

FIRST DRAFT

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY
LEON L. VAN AUTREVE (USA-RET)**

**SERGEANTS MAJOR OF THE ARMY
HISTORY PROJECT**

**Center of Military History, United States Army
and the
United States Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer**

**Prepared by: SGM Erwin H. Koehler (U.S. Army, Retired)
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US ARMY MUSEUM OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER

SERGEANTS MAJOR OF THE ARMY BOOK PROJECT

INTERVIEWER: SGM ERWIN H. KOEHLER (U.S. ARMY - RETIRED)

INTERVIEWEE: SMA LEON L. VAN AUTREVE (U.S. ARMY - RETIRED)

Interviewer: Today is February 3, 1994, I'm in the home of Sergeant Major Leon L. Van Autreve, Sergeant Major of the Army, retired. I'm in San Antonio, Texas. Sergeant Major, first of all, what is your date of birth and where were you born?

SMA Van Autreve: I was born in Eekloo, Belgium, on January 29, 1920. So, arithmetically, that adds up to just having my seventy-fourth birthday.

Interviewer: You just turned seventy-four, all right. When did your parents immigrate to the United States?

SMA Van Autreve: I was just a very, very young boy when we came over. I don't even remember anything about the passage.

Interviewer: Do you remember why your parents made the decision to move to the United States?

SMA Van Autreve: Well yes. My father had a brother who was

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living in Sidney, Montana. He urged mom and dad to come over because he felt that the opportunities there were good.

Interviewer: So they originally settled in Montana, right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. That was for a very brief period of time. Then we moved from there to Delphus, Ohio.

Interviewer: When they were in Montana, did you live in a rural type environment?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you remember where your father was born, there in Belgium?

SMA Van Autreve: My father was not born in Belgium. He was born in Creilloise, France, of Belgium parents.

Interviewer: What about your mother?

SMA Van Autreve: My mother was born in Eekloo, Belgium.

Interviewer: Tell me about your parents; their occupation, their physical characteristics, family background, etc.

SMA Van Autreve: My father, and I say this very proudly, my dad was the second highest decorated individual soldier in World War I. My mother was a housekeeper. She had never worked in any other capacity other than taking care of the house. Then when we came to the United States, of course, mom worked for other people to enhance the income situation. It's rather difficult for someone who's an immigrant to do very well.

Interviewer: So she worked as a housekeeper when she first came over.

SMA Van Autreve: Well when she first came to the United States, but not in Montana because we were there for such a short period of time, but when we came to Delphus, Ohio. She took in laundry, did washing and ironing for other people. She scrubbed floors and cleaned houses. All during this time my dad is working in a can factory. I was not very good for him because he had been gassed during World War I and

it enhanced the emphysema problem. But he was learning English and was studying to be an electrician. That's what he was ultimately involved in, being an electrician.

Interviewer: Which army did your father serve with in World War I?

SMA Van Autreve: The Belgium Army.

Interviewer: How long did he work in the can factory?

SMA Van Autreve: He worked in the can factory for about four or five years before he finally got himself education to the point about electricity that he could work independently as an electrician. Then things began to look a little better for us, economically.

Interviewer: Tell me some of your early recollections of your parents during the years when you were a pre-schooler; the things you can remember most about them.

SMA Van Autreve: I guess this is true of a lot of people. They were very honest; honest to the intent degree. They were very hard working and very, very patriotic. My mother and father really appreciated the fact that America gave them an opportunity to better themselves.

Interviewer: I think in one of your previous interviews that I read, you said they always flew the American Flag.

SMA Van Autreve: My mother went to Mrs. Wagner, who lived above us in the first house that we lived in--in Delphus--and asked her about the American Flag. She had to go to someone else, because not too many people in America know how to properly fly the American Flag; but she did get the information. I want to tell you that the American Flag graced the front of our home very, very proudly. It was correctly flown on those days when it should be flown. My dad used to cry when he talked about America and the fact that we were doing as well as we were doing. Ultimately we owned our own home, and that was just great.

Interviewer: Since discipline is extremely important in raising a child, what were some of the things that your parents forbade you to do?

What sort of punishment did you receive if you broke one of your parents' rules? Also, do you think that they were too strict or too lenient?

SMA Van Autreve: We knew that there was no compromise. If dad told us what to do, that that we were to do it. You see, it's an altogether different environment that we've got today. If I was disciplined in the school, I hoped that my teacher would not tell my father, because I was going to get another one when I got home. Today, if a teacher does anything to a child, the odds are that when the child arrives home and tells the parents, the parents takes umbrage with the teacher. It was not our family alone. That was the general perception throughout our community. Kids came home, they went to work and did things they had to do around the house. My job was to, and you most probably don't know what I'm talking about, but I had to bring in the corn cobs that we got from the grainery. I had to bring in the coal and prepare everything for the next morning. I knew that job was there and I had to do it.

Interviewer: How do you think the standards of conduct that your parents required of you, how did that help you as a young man and all the way through your adult life?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I think that as life goes on, for