to me to take this wooden trainer. But again, we need those devices, because now they're getting better and better. But that was funny, when they initially came out.

CSM ELDER: Now, you mentioned the driver's trainer. Are you talking about the driving simulation device at Fort Knox?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah. Now, this may have been a different one now. The one that we used, the soldier got in from the side, and then he (inaudible) it down. It was ironic that he didn't have to go through the tank itself and get down inside. So that's it, if it's the same system, that's what it is.

CSM ELDER: Have you seen the driver's training simulation system that's based on hydraulics,

that actually -- something similar to videogames, or high-tech videogames, where the system moves along with it?

SMA TILLEY: I was in -- I don't think I've been in one on a tank. I may have. But I think I've seen one.

But I was down at Fort Campbell one time where they had a helicopter, and I went in the same system. A Blackhawk. When I tried to fly this Blackhawk, and it all moves and shifts and stuff like that. That's sort of a needed device. And I think, again, they take it to a different level, because you can feel the motions, you can get a good idea.

But there is nothing better than going across country in a tank. You know, you can have a little mound in the hill, you know, coming up and slapping the ground or something like that. So, coming up and coming down easy.

In fact, I was just in, about a year ago, in Turkmenistan, on some Russian kind of driver's trainers. And it's interesting to see how far ahead we are than those guys. I mean, they had stuff that was just sort of very old and really -- they were okay systems, but ours are so much better.

CSM ELDER: So, do you think that we will get to a point, in your opinion, in the future where simulations like UCFT, the driver's simulators, can replace the training that we conduct out in the field?

SMA TILLEY: I think -- no. I think you've always got to get in the vehicle. You've always got to get on the tank. You've always got to -- I mean, there is something about a breech-coil coming back and the smoke coming from that main gunner round which is certainly a lot different than sitting in there and pulling a trigger, and it's a laser beam that's hitting something.

So I think you have got to have a balance. And I think if you go -- I think if you go towards training too much, I think you'd be a little messed up. You know, so there's a balance there. And you continually need to update the system to make sure that you have the right balance, as far as tank gunnery versus training.

CSM ELDER: Were you involved in the development of the training processes for the M-1 tank?

SMA TILLEY: In OSIT? Are you talking about in OSIT?

CSM ELDER: During this period where you were assigned as a senior tank commander.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, yeah. I helped set up the training program. I helped set up the gunnery program, as far as OSIT. In fact, the first gunnery program, I think we had each student firing about 15 rounds of main gun ammunition. Of course, since that time they have certainly changed it a lot.

But yeah, I was. I helped set up the training program. Along with me and about 13 or 14 other NCOs and our company commander, of course, battalion, everybody else. But we were the primary trainers on that thing.

CSM ELDER: Were you a hands-on, down to the tank kind of worker?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah.

CSM ELDER: Was there somebody in the back who had to document and write down the procedures that you were developing?

SMA TILLEY: You know, there were always people walking around taking notes and stuff. But normally what we did is we went through and we would give a class, like, in OSIT for tank gunnery. At the very end, there were people there that we would come back and say, okay, we have developed this program, but you know, this is not exactly how it's working, we need to change this and modify it. So we were updating all of that.

CSM ELDER: During this period, did you have any contact with the manufacturers, contractors, or PMA (inaudible)?

SMA TILLEY: Yes. There was a contractor -- in fact, I probably need to back up. Even before I had started that training exercise, we trained five Swiss technicians, Swiss people, on the M-1 tank itself,

because they initially thought they were going to buy it.

And we had, I think it was GEN Eggers (phonetic) or somebody that was there, was sitting right next to us as we took it through the system. So the answer is yeah, you always had those tech reps right close to you so you could -- you know, what the manual says and what the actual tank does sometimes is a little bit different.

CSM ELDER: At this period, had the Army fielded the M-1 tank that you were aware of?

SMA TILLEY: You know what? I tell you the truth, I don't know. I think they had probably fielded it at different locations. And we were the only company in the Army, so we were sort of training -- so they're fielding and we're training at about the same time. So we put -- you know, young soldiers out into the force.

CSM ELDER: And was that the goal, at this time, is to I guess train initial entry students?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah.

CSM ELDER: So that they can go to the units that had fielded the M-1?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, yeah. I think we were moving tanks into Germany and different locations. I'm not sure how you distributed those things. But that was the process. We trained the trainees for tankers, and then they would send them to units, wherever they were located at.

CSM ELDER: Any other comments on your period while you were an instructor, or -- senior tank commander?

SMA TILLEY: Well, I went from instructor to a senior tank commander. I'll also tell you, I never finished the first cycle. It was like 14 weeks, or whatever the limit was. And I went about to the ninth week as a senior tank commander. And there was a guy named Larry Hatho (phonetic), which was a first sergeant who took a leave. So the company commander says, I'm bringing you up to be the first sergeant. And then the battalion commanders told the company commander, if you bring him up to be the first sergeant, I'm

going to take him to be my Operations Sergeant. So in about four days I went from senior tank to first sergeant to Operations Sergeant.

CSM ELDER: Tell me about your time as the Operations Sergeant.

SMA TILLEY: The -- well, you know, it's like any other operations. I dealt with a lot of the training schedules, and you know, making sure ranges were laid out correctly and submitted all the proper paperwork, and I passed that stuff to brigade.

But I think the interesting thing about this was the battalion commander came in when he selected me to be the Operations Sergeant. He called me into his office and he said, hey, let me tell you something. Don't ever bother me unless you can't fix it. And you better have tried everything, okay?

So out of the year, year and a half I was there, I went to see him twice. One time he messed it up; another time the company commander messed it up. But we really had a good system, and we really functioned pretty well.

CSM ELDER: Did you have any specialized training? And if not, what assignments do you think prepared you to be an Operations Sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: Nothing prepared me. (Laughing.) And I had no specialized training.

I think for the most part, if you have the desire and the enthusiasm of getting the job done, you know, you're going to do a good job. You know, just like being a sergeant-major -- you know, if you're a good first sergeant, you're going to be a good sergeant-major. And if you're a good platoon sergeant, you're going to be a good first sergeant. So I think every step in the NCO system prepares you, hopefully, for the next.

Now, this Operations Sergeant, if you have never been one, it is a great development process, because once you get to be a first sergeant or a sergeant-major, you at least understand what they have to go through, versus sort of going down there and nagging them all the time about things you can't get. You have

a good understanding. So I think it was -- for me it was a good process prior to going on and being a first sergeant. It really helped me, it let me see training in a different set of eyes, that's for sure.

CSM ELDER: Was this your first time on a staff position?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah. Oh, I absolutely never wanted to be on a staff.

I always liked being the field, and I never wanted to be on a staff. So -- other than the fact that this was my very first time being on a battalion staff, I thought, my goodness, I would hate to be in a division or a corps. I imagine what they was (inaudible). So yeah, that was my first time.

And I went from there to a first sergeant.

CSM ELDER: Was this unit a maneuver unit, or was it a training unit?

SMA TILLEY: It was a training unit. And in fact, I stayed there -- I stayed at Fort Knox a long time, when I came back and got in that M-1 program. So I stayed there, again, about a year, over a year. And then I made E-8, or master sergeant, and they gave me a company first sergeant (inaudible).

CSM ELDER: And what company did you get?

SMA TILLEY: I had Bravo, Bravo Company, as a first sergeant. And stayed there, again, through two company commanders, I think it was. And then I was selected to go be the BNOC chief for the NCO Academy.

CSM ELDER: While you were in Bravo Company as the first sergeant, what was Bravo Company's primary responsibilities? Was it based on the M-1 program?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, it was. It was OSIT training, you know, one station unit training for trainees and AIT for the M-1 tank.

CSM ELDER: So your company had in it the trainees and the drill sergeants who were training the

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SMA TILLEY: Absolutely, yes. In fact, the good thing about that -- you talk about a mixture of people. We had the drill sergeants and the tank commanders. Well, some of the tank commanders have never been drill sergeants, and some of the drill sergeants have never been tank commanders. So when I first got there, or when we started getting this company going, there was always a little rivalry.

And so I elected to take a drill sergeant and make him a tank commander for one cycle, and a tank commander, a cadre, as a drill sergeant. And I only did that about three or four times, and then all of a sudden everybody understood the other's job is just as important as the other one. So there wasn't that friction anymore; they really got on very good.

CSM ELDER: Were all the trainees that went through your company, were they all training on the M-1 tank at the time? Or was it the M60, or a combination of both?

SMA TILLEY: No, M-1 tanks. Only M-1.

CSM ELDER: Were there other units on Fort Knox that were still training for the M60 program?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah. Yeah, sure, other units were.

Our battalion, I want to think that our battalion more or less was in the M-1, and then we had another battalion, Third Battalion, I think, was focused on the 60s, or A3s, or what. But there were other units within the brigade that were training on them.

CSM ELDER: Please compare to me the difference between the unit you had at Fort Polk, where you said you had that camaraderie with your fellow drill sergeants and your commanders -- well, now you're the guy in charge, so to speak, as the first sergeant of the company. Tell me how that was, how that felt to you, and what type of issues came up for you.

SMA TILLEY: Oh, a lot of different issues. I mean, there are different -- you know, when you've got drill sergeants, you've got the cream of the crop, I think. You know, so here you're dealing with some very high quality people. And so the differences, trying to pull them all together was --

I've always thought I'm sort of a people kind of person. I really like people. And so I've always done things, I try to do things to pull people closer together, and get me closer to them. And so I think we were pretty good. We did a pretty good job. I still get calls from, or e-mails from guys that were in that unit.

So I thought we did pretty good. We sort of stayed together. Are we as close as we could have been? You know, I don't know. Maybe we could have been a little bit closer. But I think for the most part we got along very good, very good.

And there wasn't a whole lot of wives' participation there. I think one of the things, as I look back being a first sergeant, I think that it was too bad -- here again, you're in the States -- that the wives didn't participate as much as I wish they would have. But I think the sergeants and the NCOs and the soldiers got along real good.

CSM ELDER: Tell me about the relationship between you and the commanders that you had.

SMA TILLEY: I got along good. One of the commanders I had was a great guy, did a super job -- in fact, both of them did. And I got along real good; he was really a personal kind of guy.

The other company commander I had was good also, but he got real upset about little small things. If a tank ran over a car, he'd say, okay, let's fix it. But if a soldier was three minutes late for a formation, it was like he had a heart attack or something; he would just go wild.

In fact, one of the things he used to do, in fact, he used to slam his phone down. You know, I went in one day, and he slammed his phone down and broke it, and it wouldn't work. So a few minutes later he came over to my office and said, First Sergeant, I'm going to use your phone. And I says -- pulled my drawer open, put my phone in the desk, closed it, and says, nope, can't use it. If you can't keep yours -- (laughter) -- you know, don't be messing with mine.

I think he learned a lesson. But he was a good company commander. I think -- you know, as you look back on it, as I look back on it now, you know, as the first sergeant you're older than the company

commander. And so they're looking for you for a lot of advice.

In fact, one of the things that I said to my company commander, I said, you know, I've never been a first sergeant before, so I'm going to need some help. And the company commander says, well, I've never been a captain before, so I'm going to need your help. So that was sort of funny.

And I realized very quickly that in a lot of cases, I was more experienced on the development process and what was going on. And I could really -- I always thought that if that captain is successful, then I am successful. And I thought it was always very important for me to make him successful. At whatever level it is, I think it's important that I make you successful, because I think that's my job. If I'm a staff sergeant or a sergeant first class, I want to let them be all that they can be. And so part of my responsibilities is to push them forward.

CSM ELDER: You had almost a ten-year break between the time you had assumed the responsibilities for training company to when you were part of a training company as a drill sergeant. Ten years had gone by. Had you noticed anything different in the A sergeants?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, yeah, sure. You know, training abuse was on the rise. I mean, if you'd step out of line -- I almost think if -- you know, if you used profanity, they were really sort of gun-shy. I mean, it's sort of -- I'm sure it's the same way now as a drill sergeant. But they were a little more apprehensive. And you really watch very closely.

But I'll also tell you, the thing that we really started doing is educating people on what training abuse is, educating people on different techniques as far as development process of soldiers. So yeah, it was different, it was different, just different techniques.

And also, remember, I was in a basic unit as a drill sergeant, basic training as a drill sergeant. Here's OSIT -- you know, trainees get more responsibilities, they're going to be a little freer, you run into different issues and different problems. So maybe it's sort of hard for me to compare.

It seemed to me it was a little bit different. But the same standard was there. But you need to make sure that you -- I think I really made sure that I walked around and I talked to the drill sergeants as much as I could, because I think that a lot of times they think people are more or less looking at them to get in trouble, versus trying to help them to stay out of trouble.

CSM ELDER: Do you think you brought some validity to your position by being a former drill sergeant?

SMA TILLEY: Oh, I think so. I think that one of the good things now, as the Sergeant-Major of the Army, I mean, I was a drill sergeant, I worked in correctional custody, you know, platoon sergeant for four or five years, battalion, brigade, division, MACOM, and then U.S. Central Command -- I think that everything that you bring -- I think that everybody can see that as the Sergeant-Major of the Army I've sort of been there. I've walked in your shoes.

And so I pretty much understand the same concerns that you have, or the concerns that you have -- even though I know it's different now. But I have a good understanding of what you should or shouldn't be doing.

CSM ELDER: Well, by now, Sergeant-Major, it's about 1985 for you. Have you -- had you looked back and looked at your professionalization, or the soldier-ization that you had gone through, did you start to begin to feel that you were developing professionally, to become a professional NCO?

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, sure, I'd say yes. I mean, I was -- again, I can't say it enough, I just -- my personal appearance, my physical appearance, I wanted to make sure I set the standards. You want to think that you're doing the right things.

I'll also tell you, it always seemed like there was at least one or two people that, wherever I was at, were always there just sort of coaxing me along, sort of patting me on the back -- or kicking me in the butt if I was messing something up. But yeah, I thought I was getting to be a pretty good NCO.

You know, again, being a staff sergeant and the only platoon sergeant, I mean, my head sort of swelled up a little bit, and I felt pretty good. Being on the first M-1 program. Having the battalion commander select me to be the Operations Sergeant. I mean, that's a master sergeant position, I'm a sergeant first class.

So things like that, I mean, things like that, little pats on the back or little things that sort of push you in a different direction. I think I was doing a pretty good job.

CSM ELDER: So looking back now to when you assumed the duties as first sergeant for the first time, what would you like to tell another sergeant who's about to become a first sergeant for the first time, too?

SMA TILLEY: I would probably say, establish the atmosphere within your unit. Establish the climate. And talk to people. Talk to your sergeants. Don't put that wall up between each other. I mean, don't say, "I'm the first sergeant, you're a platoon sergeant." You know, you're not less than I am; we're all at the same level. And I think sometimes people have a tendency of talking down to people.

So I think -- making sure you don't put a wall up. Don't get behind your desk. Get out and be with people. And soldiers like that. They like somebody that's out and dealing with them. And you know, just sort of be part of them, versus try to segregate yourself, like, I'm the first sergeant, I'm the company commander.

So I guess what I'm saying is be part of your unit. You know, don't segregate yourself. And be out there and be with soldiers.

One of the disadvantages, I think, for some people that I think are not successful is they tie themselves to the desk too much. They want to do those things in the order room, versus being out with the soldiers. You know, doing PT, eating in the dining facility, taking showers in the barracks -- those are things that people see.

And also, I'll tell you, growing up, every Saturday and Sunday I come to work. And here I go again -- I mean, those are the things I thought were important. I would come, and even if I watched cartoons on television on Sunday morning, people knew I was there. Even in Germany, when I was a platoon sergeant in Europe, every Saturday and Sunday I would come in. And I would take that extra two to three hours that I thought was important to talk to people.

Because I tell you, when you sit down on the edge of a bed or a chair within a room, or play foosball or a game of pool with somebody, you're in their environment. And they -- they understand that you know, whether or not you're real or you're Memorex, I mean, they understand that you are there not because you have to be there, but because you really, sincerely care about them. And so they figure it out real quick.

CSM ELDER: How do you think we as an NCO corps are at doing that? And not just doing it, about teaching our young sergeants that these are the things that make a difference?

SMA TILLEY: I tell you, personally, I think that we've sort of gotten away from that stuff. You know, first of all, I'll tell you, I know there's a lot of people that do do that. But you cannot emphasize it enough for people to sit down and talk to soldiers. You are not -- I mean, if you do everything else right, if you don't talk to your people and they don't know that you care, then you're going to be okay. But if you get them to buy into what you're doing, and they understand what you're doing, and you tell them, then they really buy into what you're doing.

The other thing I'll tell you is be very open, be very honest. In fact, I had a guy that told me years ago, the guy, Harold Moore, told me, he says, as long as you're honest and fair, you know, people look to you.

I mean, I have called people into my office that are friends of mine and asked some real pointed questions. But at least they knew when I was asking, I wasn't trying to dig into their personal life, but I was trying to take care of them.

So if you ask me a question, I'll tell you the truth. If you don't want an answer, don't ask me. And I think that's the difference. Just be honest and straightforward, and they can deal with that. But if you don't talk to them, or you segregate yourself, or you put up that wall, I think you've lost them.

So, communications, counseling, and staying focused on what your responsibilities are and what their responsibilities are, I think, is the key to success.

CSM ELDER: You mentioned that the leader's presence is important to the soldiers. That's how you learn about your soldiers. There's a lot of leaders now who say we've lost that, a lot of senior leaders who say they've lost it. And some of them point fingers to initiatives that the Army has had over the last ten-plus years or so -- things like single soldier quality of life initiative, or the one-plus-one barracks standards, where soldiers aren't ganged up in a living space, but just in a smaller space. Can you comment on that perception?

SMA TILLEY: Well, I think that we're changing. This is technology. I mean, we're making it better for our soldiers. I think that soldiers need to have their own little room. They need to have a little space.

But the things I'm talking about is basic leadership. I don't think that's gone. I mean, you can make excuses why you're not doing it, but the fact of the matter is it's your responsibility. I mean, you know, if we've got a different billeting system, and people have their own little space, I mean, nothing says you can't go up and knock on their door and say, hey, you mind if I talk to you for a minute? I mean, I'm not saying you have to do it all the time.

You know, in the Army, you know, we have people that commit suicide and all these other things. Knowing your people and understanding what they do is the key to success.

I can tell you -- I mean, I think I could tell you, as a platoon sergeant or a first sergeant -- I'm not sure I could do it as a battalion sergeant-major -- but at those levels, I think I knew my people pretty good.

You know, not "my" people, but I knew the soldiers real good.

And I knew exactly, you know, if something was wrong with them. You know, if somebody comes in and their head is sort of down, or you need to talk, that's when you need to sit down and talk. I mean, you can tell the difference -- I can tell if somebody comes to work and they're upset.

And so, have we lost that? I'm not sure we've lost it for everybody. But I'll tell you, don't make excuses because it doesn't happen. You know, you can always make an excuse. But part of your responsibility is taking care of people.

In fact, I tell people all the time, you can be successful at any job that you do and never get out of your office. But that's not what it's all about.

You know, you say "taking care of soldiers" -- well, part of "taking care of soldiers" is knowing them, counseling them, making sure that they're professionally developing for the next step or the next level in the line. So yeah, that's part of being a good soldier.

CSM ELDER: Sergeant-Major, as you alluded to, the conditions have changed. The living environment is not the same as it was ten years ago. So obviously, NCOs have to change with it. Do you think that non-commissioned officers have been -- to use the term "spoiled" -- because of the days prior to the draw-down, where if they had problems with soldiers they could just separate them, where now we don't have that luxury?

SMA TILLEY: Well, you know, I think you can still separate soldiers who are not good. In fact, that's what you've got to do. I also think there's a perception out there that -- and in fact, it may be true. I mean, you may have company commanders or whatever, battalion commanders, that don't want to separate anybody from the Army. So I think the perception is out there that you can do that.

But all you can do is from your job down. If you have a bad soldier, deal with them, counsel them, inform everybody that he's not a good soldier, he or she is not a good soldier, and do what's right.

Now, we have commanders in place that make decisions. And once they make that decision, it's good. And so the answer to your question is, you know, I think we have eluded the fact that we have allowed conditions to change a little bit, and in some cases we're making excuses for what we should be doing. You know, just because the conditions have changed -- we have a better-educated Army, we're focused on our education within the military, we continually update our education system within the Army. But if you want to be a good soldier, the one thing about being a good soldier is focus on the basic fundamentals of being a soldier.

And that's the basic stuff, is communications and counseling. If you can do those two things, I think you can be successful.

And the other thing about that -- once you do those things, it gets them behind you. You know, you're not successful and I'm not successful by myself. You know, if you don't have a team, if you don't have everybody buying in for what you're doing, then you're just a frog in the road. People will just run over you after a while. So they have to understand that you care about what's going on. And if you don't, you know, they'll just wait until you leave and then do something else.

CSM ELDER: You know, there's an old saying that you can fool a lot of people, but you can't fool your soldiers.

SMA TILLEY: That's right. No, no, I agree 100 percent. You can't -- I always say that the soldiers know if you're real or Memorex. You know, they know -- in fact, one of the things -- again, I'm not tooting my own horn -- one of the things I've liked, and I'm really very proud of, is I always get e-mail from people that I dealt with years ago. And they always say, hey, thanks a lot for what you did, and what you continue to do.

But I mean, I get calls sometimes from PFCs that are now sergeants first class, or lieutenants that are now generals. In fact, I got -- one of the tank commanders that I had years ago is now a general officer, BG

Peterson, a brigadier general. And so it's neat to see those guys develop through the Army, because you think you sort of did something right.

Not you -- I mean, you can't say, I made you who you are. But I think it's a collective group of people that help develop everybody. It's not one person.

CSM ELDER: I think people take ownership of the people that they've served with. "That was my sergeant-major, that was my platoon sergeant."

SMA TILLEY: Oh, sure, yeah. Oh, absolutely. In fact, you know, everybody wants to -- you know, I'm the same way. I want to think that I had something to do with your success -- I mean, if you're doing a good job. Of course, if you're not doing a good job, everybody sort of goes the other way.

But I think, you know -- you know, I haven't mentioned, there's a guy named John Stevens, SGM Stevens, you know him? He was a post sergeant-major down at Fort Knox for a long time.

CSM ELDER: I'm not sure.

SMA TILLEY: Yeah, and I always think that -- you know, I was his tank commander once. He took me down, and I took him through the tank system, when he was coming out of the 7th ATC.

But here's a guy that really helped develop a lot of non-commissioned officers in the Army community, that continues to do that. Even today, after being retired for probably eight, nine, ten years or something like that.

And I can remember him -- in fact, when I went over to BNOC one time to work at the NCO Academy, we had the BEAR program, and all these guys that failed the course. And so I took all these packets over to him.

And I was real proud. I was a first sergeant, I was real proud, you know, telling him that all these guys had failed. And so he brought me in his office, and he says, hey -- he always used to call me Jack -- he said, "Jack, sit down."

And I -- you know, again, I'm proud, I'm showing him what the problem is. And so he looked at these packets for a couple seconds.

And he says, "Jack," he said, "let me ask you a question." He says, "When you were a platoon sergeant, and somebody was not successful in what they were doing, what would you do?" I said, "Well, Sergeant-Major, I would train them. I would get it done and get a score."

He said, "Then get these packets and get the hell out of here." You know, which was certainly great advice.

But here's a guy that says -- you know, every once in a while you need that kick in the butt. So he just gave me a nice firm kick in the ass, said, hey, just move out and get it done.

I mean, you always need that. You can't -- you can't be passive. Every once in a while you've got to be a good kick in the backside.

CSM ELDER: I think this is a good point to stop.

(End side B, tape 2.)

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PROCEEDINGS

SGM ELDER: This is a follow-up interview with Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley.

Sergeant Major, can you please tell me about your selection and attendance to the Sergeants Major Academy?

SGM TILLEY: Well, the -- I want to say I was selected in '86, and then I attended -- yes. And then I attended the class in '87. I was in Class 28 in the Sergeants

Major Academy.

SGM ELDER: Can you tell me your impression of the Sergeants Major course?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, first of all, I got a lot out of it. I had a good impression because of the -- you know, I learned a lot from other people, just other cross-talk with other students. And I learned a lot more about, I think, other MOS's, other career management fields.

And so I guess I got a lot out of it all the way through the course, just -- even though I thought that the course was pretty demanding for me. But I certainly had a lot of fun and learned a great deal from not only the instructors but the students over there.

SGM ELDER: Now, you attended the six-month course?

SGM TILLEY: Yes.

SGM ELDER: Do you believe that the six-month course that you attended versus the current nine-month course is on target now?

SGM TILLEY: If your question is, is six months versus nine months better, is that what you're -- I think the nine-month course is on target. I think they need to go back and look at the POI to get ready to do that right now.

I think it's a good idea to allow you to have a nine-month PCS. But most of us, most sergeant majors, don't want to take that extra time to take a break. You know, that's really the bottom line.

But they need to slow down. They need to focus on exactly what the responsibilities are and allow them to get down there and be in the learning mode at the academy. And I think the nine-month process is a very good idea.

But again, we need to go back and assess that, make sure we have the right kind of information in the program and can continually update the POI.

SGM ELDER: Did you have any particular difficulties in any certain areas of studies?

SGM TILLEY: I think the only thing that was really hard about the class itself was when we would take a test, they wouldn't necessarily review the test -- well, no. They wouldn't give you the answers to the test until the following morning.

So if you flunked a test, you know, you had to wait until the following morning. They'd call you that evening. I never failed a test, but it always bothered me. You'd wait all day to see what the answer was, and I didn't like that.

That's probably the only thing I just didn't like, the testing procedures. But maybe since they've corrected them.

SGM ELDER: Now, after your graduation from the Sergeants Major Academy, where did you return -- where were you assigned to?

SGM TILLEY: I went over to Korea. I was assigned to First Tank in Korea as the first sergeant.

SGM ELDER: So tell me your first assignment as command sergeant major.

Where were you assigned?

SGM TILLEY: I was assigned in -- well, what happened is I went to Korea for a year. I spent time as a first sergeant coming out of the academy for a year. I went back to Fort Knox and worked as primarily a chief instructor, as a master sergeant, for about -- I want to say probably about 90 days or something like that, till the list come out.

And when that came out, when the list came out, I was the sergeant major and the CSM list. And then my first battalion was the Tenth Cavalry.

SGM ELDER: Okay. And that was at Fort Knox, Kentucky?

SGM TILLEY: Yes, it was.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe your typical day-to-day duties as battalion sergeant major?

SGM TILLEY: Well, my typical day-to-day duties was I'd come in every morning and take PT with soldiers. I'd go and shower at the gym and I'd come back and try to have breakfast in the dining facility.

And then I'd come in, and either between breakfast or 8:00, I'd have a short meeting with the old man, you know, sort of talk to him about what we were going to do today.

I'd go in and do any kind of paperwork or anything I had to do in the office for that day, and hopefully by about 9:15 or 9:30, I was out of the office either down in the motor

pool or going to check training to see what was going on within the unit.

And then about 11:30 or 12:00, I'd come back into the office, see what's going on, probably grab a bite to eat. Do the same thing about 1:00, see what's going on. Then just walk or check training for the battalion.

So that's probably a normal day for me.

SGM ELDER: Now, you had mentioned that you went to the dining facility and ate your meals there. Did you see an importance in that?

SGM TILLEY: Well, yes. There's a lot of importance in that. One is that you've got a chance to sit down and talk to soldiers, you know, and not only did I talk to the first sergeants, but I got a chance to be in their environment talking to soldiers about their kind of issues. And I always thought it was important to do those kind of things. Soldiers are a lot more at ease when you're in their environment talking to them.

Also, on the weekends, on Saturdays and Sundays, I normally -- every Saturday I'd get up and I'd go in, probably about 8:30 or 9:00, and walk through the battalion and talk to soldiers. I mean, I did the same thing as a first sergeant, too. So that was just sort of something heard to break.

SGM ELDER: You had mentioned that you sit down with the old man. Can you describe your relationship with your commanders while battalion sergeant major?

SGM TILLEY: I had two commanders. One I can't think of the first name.

That's really bad. The second one was LTC Owens. I can't remember the first one's name.

I was going to say Green.

But we had a good relationship. It was an open door. I'd go in and talk to him any time I wanted. I mean, it was an open door. We had a great relationship.

So, I mean, I've never -- I'll tell you the truth: I've never had a real problem with any commander I've ever had. I've always tried to understand what they want to do, and I've always been very honest with them, and so our relationships have always been pretty good.

SGM ELDER: Did your unit have any national training center type rotations, major field exercises?

SGM TILLEY: No. When I took over as the battalion sergeant major, we went to the NTC. And then I stayed there about a year and a half. We went into -- we had a cohort battalion. You know, we processed into a cohort battalion.

We was getting ready to do that, you know, to go to NTC. Now, we went down to Fort Bliss, did some rotations down there. But after about a year and a half, I went up and I was a brigade sergeant major, you know, so that was the -- you know, I didn't have a rotation out to NTC even though I've been to NTC on several occasions.

SGM ELDER: How about tank gunneries or range?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. Yes, we did a lot of tank gunnery, development phase for

soldiers (inaudible), especially with the cohorts. We fired our table 7s and table 8s and all that stuff out there.

SGM ELDER: Since the inception of 1966 of the command sergeants major program, have you ever been aware of ill will towards the command sergeant major?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I've read articles before about -- you know, you had commanders say, why should you have a sergeant major and why should you have a senior noncommissioned officer in those positions?

Oh, yes. You have -- I think you have mixed feelings. I think that some commanders that start out bad with probably a bad sergeant major, a bad first sergeant, a bad platoon sergeant, that sort of travels with them throughout the period of time they're in the military.

So, I mean, you're never going to make everybody happy. I'm convinced about that.

SGM ELDER: Can you compare maybe earlier on in your career the guidance that has been given to the command sergeant major versus now? Do you think the roles and authority of the CSM are clearer today than they may have been in the past?

SGM TILLEY: I think the difference is that you have to have a clear understanding between you and your commander what exactly your roles are within that unit. I think that when you take over the battalion, that you ought to sit down with your

commander and look him in the eye and say, sir, this is what I think I should be doing.

So I think that's a counseling session between you and him about what your roles are. But I'll honestly tell you that I don't think -- you know, I was a platoon sergeant. My role was to take care of that platoon. And then as a first sergeant, my role was to take care of that company. And as a battalion sergeant, my role was to take care of all those companies.

So I think the Army sort of develops you to move to the next level in the military. So I just think it was more personality-driven in some cases of what -- how confident you was a year ago, but then how confident the commander was about the things that you thought you could get done.

So I think it's just personality.

SGM ELDER: What do you think are the most important duties that a battalion sergeant major must perform?

SGM TILLEY: I think that -- one is I think you ought to be visible. I think you ought to talk to soldiers. You have to be the honest broker with the commander, telling him what's going on.

And then again, the relationships between the company commander and the first sergeant, the (inaudible), and the development process and mentorship and the promotion boards -- I mean, all that stuff sort of encompasses everything.

So I think when you look at one thing as being important, I don't think there is one thing. I think there's a lot of things as a CSM that you have to do. But then again, that also comes from the development process on how you go up in the military.

I mean, who was your kind of mentors or developers of people that you watched as coming up (inaudible)?

SGM ELDER: When the training doctrines for battle focus training emerged, can you compare that doctrine now that we use to maybe earlier in your career?

SGM TILLEY: Probably the answer to that is, I think earlier in my career, I thought we did pretty good -- I'm talking real early, now; you know, I came in in '66 the first time -- but I think, when I really started looking at things like that, I think the planning process, the execution process, is probably a little bit better today than it was back then.

I think you're looking more as far as where you're going and then in the future, 10, you know, 15, 20 weeks out. You're focused. It's mental focus on what your development process is.

And so I think basically it gives you a direction to go in the battle focus plan. I mean, it sort of links everything together. Sergeant's time is linked to the NCODP is linked to your metal -- I mean, everything is linked together.

And commanders have a very good understanding about training. And sergeants have a very good understanding about training.

SGM ELDER: Do you think that the understanding that you mentioned, do you think that it's clearer today than it was earlier or it's the same? There's just different responsibilities or --

SGM TILLEY: I think it's -- I think it's -- I want to say it's clearer today. Okay? But I really don't think the responsibilities of noncommissioned officers change no matter where you go. I think it's always going to be about the same.

You know, technology -- you know, I've been on six or seven different kinds of tanks. But the responsibilities that I've had as a noncommissioned officer has not changed no matter what kind of work I've been on.

The tactics and procedures that you deal with, they do change a little bit. But the responsibilities of a sergeant doesn't change that much. It's still taking care of soldiers, making sure that the basic fundamentals are fixed and focused in the right direction, and being out with soldiers and sort of pushing them in the right direction, or talking with and developing them in the right direction.

SGM ELDER: Now, after you were in the Tenth Cav, you were selected as the 194th Second Armored Brigade Sergeant Major -- can you tell me what process was used to select you for that job?

SGM TILLEY: Well, it was a separate brigade. It was 6,000-plus soldiers. So COL Don Smith was the commander. What he did was he asked the post sergeant major to

put together a few names. I was in the battalion and the brigade at that time.

And he interviewed people, and then he called me up and says, "Hey, you were selected as the brigade sergeant major." So it was just an interview process.

SGM ELDER: Now, as you moved up to the 194th, your scope of duties remained the same; you just have more soldiers that you're responsible for?

SGM TILLEY: You got it.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe some of the things that kept you occupied as the brigade sergeant major?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, usually most of the things that really keep you occupied is probably soldiers, you know, the issues and problems and stuff like that.

But I did the same kind of things that I did at the battalion level and as a first sergeant. I found out what those particular areas were. I made sure that, you know, you read the blotter, you find out where our focus planning was going to be, who was doing what kind of training on each day. And you'd get out and see soldiers.

Again, I think the most important part of any responsibility as a noncommissioned officer is to get out and talk to soldiers and see exactly what's going on. So it's the same kind of focus.

Come in in the morning, do PT with a different battalion or company within the division -- not the division, the brigade -- and then get out and grab breakfast and be

visible and find out, you know, what the concerns of soldiers are.

I tell you, as a brigade sergeant major, I mean, you know, I built a club down in the 194th. Took about 30- or \$40,000. Guttled out a building and built a club for soldiers.

I mean, I tried to -- I got very actively involved in the BOSS program. You know, I'd always try to get out and see what soldiers are doing, you know. Those kinds of things, I think, are real critical to being successful.

But again, I'm just a people person. I like people, you know. I like being with people. I like listening to concerns. I like listening to issues. And I really like -- at every level I've ever been at, I've really -- I mean, you really want to sort of make a difference, you know. When you left there, what did you do to make it better?

You always hear people talk about, when you leave there, make it better for the next person. Well, I really believe that. If I can leave it just a little bit better than it was when I got there, I did my part.

SGM ELDER: Can you sum up your assignment at Fort Knox? What did you -- or what were some of the top things that you recall while you were there at the 194th?

SGM TILLEY: I don't know. You know, things like training exercises, Reforger. I don't know. Being -- I think being the 194th brigade sergeant major, the one thing that I thought was really better than anything else, which is a side of the 18th Airborne Corps, was the distance away from them.

You had a large brigade, 6,000-plus soldiers. And I really felt that I had a real mission within that brigade. That was a great brigade. So I think, you know, if I could think about some of the accomplishments I did, I think probably just taking care of people and making sure that the Army was pushed in right direction as far as soldiers' quality of life was concerned.

SGM ELDER: Now, were you there as of, again, deactivating, or did that happen after you left?

SGM TILLEY: They deactivated some of the battalions when I was there. And when they got down to sort of a task force, it was shortly after that that I was selected as the First Armored command sergeant major.

SGM ELDER: Can you tell me, when you were selected as the First Armored Division sergeant major, where was that at and what process did you go through to get that job?

SGM TILLEY: Well, what it was was, you know, they put your name on a slate and they submit your name. What I did was I went to Germany, to (inaudible). I was interviewed along with five or six other sergeant majors by the commanding general, a guy named Bill Boyce, General Bill Boyce.

And I think I came in on one day, or they gave us a briefing in the division the second day, and then the following day they gave us the interviews, where we had

interviews.

And then that day, that afternoon after everybody was interviewed, he talked -- in fact, he talked to me twice. And on the second time, he asked me, he says, "Hey, Sergeant Major," he says, "you're more than qualified for this assignment. But I'm an exceptional family man. My son had pneumococcal meningitis.

And he said, "Are you really sure that you want this kind of job because of the commitment it puts on you and your family?" And I told him that if I didn't, I wouldn't be here, you know.

So I went back out and sat down. Probably about 15 minutes after that, he walked in and he said, "I just want to tell all of you, you did a great job, but I've selected CSM Jack Tilley to be my division sergeant major.

Everybody shook my hand and about three minutes later there was nobody in the room but me, to include the general. And so I went back into his office and I said, "Hey, sir," I said, "I've never been a division sergeant major before. Can you tell me what you want me to do?"

And he says, "Yes," he says, "Can you go home, get your stuff, and come on back as quickly as you can?" So I think I was back to the States and then back in about 30 days, I think it was. I mean, that was the bottom line.

And literally what was good about that, now, I spent 5-1/2 years as a division

sergeant major in the First Armored Division. I loved every day of that job. I mean, it was just a lot of fun.

SGM ELDER: Could you tell me, you were stationed at -- the division headquarters was stationed at Babkreuzen (phonetic) in Germany. Did the geographical dispersion of the division have any effect on your ability to do your job?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, sure it did. You know, when you had the -- you know, when you live and get up and take PT with a soldier, you have to get up at 3:30 in the morning or 3:00 in the morning to get somewhere at 5:00, you know, so you can take PT.

SO yes, the answer was -- the other thing was, it's just a lot harder. Everywhere you went, it would take you an hour and half, you know. I don't know where you went, it always took you an hour and a half to go to (inaudible) or wherever I was going. And then traffic was always causing a problem.

So yes, it did. But the good thing about that, about every 90 days or so, the commander would have, you know, a meeting with the officers noncommissioned officers, and about every 90 days or so we'd have some kind of function with the senior noncommissioned officers. So we'd work it on both sides.

And in fact, I really had a checklist, and I'd check units off as I visited them within the division. And I'd make sure that I hit everybody so often, I absolutely did, and enjoyed it.

But yes, it's a little bit tougher. Like at Fort Riley, everybody is right here, you know. But at Babkreuzen, I could join them -- I mean, they were spread out all over.

SGM ELDER: Now, you may have already alluded to this, Sergeant Major, but have you seen as you were progressing through the different levels as a command sergeant major that your duties were changing much, or were you basically doing the same thing at different levels?

SGM TILLEY: You know, that's really an interesting question. I think, you know, at every level it seemed to me I was always doing the same kind of things. But now you're -- it's just larger. You know, now you're involved with schools, not for a battalion or for a brigade; it's for a division.

So it's really -- I thought it was always the same kind of things. Now, I'll also tell you, I thought -- yes. I think it was the same kind of things. It just got, you know, just bigger and bigger.

People will say that, you know, why don't you give me a checklist of what a sergeant major will do. And I'll say is, you do different things every day. I mean, you're sort of the catch-all for everything within the unit.

If the floor is messed up, you're going to focus on the floor. If someone has problems with personnel, you're going to develop that in there and work it. So you're just sort of working on it. You're the troubleshoot guy within the battalion, I think. And you

go where you think you need to go. It changes depending on what the process is with you and your command.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe your relationship with the commanders of subordinate units while you were with the First Armored Division?

SGM TILLEY: Well, yes. I had a great time. You know, that's -- you know, I hate to always talk positive. I don't think there was only one person when I was the division sergeant major, 5-1/2 years, that I never had a good relationship with, one battalion commander.

And here you go again. It was probably just one of those commanders that just did not -- I'm not going to say didn't trust NCOs, but didn't necessarily know how to work with NCOs. And it wasn't necessarily me; it was everybody around him. So I think just one.

But the answer is, I've always got along good with people and I've always got along good with commanders. I'm not the kind of guy that comes in saying, "Look, I'm the Sergeant Major of the Army or I'm a division sergeant major, and you're going to do this."

I think my job is to come in and advise you of what's correct and what's not correct. And after that, if you still want to say, well, "I'm going to do it anyway," then I'd advise you -- I'd say, "Hey, look, if you're going to do that, I feel obligated to tell the division commander," you know.

So I think I've always had good -- and I've always been up front about it to all the people I've ever worked with.

SGM ELDER: How about with the sergeants major of subordinate units? How were your relationships with them?

SGM TILLEY: Always pretty good. But it's the same thing. Every once in a while you're going to run into a sergeant major that doesn't like you for some reason. And normally it's because if I was there, this is what I would do.

Well, the answer is, you're not there, and so if you want to develop in the Army, you need to be supportive in the Army. So again, I don't think -- I don't think -- there are probably only two guys I think I had a problem with, and both of them had medical problems and they sort of was upset because of a course of action that I took.

The only other ones I remember having a problem with, unfortunately, is a division sergeant major. I think there was like three or four sergeant majors relieved out of that four- or five-year period.

And they are not going to like you no matter what you do, you know, because you got to tell it like it is and sometimes that's not fun.

SGM ELDER: How were you able to develop or mentor your subordinate sergeants major?

SGM TILLEY: Just the same way I did as (inaudible) some of the time. So I'd go

and (inaudible) and I'd talk with them how to do it. I always liked to do things like -- you know, like I used to play a lot of racquetball. I used to run a lot; I still run as much as I can. Golfing.

I mean, something that you're on the same sheet of music, that's something that you like to do. And as long as you're talking, I would call that developmental counseling, developmental mentorship, whatever you want to call it.

But if he's communicating or he or she is communicating with you, you are helping handle the development process. And so find something -- you know, even if it's playing cards. I used to play Spades with soldiers and sergeant majors every once in a while, and in the process you'd talk, you know.

Or maybe they liked coffee. I've never liked coffee, but maybe they want to have a drink or a 7-Up or something like that, somewhere that you're in their environment and they want to talk to you, you know.

Just make yourself, you know, easily approachable. And I think sometimes that's the problem with some of us: We're not as easy to talk to as we should be.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe some of your major initiatives or programs that you brought on board as a division sergeant major?

SGM TILLEY: Well, I think NCO gunnery was one. You know, we really focused on the process of NCO-led gunnery. I tried anywhere I could to put the NCOs in

charge. You know, every time we had the -- you know, the division commander, you know, we'd want to have to have the NCOs do those kind of things.

You know, I got soldier of the year and NCO of the year for USEUR, I think, twice or something like that when I was the division sergeant major. I was very focused on the school system, on the -- making sure that soldiers understood the process on the evaluation, how to (inaudible) with schools and stuff like that.

And probably the only other thing is being a good role model and getting out -- again, talking to soldiers and seeing exactly what they're doing.

You know, one of the things that you maybe ought to do in this process of this book is not talk to me. Talk to people that I worked with and then let them maybe give you an assessment of what I did good or bad, I mean.

And that's probably -- Blaggs is good. He's right here on this post. He's the 11 Cav sergeant major. Mary Sutherland. Mike Bush is now the first AD sergeant major. You know, David Lahey is probably not a bad one.

I can't think of any others. But there's a lot of people that I dealt with over the time and they can probably tell you, you know, more of what I did maybe versus what I thought I did.

SGM ELDER: Just so you know, I'm going to take stacks of stuff on you. And this is the background information that we'll use for your portion of the personal kind of

biography. And it's more in your words.

And one of the things that the last book kind of got beat up on from some of the formers were, "Oh, nobody went back and checked that guy's facts," or, "Well, he said this happened on this month and it really didn't, it happened on that month."

This is your words, your reflections on your career. You know, it's kind of like your little memoirs in a little small package, I guess, and it kind of encompassed everything in about 14 pages.

So yes, there's plenty of background stuff that I have from all kinds of written sources that are out there, and it'll all roll together and it'll come out pretty good.

SGM TILLEY: Well, you don't see yourself.

SGM ELDER: Right.

SGM TILLEY: You know, other people see you. I mean, you never quite -- I mean, I never -- well, I'm not going to -- you know, I never -- I don't feel that I stand out. You know what I'm talking about? I mean, I'm just a soldier getting a job done. I'm no different than anybody else. I just have a different job, you know.

They all say, "Oh, you're doing great." Well, you know, I'm doing what I thought I was supposed to do. I mean, that's what we did all my life, you know, so I can't do it any different.

But I really started that -- again, as a platoon sergeant, first sergeant, battalion -- I

mean, all the way up. I don't think it -- the Sergeant Major of the Army, I think there's differences there when you get there on top of that thing.

SGM ELDER: One of the things -- you know, if I start the interview off and say, "Tell me about your life," we'd probably be done in ten minutes because that's how soldiers are in a lot of cases.

SGM TILLEY: Oh, yes. Yes.

SGM ELDER: So really what I'm trying to do is get the dialogue going. And I'll pose a question, but I don't know if you realize that you'll go off in a different area. And what I'm doing is extracting the information or adding into the discussion.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. That's probably being old.

SGM TILLEY: That's a good thing, though, because it makes for -- so far I've been able to get some -- extract some good comments or -- you know, in a ten-minute speech or spiel, there may be a couple of real good nuggets in there that can be used.

Now we'll move on to some other things. During your time as the -- early in your tenure as the First Armored Division sergeant major, the war in the Balkans was going on.

Did you feel that the division was training with a Balkans focus?

SGM TILLEY: Well, yes. You know, I got ready to go to the Balkans three times, you know. And each time I got ready, it dropped down. It stopped kind of, boom. The day we went -- got alerted for the Balkans -- I believe it was in December '95 -- is that

when I went home that night, they said, "Hey, we're going to go. We're going to go." And I said, "Yeah, right." I said, "Call me at home."

But for some reason, I walked in in the morning and everybody's running all around, you know. I said, shit, you know. And they'd just started the process of contacting people.

You know, I said, "What's going on?" They said, "We've been alerted. We're moving out." And so I always thought we'd go, but I'd heard that from every division commander we'd ever had.

The one that I had at that time, General Mack, said, "Oh, we're not going." You know, I thought, you know, "We're going to go." So I tell you the truth, I didn't think we'd go. I thought we'd just talk about it.

But I really sort of hung on there because, I mean, I didn't want to see the division go (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Now, during this time when you were preparing, did you -- or the feeling around the division, maybe, that you might have to fight your way in, or from the initial point did you believe it was peace enforcement?

SGM TILLEY: I'll tell you the truth, I thought we really at one time was going to have to fight our way in. I was really surprised -- the good thing about that, they allowed us to have a big enough force to go in there that I think that everybody was very afraid of

us. Because an armored division coming in there has a lot of firepower.

But I'll honestly tell you that I really thought that when we went in there, we was going to have to fight. But as you got in there and you started seeing the stuff, they was afraid of you.

There was instances where they would flare up a little bit. We'd have to use some different kinds of techniques to sort of calm them down or get control. But I initially thought we were going to fight.

SGM ELDER: Now, before the division went into Bosnia, soldiers were in Macedonia as part of Task Force Able Sentry. Were you able to visit soldiers and observe the events going on?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, sure. Yes.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe that?

SGM TILLEY: Well, what it was was, you know, we was at checkpoints, towers, you know, right on the Macedonian border, just observing the, you know, Serbs, you know, what was going on in that area of operation. And yes, I went down there a lot of times -- I shouldn't say a lot, probably four or five times when (inaudible) was going on.

But that was a very good operation. I mean, they had very good control. They had -- the biggest thing about that was getting into some of those checkpoints in the mountains and stuff because they was in some pretty -- you know, pretty rough places.

But that was a good operation.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe your deployment into Bosnia, what you went through and how you actually got in the country?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, it's funny you ask. The way I got in the country was me and the general come in on a plane into Tuzla, flew in on a plane. I think the Humvees had come in on another plane, so they were already there.

So we flew in there and landed right in Tuzla, and they had the U.N. that was still there. We went in and started setting up, and about three or four days after we got there, we sort of moved the U.N. out of the White House or they finished up, had like a change of flags, and we just took over the building and then started occupying -- or was occupying at that time the entire of Tuzla.

And also, at that time, the division was coming across the Sava (phonetic). They had not even crossed the Sava River yet. And so what I did was me and the general would fly back up to the Sava River, check it out, and then eventually, once we'd cleared all the way down the Sava down to Tuzla, then I would drive up to the Sava and check soldiers out and then come back down and forth down through those areas of operation.

I think we had like 37 base camps or something like that.

SGM ELDER: Now, as the division went in, it was December and January. Did the weather conditions affect operations?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, it did, yes. You know, the -- we got -- the engineers got flooded out right there over the Sava River. We needed more expansions for the bridge than we had, I think, initially. The weather condition was cold as hell, and the engineers were working very hard just to get us across that bridge.

So it did affect it. I mean, there's a lot of things you had to be afraid of. One is, you couldn't pull off the road too far because you didn't know if it was mined. Nothing was secure. You weren't sure where there was any mines.

Once you got into the zone of separation -- I mean, we just had crossed the bridge and started getting down in the sector, and an MP hit a mine, I think, on the first day, and I think blew off part of his foot. It blew off the front of the Humvee.

And so the weather did affect everything that was going on in there. But everybody, I thought, was pretty much trained to do the things they had to do. And they really -- I mean, you get soldiers that are focused in (inaudible), they know what to do.

Don't get off the road. Stay up on the (inaudible). Don't go to sleep. And so the focus was right there.

SGM ELDER: As you had gone in, can you describe the living conditions?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I mean, you know, the water table in Bosnia is very low -- I mean, the water is very high there. So you get off the road, you're in mud. Okay?

So soldiers, about the first 90 days, everything -- and once you secured the area and

cleared the area, you was living in mud. And so you had to take tons and tons of gravel to raise that up there so you could put the foundation in tents and stuff.

So the living conditions were pretty bad the first 90 days. Of course, we moved in the blown-out factories or -- anywhere that we could put some people in that building, we moved in there. But it was pretty rough for the first 90 days.

After that 90 days, though, we really got took care of and the engineers really took care of us by building the base camps up and doing the things we have to do. But again, we were scattered all over the country, though.

You know, it was about 18,000 U.S. and about another 7,000 Balkan nationals, about 25,000.

SGM ELDER: Do you think that because of the time of the year, around Christmastime, that the morale of the soldiers may have been affected in the division because of the potential for deployment?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I tell you, that's -- you know, I'm sure there's people that had -- was a little disappointed about leaving prior to Christmas. There was no question in my mind, because I certainly was.

But I think the focus on what you was doing quickly changed. I mean, this was no joke. It was a real world mission. So I didn't see much about morale. I didn't hear a bunch of people moaning and groaning.

You know when people start moaning and groaning? When everything stops and you start sitting there and you start sustaining and you start waiting and waiting and waiting and nothing happens. That's when the morale changes.

But for the most part, I think morale was pretty good. And I think morale was good because USEUR, the Fifth Corps, everybody in that -- all soldiers tried to really do everything they could to take care of people.

SGM ELDER: President Clinton declared that the U.S. would be in country for one year. Here we are many years down the road now.

SGM TILLEY: That affected morale, yes. No, the -- in fact, it's funny you say that. When he said one year, you know, they asked me -- somebody asked me about it and I said, you know, I don't know. I mean, all I can do is like everybody else, is just listen to what the President says and sort it out.

But you stay for the year and just understand after that one year you're going to go somewhere else. So you might be here a year, and if they continue on with this mission, somebody else will come and do it.

The ones, I think, that really caught heck about that was the reserves and guards that come in. They basically got orders for them for 179 days, 180 days. Well, they had to, you know, revoke those orders, change those orders to make them 365 days.

And so that affected their morale a great deal, but they worked through that really

well.

SGM ELDER: You had mentioned that somebody had asked you a question about the one-year deployment. Can you describe your relationship with the press in the military during that time frame?

SGM TILLEY: You know, that was probably my first time in the Army that I ever had to do anything with press. You know, I'm not -- I don't take pictures well or talk in front of people very well.

But I never really had to do anything as far as press. And the only time I ever had to do anything with press was that General Nash asked me to go up and talk with the press about issues of morale and about soldiers. So I went up and did that.

And the one thing that came out of that that was pretty interesting, they asked me about alcohol in Bosnia. And I told them that, you know, normally on any kind of deployments like this, we don't drink alcohol in the field. There's a lot of reasons why, but we just don't do it.

However, in the future, they may reassess that, you know. And that's an honest assessment. But right now the answer is, no alcohol, maybe we'll reassess it later, and that's it.

Well, that's how I answered the question. Well, in the Stars & Stripes the following day, what they said was, "The senior NCO says alcohol comes to Bosnia."

And so the general called me in and says, "I can't believe you said that," and I said, "Well, I didn't say that." And what I did was they'd videotaped it. I got him the videotape, and then he says, "Hell, you didn't say that." I said, "I told you I didn't say that."

And that's my first iteration with the press. I mean, they wanted to do everything. They wanted information. And so, you know, I did the best I could. But I'm really not that kind of a person that really wants to get up and talk to the press.

But now, as a sergeant major of the Army, I mean, I know you got to do that. But, you know, that's something that I really don't (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Do you think the Army gained any lessons learned from what was possibly the largest major deployment of combat troops since probably Vietnam?

SGM TILLEY: Sure. There was a lot of lessons learned. I mean, I can't remember all of them, but there was thousands of -- I mean, just the way we moved in vehicles and the way we occupied, our communications, the problems we had with -- I mean, just all that stuff.

I think there's -- you know, what is it, CALL?

SGM ELDER: Yes, Center for Army Lessons Learned.

SGM TILLEY: Center for Army Lessons Learned -- they had people over there right off the bat on (inaudible). So there's a lot of lessons learned.

You know, one of the things that sometimes is interesting to me, you don't hear

much about that. You don't hear much about lessons learned. And I think that's sometimes some of the problems that we have with our school systems.

We should have taken those lessons learned and implemented them into the educational system in the Army, to soldiers in the Army, so we don't have to keep reinventing the wheel.

You know, we did a good job collecting the lessons learned, but I'm not sure what we did to forward them to make our training a little bit better somehow. I mean, our course of training is good, but in our education system, I think we could have put some of those things in there.

SGM ELDER: Do you think, based on your experience, that the 12-month deployment is something the Army should continue to look at? Is six months about right? I think we could probably figure out what the soldiers would prefer, but having lived through a 12-month deployment and seeing how typically nowadays most deployments are around the six-month window, you think that operation --

SGM TILLEY: I'll tell you. I've been on two one-year deployments. One was in Vietnam when I was a young man; the other one was in Bosnia as an older person. Okay?

I thought I maintained my edge for a year both times. But I'll also tell you, I didn't realize I really got tired. One year is a long, long time to sustain that edge for whatever you have to do.

So I think six months is about right. You know, if you can get in in six months and get out, the rotation is about right. Any more than that, I think it's probably just a little too much.

SGM ELDER: Now, the President, William Clinton, visited soldiers at different times during this operation. Did you have any interactions with the President or any high-level dignitaries, like the Secy of the Army?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. In Baumholder, Germany, before we left, I met the President, the commanding general, (inaudible) West, and walked him down to the stage and stuff. Also in Bosnia, when the President arrived down in Bosnia, I introduced him: "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

I did talk to him -- me and my wife talked to him -- both up in Bosnia, along with Hillary and Chelsea. So we did have some interaction with him.

(Inaudible) West had lunch with him a couple times and talked to him a few times.

But I don't know if I talked to him down in Bosnia, but I talked to him in Baumholder there in Germany.

SGM ELDER: Either before the deployment or during the deployment, did the division commander, MG William L. Nash, give you any specific guidance relating to the mission?

SGM TILLEY: You know, we did talk. And the big thing is that he said -- and

here's -- you've got to know General Nash. He said that he didn't care if soldiers called you an SOB as long as you enforced basic standards of (inaudible). You know, that was his only guidance.

I think he felt pretty comfortable with what my abilities were, and so that's the only thing he said: Enforce standards, stay in uniform, and you're okay. And that's exactly what I told the other sergeant majors (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Great. I'm going to flip the tape.

This is a continuation of a follow-up interview with Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley, side 2.

Sergeant Major, before we stopped the tape, we were discussing your appointment with the First Armored Division to Bosnia in 1995. We were talking about the instructions that the division commander had given you during the deployment, and he told you to focus on the basics.

Can you tell me, how did force protection play in your daily routine?

SGM TILLEY: When I was down in Bosnia?

SGM ELDER: Yes.

SGM TILLEY: That was something I focused on everywhere I went, in the vehicle convoy, standard proper uniform, be observant of what's going on, checking the towers, checking everything, you know, the (inaudible) and things.

So I was really -- the first part of being there, that's one of the things that General Nash really asked me to focus on. The other one was really accidental discharge of weapons and stuff like that. So, I mean, I (inaudible).

But do you know something? That is a basic fundamental of every soldier: force protect, clean weapons, stay in focus on what you're doing.

SGM ELDER: How concerned were you about complacency setting in for the mostly static division?

SGM TILLEY: Well, any time that you got people sitting there for a long time and not doing anything, they get complacent. They really do. I mean, the fact that you get them up and get them doing different things, don't put them in the same guard posts or anything, that's something every noncommissioned officer had to fight with all the time.

Because after -- you know, after 90 days, you know, if you're not doing anything, soldiers get bored. They're getting tired and they're concerned about what's going on. So they certainly got complacent real quick. So that came up a lot.

SGM ELDER: What type of things did you do as the division sergeant major to overcome some of those problems?

SGM TILLEY: Well, the one that I just told you about, you make sure that you're talking to people about moving around. You're out talking to soldiers and see what's going on, what concerns (inaudible). I even have a little traveling band I used to take with me to

let them sing for soldiers and stuff.

So getting out and making sure that things like MWR, education system, things that we need to start getting started down there got walked in the right direction.

You know, the big things is AAFES, AAFES getting up and getting out and doing the thing -- and I think they was on the ground with us when we got there. So they were moving quick.

SGM ELDER: Well, you know, when you said the traveling band, you know, I remember you coming to the motor pool singing a song one day with all the soldiers. Yes, that was a pretty interesting thing.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. That was a lot of fun, too. I think a lot of people got a lot out of that.

SGM ELDER: Well, while we're talking about that, what other type of things were brought into the theater to lift the spirits of the soldiers? Were there any special groups or USO-type --

SGM TILLEY: Yes. Well, you know, MWR brought a lot of stuff in there. But it took us a while to get it in there. In fact, you know, MWR basketball stuff, gymnasium stuff -- I don't think we ever got any treadmills, but we got the steppers and the weights and all that stuff.

So those things very quickly they tried to get on the ground. Again, this goes back

to complacency. If you didn't do those things or get them out, then you're really going to have problems, morale problems, after a while.

SGM ELDER: So what about the United States back home? Were there any acts that came into the theater?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, there are -- you know, people like Sheryl Crowe, B.B. King, USO shows. I mean, MWR tried very quickly or USO tried very quickly to get things in for soldiers to listen to and be supported by. And they came.

But I can't remember all the people that came over there that -- there was a constant flow of people that came in there, wanted to entertain, do the best they can (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Do you think the American people were behind their soldiers that were in Bosnia?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I think that the American population, if they understand what the mission is and they understand what we're doing, I think they're always going to be behind us.

One good thing about Americans, you know: We may badmouth each other, you know, but as soon as something hits the fan a little bit, we're going to stay focused and go in the right direction and support each other.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe 20 years later from your tour in Vietnam the differences in being deployed into a theater in Bosnia in 1995 versus Vietnam in 1966?

SGM TILLEY: Vietnam in 1966 -- really, '67 -- was I was 18 years old. I was young. I didn't know much. I came in the Army in '67. But I was young and didn't know really what to expect.

I thought I knew more about what to expect this time when I deployed in Bosnia. I thought, after my years of experience and being in just about every level for such a long time, that I knew exactly what to expect, not only out of soldiers but out of myself.

SGM ELDER: You had mentioned the alcohol policy. Were there any inherent problems, discipline problems, relating to either alcohol, sexual harassment, pregnancy, or equal opportunity?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, sure there was. All those issues. Every one of those came up. We had soldiers that were drinking alcohol. They'd have it shipped into them by mail. And you just sort of deal with those guys when you got them.

Equal opportunity, I think we had a couple of instances where people had, you know, written some kind of racial slur on the wall or something like that. But, you know, you'd paint the wall and clean it up or whatever and just sort of drive on.

But those are always immature young soldiers that don't know the facts of life. They just don't have anything else to do except harass somebody else. So you sort of deal with them as they come up.

SGM ELDER: Would you tie those type of problems to the deployment? In other

words, were they on an increase? Were they the same? Were they less? Or is it just soldiers being soldiers?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I'll tell you, I hate to say that it's soldiers being soldiers because I don't -- I think that, you know, in any large organization, you're going to have people that don't like each other.

And so, you know, as you see them, you identify those problems and you correct them. I mean, that's all you can do. And so I don't -- you know, I never want to say they're soldiers being soldiers. I hope soldiers are bigger than stuff like that.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe how family support was handled during the deployment?

SGM TILLEY: We left -- yes, we left, you know, sergeants first class and officers back in Germany, and they worked on all the BSGs and ASGs to have a very solid family support team back in the rear. And we worked those issues just as quickly as we could.

The other thing we did, too, is we sent soldiers to school after 90 days -- after 60 days or something like that. I can't remember if it was 90 or 60 days. But we sent soldiers to field EC, 100 soldiers a month to field EC, ANOC and BNOC. They went to school.

So after 60 days on the ground, we just -- everything is normal. We just go back to normal and start sending people back to school.

SGM ELDER: What type of actions did the division take to assist families in the communities left behind?

SGM TILLEY: Again, communications, knowing where their husbands are at, making sure they have their mail, making sure there's a good channel of communication because rumors start so quick. If you see something on television, people are going to start talking very quick.

So keep them just updated about what's going on. A lot of times, you know, when you have family support organizations, it's not the one that's in your organization. It's the ones that's not in the organizations that have problems. And then they look one way to do things (inaudible).

So there was a really good channel of communication about trying to keep everybody informed, where the points of contact were. I mean, you know, if there was a problem, they'd call down there and we could send them back if it was a big issue.

SGM ELDER: As you look back on your deployment to Bosnia with the First Armored Division, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

SGM TILLEY: Probably, you know, I tried -- again, here we go: Taking care of soldiers, making sure their needs were taken care of. I thought we did a very good job about taking care of the (inaudible) and schools even though we was deployed.

Setting up a pretty solid communications systems within Bosnia, talking to people

and making people feel pretty proud of what they were doing. You know, that's -- I mean, that's probably (inaudible), probably just doing the same things I did all my military life.

SGM ELDER: Did you have any frustrations or concerns during your deployment?

SGM TILLEY: You know, the concerns I initially had was, you know, most soldiers are used to staying up working hard for two weeks and then collapsing. This was a one-year organization. This is the kind that you had to sustain for -- you know, for one year.

And so I thought people, after a little while, they started getting sleepy. They needed to delegate authority down to noncommissioned officers or officers. But it didn't take me but 90 days or three or four months to figure out, you'd better start using all the people from your organization.

And so that was one of the biggest things I was concerned about, the people just sort of getting -- going and getting complacent and not getting in a good sleep program and a good work program (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Can you describe the redeployment of the division at the end of your tour?

SGM TILLEY: I tell you what, one of the things that really sticks out in my mind was they wanted to close the beer tent up in Hungary, which sounds like a funny thing.

But the thing about that, if they'd have closed that beer tent, we'd have had a bunch of drunks back in Germany killing each other.

I thought the redeployment was really done very professionally. When you come out through Hungary and they gave you those classes about how to move yourself back into the house and all that other stuff, you know, I usually think they're all pretty foolish. But I listened to those things and I got a lot out of it.

I think everybody was really pretty much safety conscious. They tried to get them to slow down, but it's hard to slow a soldier down when you go back to -- you know, when you haven't been off for awhile. So I think we did a pretty good job on redeployment.

The big thing about that, the first 30 days I was back in Germany, everything was quiet. After about 45 days, the same things started to pop up again -- you know, drinking and driving, all the same issues that you had when you was gone. It was like you wasn't gone.

SGM ELDER: Now, after the division returned, I'm sure that you took -- the division took a break and they kind of stood down. How soon would you say before you started your training plans back into effect again?

SGM TILLEY: I want to say it was almost like 45 or 60 days or something like that, you know. Because you come down and you've got your vehicles squared away. Everybody tried to take a block leave, which was about 30 days.

And then you slowly but surely sort of work your way back into just the training process. And I'd probably say about 60 days after you got there, you know. Get your vehicles back and get them on the (inaudible) and get everybody squared away, and then take your block leave, and then come back and start the same old thing again.

Because one of the things that we have to do as soldiers is go back and stay proficient, whatever your MOS is. You know, if you're in tanks, you started shooting tanks. If you're in ground, they started shooting ground (inaudible). If you're a soldier and infantryman, start shooting your M-16.

And so those things are really important to all of us, to make sure we'd be ready to go. And then if your combat -- I mean, just getting accountability of everything you've got, I mean, that's -- you know, that's a major deployment. And so that takes a long time.

You had mentioned just a moment about the combat skills. Did you feel because of the type of mission that the division had that there was a degradation in the war-fighting skills for the division?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I hear a lot of people talking about that. And I think that there may be some CO that maybe got a little rusty. But when we was in Bosnia, we sent tankers and (inaudible) up to Hungary to shoot. We set up ranges so people could fire their M-16s and stuff like that.

So I think if there was a degradation in skills, there's always something that maybe

the commander sort of missed. But you're doing different kinds of things. You're doing peace negotiation versus actually fighting with someone.

And so probably more than anything else, there's probably (inaudible) -- but no, you got to be at a certain level in your wartime skills. It's easy to come down; it's hard to go up sometimes.

So the answer to your question is, if there was, I don't think it was that much.

SGM ELDER: Within the division, who gained the most during the deployment? And maybe I can rephrase that. Was it the leadership who got to exercise their staff skills? Was it the noncommissioned officers? Was it the commanders? If anybody was to gain anything from that deployment personally or professionally, who would you think that would be?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I tell you the truth, I think everybody gains from it. You know, I can't think -- because, I mean, any time that you're doing your job, you're going to win.

You know, I think the leadership, the senior leadership, or the leadership within the division, I think they gained a lot because we're learning. We're going through the process.

I think the soldiers gained a lot because they're down there doing the things they're doing every day of their life or supposed to be doing. So I think if you went to Bosnia and went to (inaudible), I think that every single person (inaudible), and they can move just

because of that.

SGM ELDER: Can you describe your relationship with the soldiers of the division after you returned from Bosnia? Some folks talk about, you know, when you deploy with somebody, you kind of get a little closer, a little tighter, a closer-knit group.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I think in the command group and stuff like that, the people that you're around all the time, I think you probably got a little bit -- I probably got a little closer to those.

I think the relationship to the brigade sergeant majors and some of the battalion sergeant majors, I think I got a little bit closer. They may have known me a little bit better, and I probably got to know them a little bit better.

I think for that part, that's probably me, just the immediate family I have around me, I mean, those CSMs, and commanders, too, that I worked with on a daily basis. I think I got a little closer.

And I knew what their issues were, and they knew that they could talk to me about issues. And I think we got a little closer.

SGM ELDER: Now, how much longer were you with the division after you redeployed?

SGM TILLEY: Let's see. We come back in --

SGM ELDER: November '96?

SGM TILLEY: -- December '96. July of '97. I think General Nash left in March or May or something like that. Yes, March, end of March, first of May, and then I left in July.

SGM ELDER: Now, did you find that your duties and responsibilities were the same when you returned? Were there some new things that you had to focus on?

SGM TILLEY: Well, the biggest thing is you're sort of moving in. Now, even though you've been gone for a year, you've rotated a lot of people, you know. So people have rotated out or PCS'd and people are changing. So it's a constant education process of exactly (inaudible) and what you're doing in the division.

Again, my focus is on schools and chapters and stuff like that within the military, or the division. So I think for the most part, after being there such a long time, I think I just sort of felt that way. I had to be (inaudible).

But I also think it was time for me to go. After 5-1/2 years, you know, I couldn't see the forest because of the trees. I mean, I just -- I'm right in the middle of all that stuff, and I think changes needed to occur but, you know, I was too close to know what was going on. You know, I did all my changes.

SGM ELDER: Can you tell me what your plan was at the end of your tour, where you ended up going and what you were going to do?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, to tell you the truth, I was going to go to Fort

Knox, Kentucky. I was going to be a battalion sergeant major at Fort Knox, Kentucky. I was going to go there, stay about 18 months, and then retire out of the military. That was the plan.

But just before I left, about a couple weeks before I left, General Anderson and -- jeez, I can't think of the sergeant major's name -- anyways, the Space and Missile Defense Command sergeant major, he came over there and talked to me about going to Space and Missile Defense.

And I said, where are you now? I wouldn't mind staying a couple more years in as (inaudible). Let me put my name in the hat for that. And then, you know, I was selected to go to Washington, D.C. to work at Space and Missile Command.

SGM ELDER: How would you compare the assignment at the Space and Missile Defense Command to previous assignments?

SGM TILLEY: Well, the difference is it was a very small unit, maybe 11-, 1200 soldiers. And the rest was civilians, probably about 3,000 people in total. It was more like a brigade or battalion for me. I was used to working with about 18,000 soldiers.

So it was a large adjustment because it reduced the size of the people and the issues. In the headquarters there, there was only about 50 or 60 people. So that was a big adjustment.

But everything you do, it's just like anything else. You go back and start doing the

same things you did before -- visiting soldiers, finding out what their issues were, trying to fix different things, other concerns, and just keep moving on.

So that's exactly what I started doing. But I didn't stay there very long. I only stayed there five months, five or six months, and then (inaudible) after they (inaudible) the Sergeant Major of the Army, then SGM Hall contacted me asked if I could be (inaudible) for the United States Central Command and I was selected for that job.

SGM ELDER: Now, did you -- you had mentioned civilians. Did you work very close with the civilians during your five months?

SGM TILLEY: Uh-huh.

SGM ELDER: Had you worked with civilians before?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, sure. You know, you work with a lot of civilians. At the division, you run into quite a few civilians.

You know, civilians are soldiers, too. You know, I mean, the only difference is they've elected to be a civilian, but they're working so closely with you, you've got to call them soldiers because they have the same focus and the same philosophy about making it better for all of us (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: As a depot sergeant major, we had 2,500 civilians, and I used to call them my soldiers in blue jeans.

SGM TILLEY: You're right.

SGM ELDER: Well, while the Space and Missile Defense Command sergeant major, you participated in a future NCO workshop in 1997. Can you tell me your impression of the direction of the NCO corps at that time?

SGM TILLEY: This is -- well, you know, what they was -- what they was doing was talking about, you know, what's the NCO corps going to look in the year 2020 or something like that. Should it be perfect? You know, how should we modify the structure of the NCO corps?

And, you know, that's so long ago, it's hard for me to remember. But I think we just talked about what we should look like in ten or fifteen years. You know, what should we modify? What should we focus on? How should we develop our education system?

And I thought it was pretty beneficial conference. But I think -- you know, I think we may have gone out of the box just a little bit. You know, I wish there was -- sometimes we're so worried about future that we can't worry about today, you know.

The future is going to come, but let's focus on today and make sure we're squared away today versus what's going to happen ten years down the road. And so I got a lot of that out of that.

I mean, we talked about a lot of good things. But, you know, quite frankly, I can't remember all the issues and stuff that came out of it.

SGM ELDER: As one of the by-products of that conference was born the future

vision of the NCO corps. You have recently pushed the future vision of the NCO corps.

Can you tell me, how is the sergeant supposed to use that vision?

SGM TILLEY: Well, it's nothing more than giving him a sort of direction that he needs to go to or go in. He needs to see that these are the things that we ought to focus on. In fact, if you look at the -- it's not -- it's sort of an updated version, down on the bottom it talks about counseling. It talks about discipline and things like that.

So it gives him a direction that he ought to be looking at as a noncommissioned officer. That's all it's about.

SGM ELDER: You had mentioned after your five months with the Space and Missile Defense Command, you were asked to serve at Central Command as the senior noncommissioned officer. What were your first impressions of serving in a joint billet?

SGM TILLEY: I was sort of excited about working for a force (inaudible). I thought that would be fun. But I think what caught my impression was, they have a real-world mission. Things are going on every day. And I was just excited about getting down there and seeing what was going on down in that area of operation.

But once you get into the joint command, it was -- I thought it was pretty neat to learn about other services, learn about the goods things and the bad things that they do, learn about their concerns and what their issues was.

So I just got a lot out of every service. And I really left there saying, I wish I'd

have done something like that earlier in my career, you know. But I had a great commander. Joe Anthony is Navy, who was a super, super nice fellow and a great CINC.

And I just thought a lot of good people worked there. So I came out of it really feeling pretty positive about (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Now, in CENTCOM, you had enlisted soldiers from other services. You had mentioned -- a theme that you continue to mention is you do business pretty much the same, just at different levels.

SGM TILLEY: Right.

SGM ELDER: Dealing with those from the sister services, did you feel that they had the same issues as soldiers had?

SGM TILLEY: The issues are the same, the way that they approach them a little bit different. You know, there's a culture problem. I'm not Air Force, so I don't know all the -- you know, the terms of the Air Force people, or the Navy or the Marine Corps.

So I think it was just learning about the do's and don'ts of their particular service. That was the biggest thing. You know, when did they get (inaudible)? I mean, when did they -- what kind of -- you know, the Marine Corps runs three miles. The Army runs two. The Navy runs a mile. The Air Force bikes, you know.

So just learning about all those different kinds of techniques was really pretty difficult because you end up not -- not only doing a thing like that, but sometimes you sort

of insult their service, you know, and do that.

So knowing about their service -- and you really have to focus on making sure (inaudible) a soldier of the quarter or a serviceman of the quarter, they'd better have, you know, Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps. There'd better be a mix in there because, you know, if not, it gets off balance.

SGM ELDER: You had mentioned earlier when you were selected for the First Armored Division, your comments -- your first comments to the division commander. Did you feel you were well prepared to serve at the Space and Missile Defense Command and CENTCOM?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I tell you the truth, I did. Space and Missile Defense Command, like any other assignment, sort of worried me because I don't know anything about space and missile defense, you know.

And when I got down to the Central, the one thing that probably worried me about it more than anything else, I mean, the Sergeant Major of the Army come out of the Central Command. Here's a guy that's certainly a very quality noncommissioned officer, and I'm going to replace him, you know. So I need to make sure I do a good job.

So, you know, after -- I guess after a week or so, I felt pretty confident about what I needed to do.

SGM ELDER: So while you were at the CENTCOM, you went through the

interview process for the 12th Sergeant Major of the Army. Is that the first time you had gone through that interview process, the first time you'd been considered?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, yes. Yes. The first for the Sergeant Major of the Army's job? No, I'd never been considered before. I'd never even thought -- even though that I guess I was qualified when I was a division sergeant major.

But quite frankly, I said, you know, I can't compete with these guys. I'm not -- you know, I'm not -- I don't think I was qualified to be the Sergeant Major of the Army. So the answer to your question is yes. That's the only time.

SGM ELDER: You just mentioned a recent change to the selection process. Can you comment on that? Now you have to work for a lieutenant general or higher before you can be competitive?

SGM TILLEY: No, no. No, no. No. I didn't say that. It was my impression that to be competitive, in my mind I thought you probably had to work for a lieutenant or a general officer at four-star level.

I always thought when I was at a two-star level, even though I could have completed for that Sergeant Major of the Army, I didn't necessarily think that I had the qualifications to be the Sergeant Major of the Army. You know, when you were talking about fighting position, mine was a little bit smaller than the guy at three- or four-star level.

And I didn't think I knew enough about what the Sergeant Major of the Army would even have to do. So it's not that -- it's not that I wasn't qualified, it's just that I didn't think personally I was qualified even to complete.

SGM ELDER: I'm going to keep pushing on that one, Sergeant Major. At the time you were the division sergeant major, the rules allowed two-star level sergeant majors to complete.

SGM TILLEY: Yes.

SGM ELDER: However, now current rules say you must be at three-star level to complete.

SGM TILLEY: You know, I'd have to go back and check.

SGM ELDER: It is, Sergeant Major.

SGM TILLEY: Is that right?

SGM ELDER: At least for your selection process. I got the pre-board qualifications, and that's why I stated it's a new change that says you must now work for a lieutenant general -- have worked at the lieutenant general or higher level.

And it's not something that had been in place before.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I guess, you know, I didn't know that, to tell you the truth. I probably did know that when I looked at the message, but it didn't pertain to me so I didn't even think about that.

I'll tell you the truth, I wouldn't see a problem with allowing people to complete at a two-star level. But I've honestly got to tell you that I think that a person who works at a three- or four-star level, I think that knowledge-wise it probably would be a better selection, you know. They just have had that level of experience.

Not to say a guy from the two-star level couldn't go there. But, you know, I've always been the sort of guy -- and I heard people talk about this for years, but I thought we only got history (inaudible) one brigade, one division, one -- you know what I'm talking about?

So I think there's a lot to be learned by saying, work at a three- or four-star level. I didn't know that that was a change.

SGM ELDER: It was a change.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I didn't even think about that. You know the way it used to be, thought? It used to be like O-6 or above.

SGM ELDER: O-6 or above. Exactly.

SGM TILLEY: I wonder why they changed it?

SGM ELDER: I'm not sure. That's -- part of, you know, doing the research for the book is, you know, there's still a lot of things documented. But believe it or not, and I think I told you in my AAR before I left DC, that there's so many documents lost to history that are just not around.

Another comment that you had mentioned to me is sit down and talk with the sergeants major of the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. There is nothing -- I have to historians, to them personally. They have no historical documents on the establishment of the office. They can tell you who was there -- you know, this guy was here, the first guy there. But they can't tell you anything that brought them up to that point.

They don't have any recollection. There's nobody around that -- other than maybe telling war stories, there's just nothing written down in any type of format on some of these just important events that have happened.

And I don't want to say important like they're earth-shattering but, you know, they're just little marks on the wall that have continued to track the professionalism of the noncommissioned officer corps.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. It is interesting. I didn't know that.

SGM ELDER: Okay. We were talking about your selection to -- your competition for the Sergeant Major of the Army. Can you tell me how -- the process that you went through after General Zinni had nominated you for Sergeant Major of the Army? What process did you go through until you were finally selected?

SGM TILLEY: Well, I submitted a packet. And then what happened was they -- you know, but that's really an interesting question because that's -- now I understand why

there was less people. There was only 13 people competing for that job.

And what they did is they interviewed all 13 people, and then you went up to FIRSTCOM. You went into a room. There was nobody in the room but maybe you and a couple of other guys. You couldn't talk to anybody about the board.

I did it on the second day. There was people that -- they went alphabetically. A few go on the first day. On the second day, nobody talked to you about the board. You went in there. There was a lieutenant general, two major generals, two brigadier generals, and the Sergeant Major of the Army.

And you reported, sit down, and they said, "Do you know why you're here?" And they just automatically started to ask you questions. And the process for me lasted about ten minutes. I got up and left. They said, "We'll contact you."

About -- and I can't remember, this was so early in the morning -- about 11:30 or 12:00, they called me and said that, "Congratulations. You've been selected for the next step in the process for the selection of the Sergeant Major of the Army." They contacted five people, and the rest they contacted and told them they wasn't -- and the five people, I remember Sergeant Major McFowler, Sergeant Major Beck, Sergeant Major Lay, Sergeant Major Young, and myself. Those were the five people.

We all at about 1400 got into a vehicle that day and drove up to the Pentagon. Went into a conference room. The Chief of Staff of the Army came in there and talked to

all of us about, "hey, all of you are very competitive. You're all -- any one of you could be the Sergeant Major of the Army. But I'm only going to select one of you, but you're all very competitive. So I appreciate you all attending."

And then he blew right out with -- I think it was Sergeant Major Beck. And Sergeant Major Beck -- and I'm not sure who was second, but I'm going to say I was either third or fourth.

And so we all -- I think I sit in there for about 40 or 45 minutes with the Chief, and I think everybody was in about the same amount of time. He came back out, walked back into the conference room -- and I'll tell you the truth, you ever just sort of feel like you've won, you know? And I felt pretty good about it. And, you know, I'm not saying anybody was bad or good.

He said, "Hey, look." He said, "I don't know who we're going to select as the Sergeant Major of the Army," he said. "But," he said, "you're all very qualified to do your job here. I appreciate here. And whoever's selected, I expect all of you to support him. I haven't made the decision yet. We'll contact you."

And he just -- him and the Sergeant Major of the Army left. And we all just piled in, went back, got our vehicles, moved on back. I flew back to Tampa. I think -- I want to say it was a Friday.

And what I did was on Monday and Tuesday -- I really can't remember the time,

but I think it was like on Monday or Tuesday, I took a leave. One is, I was just sort of glad it was over. I just wanted to get (inaudible). So I went golfing.

And I was on hole number 2 and SMA Hall called me and said, "Hey, look, you need to come back up to D.C." And I said, "How come?" And he said, "Well," he said, "the Secretary of the Army wants to talk to you." And I said, "Oh, well, that's good." I said, "Does it mean this is another step?" He says, "No." He says, "No, you're one of one." He says, "But it just is something they had to do."

And so I went back up and I sat down and talked to the Secretary. And as I leaving he says, "Hey, tell Sergeant Major Hall I'm giving you a thumbs up." So I went back to him and I told him what he said, and he said --

And so we didn't say anything about that. I think it was like a week later that we announced that I was selected Sergeant Major of the Army.

SGM ELDER: You had mentioned that you went and sat down with the Chief, General Shinseki. Had you met with the Chief before?

SGM TILLEY: No.

SGM ELDER: Had you had any interaction with him prior to him being the Chief?

SGM TILLEY: Really, I met him twice before. Once I met him in Germany when he was a brigadier general. Down at Augsburg, we went to a communications

briefing or something like that. And then I'd not seen him for years until I seen him when he's a four-star general. And I won't say he was a vice then.

And I seen him in AUSA. And I walked by and he stopped, I stopped, we backed up, and he says, "Sergeant Major, how you doing?" I says, "Not as good as you because you got four stars and I'm still a sergeant major," you know. So he sort of laughed. We talked for just a couple of seconds, and moved out. That's the only interaction I'd ever had.

SGM ELDER: Sergeant Major, would you compare the interview process with anything like a promotion board that a young soldier goes through nowadays? Was it a relaxed environment?

SGM TILLEY: You're talking about the board where they had the lieutenant general?

SGM ELDER: No. When you were actually sitting down with the Chief.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. The Chief -- well, it's not like a board. It's like an interview process. He had a list of questions, you know, and he went through those questions and asked your opinion on different things.

And so it could be, you know, considered a promotion board. But I think it was more of picking your brain a little bit to see what you thought about things, what your issues was.

I mean, he asked me things about what you think about commanders that use e-mail

and never get out from their e-mails. We talked about (inaudible). We talked about -- you know, I can't remember all the things we talked about, but we talked about a lot of stuff that just sort of generated discussion.

In fact, he asked me about transformation, and I told him, I said, "You know, sir, I can help you sell transformation." He said, "Sergeant Major, you don't have to sell transformation." I said, "But I can help you. I can educate people on the transformation process."

So we talked about how we'd do it, and I talked about having a Sergeant Major of the Army conference (inaudible), you know, and educating the noncommissioned officers who in fact would educate everyone else in the Army, you know.

And we talked about a lot of ideas and thoughts. I just thought we had, you know, a very good discussion.

SGM ELDER: This may be unfair to you because you just found out about the new requirements for working at the lieutenant general level. But as you had mentioned, the number of personnel who were interviewed during your selection process were down considerably lower than they had been in the past.

If that is possible, do you think that the problems that happened with Sergeant Major McKinney were in office, that that may have caused things to be done differently or maybe caused some concerns throughout the ranks to apply for that particular job?

SGM TILLEY: Say that again. You think there's people that were afraid to compete for the job because of what happened to Sergeant Major of the Army McKinney?

SGM ELDER: Either/or. What I'm asking is, because of the problems that had happened with Sergeant Major McKinney, if that had any impact, whether it was they were afraid to compete, whether it was because of background screening --

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I would tell you that I probably -- I think that some people thought about that. I think if there's something that (inaudible) out there, you always have a little apprehension about that because you know you're in a glass case right there and if you violate something, you do something wrong, then somebody's going to throw glass -- or throw rocks at you and try and break it.

So I think there probably was some people that thought about that. But I guess, like anything else, people get in trouble. Things happen. They continue on.

And so I think that's -- it may have been a consideration. You know, I tell you what, I don't even think it was a consideration when I was completing for Sergeant Major of the Army. I think that Sergeant Major of the Army is sort of (inaudible) all the biases and concerns that people had within the Army about that position.

SGM ELDER: You talking about Sergeant Major Hall?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I think that he went in the -- he went into the -- SMA Hall went into the Sergeant Major of the Army position at a very critical time in the Army, and

I think you had to have a very special person to put in there at the right time because if you put the wrong person in there, that could have killed that job for all of us (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: I'm going to change tapes.

This is the follow-up interview with Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley, a continuation of oral history interview.

Sergeant Major, now we're talking about your initial selection and the time frame when you were selected as the 12th Sergeant Major of the Army. After you were selected and SMA Hall notified you, can you tell me what you did and how you finally got reassigned to the Pentagon?

SGM TILLEY: The first thing I did, I went home and told my wife, and she told me to take that (inaudible).

But what I did was once I was notified by Sergeant Major Hall, initially I couldn't say anything for really about a week. And then, you know, it was publicized, and then I very quickly cleared and sort of moved right out to the Pentagon.

It took me probably about three weeks, I think, to get out of there, you know. So I'd have to fly up and do what I had to do and fly back on the weekends until I, you know, got on. So probably, you know, three weeks to a month to sort of get up there.

SGM ELDER: Can you talk about the ceremony that they used to --

SGM TILLEY: The swearing in?

SGM ELDER: -- swear you in?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. It was done in the Hall of Heroes. We wasn't of the date initially because Sergeant Major Hall was going to be here on the 22nd of June. We was doing something on that day, so I was going to be sworn on the 23rd. So very quickly they was (inaudible).

It was done in the Hall of Heroes and I invited some close friends. In fact, some of them came all the way from Washington State to be part of the ceremony, people I'd known throughout the years. One guy I went to high school with just showed up. I mean, it was really sort of neat.

But it's one of those things that you're really sort of flabbergasted about, the things and the events. I mean, you're making something a big deal where you think it's not as big as it is.

But that was really a very special day for me. I mean, the Chief got up there and said a bunch of nice words. You put the hand on the Bible and, you know, you gave the oath. And then my wife gave me the jacket. I put the Sergeant Major of the Army, you know, jacket on and put the rank on.

And that was just a very big deal and a very good time for me, and I had to sort of swell it up. I was really (inaudible). Again, it's going to take a while for it to deflate. You know, you realize you just got another job.

That was just a big day. It's one -- I guess it's probably one of those days in life that you'll never forget. There are certain things that sort of stick out in your life. I mean, being sworn in as the 12th Sergeant Major of the Army, you know, that's a big deal. The 12th person in history to get that job.

So, you know, of course I felt good. But again, it doesn't take you long to figure out that, hey, you got a lot more responsibility and a lot more things you have to do.

SGM ELDER: Did they present you a copy of the oath or some sort of certificate?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. You know, I want to say they did, and it's probably in the office right (inaudible). But again, I'd have to go back and check.

SGM ELDER: And the reason I ask that is because of all the things that I found through all the research, I have never found the actual words to the oath that go along with it, which I guess is different than maybe some other oaths.

SGM TILLEY: What we can do is we can -- you can contact Sergeant Myers in the office right there (inaudible) and they can probably hunt that stuff down. Because protocol set all that stuff up, the book and all that stuff. So there's something there for you.

SGM ELDER: Once you arrived -- either when you arrived or before you arrived, did General Shinseki give you any specific instructions or duties?

SGM TILLEY: Yes, he did, you know. And, you know, staying in your lane, staying focused on noncommissioned officers and soldiers' responsibility, being out seeing

soldiers, seeing what's going on -- I mean, just a lot of the same things that, you know, I think I'm dealing with in my military career.

SGM ELDER: One of the themes that we brought up is that you pretty much do things the same at just different levels. I've got to ask the question again: As Sergeant Major of the Army, what do you see as your primary duties and responsibilities?

SGM TILLEY: You know, now it's just a lot different. Here you've got to deal with Congress. You're trying to be the person that takes that information to Congress and the Secretary of Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Army. You have to find the right people to talk to about issues for people within the services and stuff like that.

So I think it's just a little -- and not only do you have to travel and see soldiers, but somehow you've got to figure out how to get that information flow to the other people on the Hill and stuff like that.

So I think that's the most difficult part of my job, knowing and letting them understand exactly the needs of the Army.

SGM ELDER: If you can sum up in just a couple of simple words, what would you -- since you've been on the position for about a year now, what would you say is the primary job of the Sergeant Major of the Army?

SGM TILLEY: Well, I can just give you easy one: Taking care of soldiers. Keeping people informed. Letting people understand what's going on for basic soldiers in

the Army.

I mean, you know, at this level right here, you don't necessarily understand what soldiers are doing on the ground. So keeping people informed. I mean, letting not only the Chief of Staff of the Army but everybody understanding, I mean, what's going on in the Army.

You know, I'll tell you something: I don't think there's very many people in the Army who see as much of the Army as me. In fact, I don't think there's anyone, not one person in the Army.

Now, you may see it -- you know, the Chief sees the army a little different than I do. But just the basic operational stuff in the Army, I think that I'm probably the only guy in the Army that really sees everything and has a very good impression about what's good and what's bad.

SGM ELDER: This may be a one-sided question: 35 years ago, just a little over 35 years ago, we didn't have a Sergeant Major of the Army.

Can you tell me, I mean, is this the right thing for us to do, is have somebody at your level at the right hand of the Chief of Staff of the Army looking out for the interests of the enlisted soldiers?

SGM TILLEY: Absolutely. You know, but I think that it all goes back to the person that's in this job. I think that you can have people in this job that their head's

swelled up, that they're more focused on themselves versus the soldiers.

But I think if you got the right person in this job, they can clearly make a difference for soldiers. For example, pay, you know. For example, well-being. I mean, when you go over and talk in Congress and you tell them about, you know, our responsibilities, what we're doing, and all the other things, I mean, they know that you know and they know that you've been there.

So I think it's real critical to have the right person in this job.

SGM ELDER: So would you say that this is a -- the person who holds this job has got to have a type of personality?

SGM TILLEY: I do. I think you've got to be very open-minded. I think you've got to have -- I'm not even saying -- I think you have to have good communications skills. You've got to be able to get along with people as well as you can.

I think you need to know when to fight and when to sort of be quiet, you know. I'll also tell you, you owe it to yourself and the Chief to be very honest and straightforward, you know.

I think that you've got to -- but I'll also tell you that I think you can have the wrong person in there that does the wrong thing, that uses this job in the wrong direction.

But no, again, guys like Sergeant Major Hall and Kidd and all the rest of them, I mean, they've all done great jobs at the particular time they were the Sergeant Major of the

Army. I think they all did a fantastic job.

SGM ELDER: You were just talking about the Chief. Can you describe your relationship with the Chief of Staff?

SGM TILLEY: Well, let me tell you something: That Chief works hard. He is probably one of the most polite people I've ever met in my life. He has told me that if I want to come in and talk to him, I can at any time.

But, you know, I'll tell you something: He's always busy. There's so much going on, I feel bad about going in and trying to bother him about something. But I do. I mean, I come in and I tell him like it is, and he sort of gives me an honest assessment of what's going on.

Now, usually every Monday we meet, and there for a few weeks we could -- we always block a little bit of time where we just sit down and talk one on one.

SGM ELDER: What about your relationship with the Vice?

SGM TILLEY: Same thing. He's -- the Vice is probably easier for me to get to. He's very busy, too, but he's a great guy. I mean, he's easy. He wants to talk to you. He wants to help you. And he's focused on (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Are there any other primary staff members, maybe, that -- the Secretary of the General Staff or other folks that you work close with within the Pentagon?

SGM TILLEY: I'd probably say the DAS, the DSPR, and the DSOPS, and the

DSLOG. I mean, all of those guys sort of -- I mean, different issues (inaudible). So it depends on where I'm coming.

If you're dealing with berets, who are you going to? Okay? If you're dealing with operational stuff, who are you going to? If you're dealing with personnel issues, who are you going to?

So I think all of those guys, all the Army staff, is more than willing to -- you know, to help you out with any kinds of concerns or any kinds of problems you have.

SGM ELDER: Do you have unfettered access to the Chief of Staff?

SGM TILLEY: Do you mean can I go in there any time I want? You know, you can, but again, it's -- he has a -- he's the guy that is dealing with theater strategy. If I come over and say, "Hey, I need to see the Chief," I can see the Chief.

But I'm not the kind of guy that wants to say, "I need to see the Chief," every 20 minutes or every 30 minutes. I mean, I can't do that. I don't think there would be enough time in the day.

So I sort of stay in my lane of operation. If I need to see him, then I can see him. If I don't need to see him (inaudible). But I think the smart thing there, we go to Leavenworth about every two weeks. If I want to see him, I can fly on the airplane with him. Okay?

I mean, there's things that you can do to get (inaudible). But again, here you go

again: He's doing one thing, I'm doing one thing, and clearly they don't need to go down the same path all the time. We need to go out like this.

The other thing you got is e-mail. If I want to talk to him on e-mail, I'll talk to him on e-mail. So the answer to your question is, if I want to see him, I can see him any time I want. Okay? I don't think there's a problem with that.

But I'm the kind of person, and I know he understands, that I'm not to go in to him unless I've really got a big issue.

SGM ELDER: Do you see that there should be any concern that the office of the Sergeant Major has been moved from a representative of the Chief of Staff working for the Chief of Staff to now a staff NCO working for staff officers within the Pentagon?

SGM TILLEY: You're saying the Sergeant Major of the Army's office?

SGM ELDER: Yes.

SGM TILLEY: Working for staff officers in the Pentagon? I don't think so. That doesn't happen. I'm not working for a staff officer in the Pentagon. I'm working for the Chief of Staff of the Army. And I don't -- I mean, I don't deal with anybody else. Normally, if I'm working with somebody else, I'd ask them questions. I'm not working for them.

I'll tell you, a lot of times they'll come to me about stuff like that. So I'm still working with the Chief, really more the Chief and the Vice than the DAS or something like

that. I mean, there's a lot of stuff you can work out of the DAS (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: And the DAS is the -- the acronym DAS?

SGM TILLEY: The -- gosh, I'm trying to think of what it is. You know, I don't know. I can't think of what it is. It's the Deputy -- the DAS. I want to say it's the Deputy Vice Chief of Staff (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: At the Army Secretariat?

SGM TILLEY: I'm not sure.

SGM ELDER: Okay. Can you describe your relationship with the other staff --

SGM TILLEY: All the --

SGM ELDER: Yes.

SGM TILLEY: Very good. All of them are always very helpful and all of them are very motivated to try to do anything they can do. In fact, on a bunch of occasions, they've always told me that any issues that you have, please contact us and we'll work on it.

You know, one good -- like General Ellis, the (inaudible), I mean, they'll really -- you know, I don't go directly to anyone if I have to. They'll jump out on whatever the issue is.

SGM ELDER: Do they seek your guidance on policies or issues relating to enlisted soldiers?

SGM TILLEY: Sure, they do. Usually anything that's come up from the (inaudible) or anything like that, changes in the regulations, anything like that (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Can you tell me, what are some of the top issues that you see facing the enlisted soldiers, maybe the top issues that you find yourself dealing with on a regular basis?

SGM TILLEY: The number one issue is -- if you're talking about issues -- really pay. Pay is the number one issue for soldiers. One is because there's always a comparison with officer payment and enlisted payment. There's always a comparison with the education and stuff like that. So pay is the number one issue that I talk with people about all the time.

SGM ELDER: How about some of the other issues that may come up on a regular basis?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, there's always issues about infrastructure, well-being, child care development. TRICARE is always a big issue. Retirement benefits is always a big issue. Why do you pay sergeants so much money -- or soldiers so much money and how come you don't pay sergeants so much money to stay in the military?

The education is a big, important issue, about education, military education, for us. NCOAS is an important issue. College degrees is an important issue -- I mean, getting in an education program and trying to get their education, for college and that.

Those are probably the -- and then the other side of that is the personnel issues. You know, slates, we talk about slates, nominative slates. I get involved in all of those. Screening to make sure that, you know, everything is okay all the way through.

Just daily -- just little bullshit kind of issues that (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Now, when you had first come on board as the Sergeant Major of the Army, you had mentioned about five top topics that you thought you had to focus on. Have those numbers grown over time?

SGM TILLEY: Yes, they sort of have. You know, the same -- it's the same five: you know, pay, well-being, TRICARE, retirement benefits, and why do you pay soldiers so much.

So I think the difference now is the education system, the Sergeants Major Academy and NCOAS, is probably the only other big issue that's coming up. And then I think another one that's coming up is just counseling, developmental counseling and stuff like that.

And then that NCO board, you know, our panel that we have going out and doing all the surveys. And then there seems like there's a bigger need for me to come and talk to like PCC and the War College and stuff like that about the interaction and how they feel about stuff.

So I think -- and then talking to guard and reserve and recruiting stations and stuff

like that. I think there's just sort of a bigger demand for me to come out and do things like that.

But those are probably the only big issues that I deal with. It doesn't sound like much, but -- and then the other thing of that, I think there's more -- there's more people from Congress that ask me to come over and talk to them now, too. So that's probably the biggest thing.

SGM ELDER: In your over one year that you've been on board, about how many times have you addressed Congress?

SGM TILLEY: I really testified twice. I went over there probably -- I'd probably say nine times.

SGM ELDER: You say you went over there and you testified twice. Is there a difference -- when you go over there, are you not testifying or are you --

SGM TILLEY: Yes. When you go over and testify, you're in front of a formal board and you have a written statement and all that stuff. And then -- but sometimes they ask you to come over and talk one-on-one to a congressman about an issue or something like that. Okay? And so we just go and discuss that personal issue with him.

SGM ELDER: That must be interesting.

SGM TILLEY: It is interesting. Yes. Depending on what the issue is. It could be anything associated with whatever, and they sort of want to know what -- your input

and how you feel about that or whatever it is. It is pretty interesting.

SGM ELDER: I think I recall you mentioning that with less of our elected officials having served in the military, that that is an important part of your job, telling them the issues that affect enlisted soldiers.

SGM TILLEY: Absolutely.

SGM ELDER: Do your peers, the other senior enlisted soldiers at the different services, do they do similar activities?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. Yes, they do the same kind of thing. They educate them on all their -- on the things that go on within their particular service. So they do the same thing.

Some probably do it a little bit better, some maybe not as good. But yes, they do the same kinds of things.

SGM ELDER: Do you feel that that's something that's an important part of your responsibilities, is to inform our elected leaders?

SGM TILLEY: Absolutely. I mean, I don't think you can -- you know, unless you're a soldier, you don't know what a soldier does. You know, I ran into a -- I want to say it's a congressman out of Idaho the other day that was a sergeant first class, you know. And I've ran into a couple of spec 4s that were staffers over in Congress.

But there's very few people that have that kind of military background. And so yes,

it's very important. I mean, I don't think I could go over there enough and talk to them about what's going on.

The other thing is, I wish they would -- and some of them try to do that -- is go out to military installations and have the chance to talk to other NCOs and stuff about what's going on within the service.

SGM ELDER: Sergeant Major, when you entered your job, the Army was in the midst of transformation. Can you discuss some of the current initiatives that are on the forefront of this change?

SGM TILLEY: Well, the first, you know, the I Brigades (phonetic) that we have that are coming up, I mean, that's a course. That's a change. Our education system is changing for NCOAS. I think we're looking in a -- you know, officer and education systems have both changed, and I think that -- the 11 Hotels, I mean, the 11 series MOS are combined.

I think you have a lot of small changes within the Army, right now in the Army, that are occurring because of the transformation of the Army. People are sort of leaning forward in the fighting position trying to make the appropriate change to their particular MOS, if that makes any sense.

I mean, there's just a lot of stuff. I don't know if you could put your hand on all the stuff that's been going on.

SGM ELDER: Sergeant Major, one of the symbols of transformation is the Army beret. And having lived through and got past the 14th of June, can you tell me, how did that affect you as the Sergeant Major of the Army dealing with the beret?

SGM TILLEY: The one thing it affected me with is that, you know, I learned -- I learned a lot about change in the military. I learned a lot about -- people just absolutely hate change.

I also learned a lot that most people don't research the information before they start making rational decisions about what's going on. You know, they just said, "That's not fair, let's do" -- you know, without going out and doing a little research and finding out why we're doing something like that.

I've found the important part about keeping your retirees informed about things that are going on. Retirees really want to be a part of everything that goes on in the military, and sometimes they don't like change. You know, they don't like things to grow.

So one thing -- I mean, that's probably all I learned about that beret. Of course, I learned about the history of the beret. I learned about the importance. I learned about transforming the Army and what we're doing in the future.

But the biggest thing I learned about it, how hard it is for us to educate people at every level within the military, how difficult that -- just like today, when I'm out asking soldiers, I said, you know, "Do you ever see those thoughts and concerns?" I put them out

every month.

Well, I mean, the brigade and battalion sergeant major, maybe the first sergeant. But hell, that probably doesn't go any lower than that. But it should go lower than that. You ought to make it sort of a requirement to at least look at it and then throw it away if you want to throw it away.

That's how difficult it is for us to educate people in the military. And it's -- information flow is tough.

SGM ELDER: How important was the beret to the transformation process?

SGM TILLEY: I would tell you that if you couldn't put a beret on -- a headgear in the Army, you couldn't transform the Army, if that makes sense. If we can't put a headgear on the military, a uniform change in the Army, don't try to transform the Army with different vehicles because we can't do it.

I think it was almost so ludicrous that people, all people, or so many people, got involved about something that surely was just an Army issue, you know. And then at the outcome of it, the only thing I've heard now is how positive it is.

In fact, everybody knows when the Army's birthday is now. There's no question in my mind, everybody in the Army now. The ones coming in now, we may have to educate them. But right now, everybody knows the 14th of June when the Army birthday is, and they also know -- you know, they should know why we're changing the beret, you know.

Did you ever get that information paper about the beret?

SGM ELDER: Yes.

SGM TILLEY: Yes. And that sort of laid everything out about the beret and what we needed to do on the headgear in the military. So I thought that was pretty positive.

SGM ELDER: One other issue of transformation was the changing of the Army's recruiting slogan to the "Army of One."

SGM TILLEY: Yes.

SGM ELDER: Can you talk about the success of how that transition has been?

SGM TILLEY: Well, you know, I'd probably have to go for a long time. Let me just get all of it real quick. "Be All You Can Be." The first four months when that come out, nobody liked it. "Army of One." I watched that videotape three times before they told me not to say anything.

The first time up, I mean, I'm not seeing that. The second time and the third time, as soon as they shut it off, I said, "Hey, wait a minute. This guy is running the wrong way. He's not in the proper uniform. Where is his values tag? Where is his plotter team?"

But I asked one very important last question: Is it right for the Army? Will it get soldiers or young people out of the military to identify with the Army? And the answer is yes.

We reenlist about 185,000 to 200,000 people a year. And young people identify with "Army of One." It's not one person. It's, you know, one squad, one team, one Army, you know.

And if you dig down into all those Army ad campaigns, you'll find out that they are talking about team. They are talking about commitment. So the "Army of One" right now has been very successful in the United States Army, so we're looking good.

You know, you need to compare all the other numbers to all the other services. Look at the Marine Corps. They only got 170,000. (Inaudible) enlist 40,000 people a year or 30,000. I'm not sure what the Navy and the Air Force have.

But when you look at the sheer numbers of the United States Army, I mean, that's -- 185,000 people, man, I mean, if that was your business, that would be a little rough, you know. So you do whatever you have to do to get soldiers coming back.

SGM ELDER: I guess the question, just to expand on that a little more, is because of the new campaign, has it shown to be successful at this point?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. Yes, it has. It was successful very shortly after it started. Okay? Now, is it successful because we've just got people coming to the Army? I don't know. There's more hits on the website. People are talking, looking into it, tracking soldiers that go through basic training. So it appears right now that it's more successful.

SGM ELDER: One thing that many people may not realize is, the "Army of One"

campaign is not just TV commercials and radio ads. It also bring in technology things like the web-based information for today's youth.

SGM TILLEY: Sure.

SGM ELDER: Do you think that the Army needs to adopt new techniques to reach these young people at all levels, either to get them in the Army or once we get them in the Army?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. You know, I'm 52 years old. I can't identify with an 18-year-old. You know, there's different things and different ways to teach them. So the answer is yes. You have to identify in different ways to motivate people to come in the Army.

And that's just a -- I mean, really, I guess if you look at it, that's a part of transformation, you know, marketing techniques in the Army, how you bring people in the military. So I think it is part of that.

SGM ELDER: Do you see that as a challenge for today's leaders, keeping up with those type of changes, particularly when we're talking about, you know, the senior NCOs, the first sergeants, the sergeants first class dealing with the 18-year-olds and that generation gap that's always there? Is it any different?

SGM TILLEY: Oh, sure there is. But I think the key is, one, is you got to get out and talk to people. I think there is a gap there. You know, I can't identify with an 18-year-

old about what issues and what he thinks is cool or nice or whatever. I'm not even sure what the slang is now.

And so the only way to figure that out is to get down with him and sort of figure out what he's doing, or let him understand what I'm doing, one or the other. And that goes back with basic counseling and developmental counseling for soldiers.

So I think it is a -- you know, the older you get, the harder it is to identify. I mean, let's -- I mean, I'm always asking folks. And faddish to me and faddish maybe to an 18-year-old is two different things, you know. Probably faddish to an 18-year-old is an earring in his forehead or something like that. I don't know.

But, you know, I just can't identify with it. So I think, again, the key to success is just counseling.

SGM ELDER: Since our last talk, Sergeant Major, you've had a MACOM sergeants major conference, the first when you brought in all the two-star sergeants major and above. Can you --

SGM TILLEY: Was that at Fort Bliss?

SGM ELDER: Yes, at Fort Bliss.

SGM TILLEY: That was one-star and above.

SGM ELDER: One-star and above. All the --

SGM TILLEY: Guard, reserve, and active duty.

SGM ELDER: Can you talk about some of the things that you hope to gain out of that, and if there's been any success from that meeting?

SGM TILLEY: Well, I think what happens is you strengthen the relationship between guard and active duty. We're getting more people to cross-talk about issues. You can sort things out right down in that conference very quickly. There was about 250 people, or something like that.

The Secretary of the Army talked to us and the Chief of Staff of the Army and the DSLOG and the DSPR and the DSOPS. I mean, you had the key leadership in the Army coming down to talk to us. And so I thought it was very beneficial.

SGM ELDER: Was there any products or results from that meeting that came out of it?

SGM TILLEY: Sure, there was. There were some issues about conditional promotions. We wrote a few submissions about uniforms. We made some regulation changes and stuff like that. I can't remember what all the change was. But the answer is yes.

The one thing that came out of that was a closer bonding of senior noncommissioned officers in the Army, guard, reserve, or active. You know, I think that's one of the good things. And that was our first one; we'll find out what comes out of this one here this January.

SGM ELDER: Is this something that you continue to --

SGM TILLEY: Annual event.

SGM ELDER: Annual event?

SGM TILLEY: Every January we're doing to do the same thing, same location.

SGM ELDER: Is it going to be in conjunction with any other conferences or is this just a stand-alone event?

SGM TILLEY: This is a stand-alone conference. I don't think we could do it in conjunction with anything else.

SGM ELDER: Another event that you brought, another first that you brought in, was the first sergeants type of training at the Pentagon. Can you talk about your perception of the need for that type of training for the enlisted soldier?

SGM TILLEY: Well, the fact of the matter is it wasn't doing anything and it's a requirement for everybody in the Army. Okay? And other thing is that when you get into a higher headquarters like the Pentagon or something like that, we forget about the basic fundamentals of being a soldier.

And so it's nothing more than two hours a month, you know. I wish it would be two hours every other week or something like that. But it's part of the developmental process of soldiers within the Army.

Because, you know, a lot of those guys and gals come out of the Pentagon and go

to another assignment, you know. So let's let them go back to their assignment at least knowing what's going on.

SGM ELDER: With one year in the job now, are there any things that were hard lessons for you to learn that you wish in hindsight you'd have known up front?

SGM TILLEY: You know, no. I'll tell you the truth, I don't think so. I think that -- I'm sure there's some lessons. I mean, I've learned lessons every day of my life.

I think that -- I don't think there's anything I really was very surprised about. I think everything sort of -- I mean, there's some things that, you know, we probably didn't do well and some of the things I did okay.

But I think for the most part everything is okay. You know, there wasn't anything big. The other thing is that, you know, Sergeant Major Hall never was far away; I could always call him and ask him.

SGM ELDER: Do you keep a relationship with any of the other former Sergeants Major of the Army?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I've tried to keep a relationship with all of them. And, you know, understand that there's things that I've got to do every day. But I talk to them and I'll send them a letter about every 90 days, you know, thanking them for what they're doing, try to give them a little update, and stuff like that.

We have another conference coming in September with just the SMAs down at the

academy. They'll go down (inaudible). You might want to come down to that this year.

We're going to line up all the previous Sergeants Major of the Army to have a panel. The students will ask them questions. They'll go to a classroom, okay, and then we'll have a separate session in the back with the SMAs and ourselves about issues concerning them.

SGM ELDER: That would be great. You know, there's not one picture that we know of yet that has all 12 former and current Sergeants Major of the Army. There's nine is the highest we've gotten to right now at any one time.

That would be a great addition for the book if that could be pulled off. But it's always timing, you know. Not everybody is available to go and, you know, each of them are getting along in their years. And this would be a great opportunity to see all 12 of them come together.

SGM TILLEY: I think we'll have all of them but one.

SGM ELDER: You think so?

SGM TILLEY: Yes. I think -- McKinney will come, yes. So you'll have all but one for sure, and you may get some (inaudible). Is nine the most they've ever had?

SGM ELDER: Yes. Nine is the most that we've had in one picture. I think it was seven when Sergeant Major Kidd was the Sergeant Major of the Army, and he was -- nine, ten, eleven --

SGM TILLEY: Ten? No, McKinney was ten.

SGM ELDER: Yes. Kidd was nine. So I think seven is the highest they had it up to. But then, of course, every year -- you know, every time we get a new Sergeant Major of the Army, then the numbers go up and getting everybody together -- if we don't get them together soon, you know, some of them are getting pretty old and we're going to lose out on the chance.

But now would be a great time. I mean, if they come down, I'll make sure I talk with the right folks, and if I'm available, too, I would definitely come down.

You had mentioned the sergeant majors -- the former sergeant majors coming down for the conference. Were they able to -- did any of them attend your MACOM sergeant major conference?

SGM TILLEY: No.

SGM ELDER: None of them did?

SGM TILLEY: I think you need to be careful, though. One is that there's times where they ought to be there and then there's times where they ought to let us grow. Okay? So I think you have to (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Right. We had talked about any things in hindsight you may have done differently. Can you talk about some of the positive and rewarding aspects that you had of your job?

SGM TILLEY: Well, I think one is having that Sergeant Major of the Army conference now. I think that's pretty positive. I think working on NCOAS is pretty positive. You know, there's a lot of just little things, and I think having a soldier and NCO of the year has been pretty positive, will be positive when we get it kicked off.

I think that getting through the beret, I think, no matter what all the issues were, I think that was very positive (inaudible), and I'm sure proud of that. But those are probably just little small advances.

SGM ELDER: How about personally rewarding opportunities?

SGM TILLEY: Riding on Air Force One. I thought that was pretty neat. You know, I just enjoy just meeting people and talking to them. I think that's probably -- when I come out of the job, one of the disadvantages is that you don't want me to do those things any more. So I think that's probably rewarding.

SGM ELDER: Is the time -- do you find the time is passing by quickly, and are you able to enjoy those opportunities like riding on Air Force One as they come along?

SGM TILLEY: You know, I'll tell you the truth, the time did -- I mean, the first year was like (snapping fingers) that. And so yes, it's moving real fast.

But you know something? That's okay. I mean, that's okay with me. I mean, after I finish this assignment, I'll have over 35 years in the Army, you know. I did my part. So I can't (inaudible). You know, that's okay. I need to get out of here (inaudible).

SGM ELDER: Sergeant Major, I think I have used up my time for today. I'm going to shut this thing off.

(The interview was concluded.)

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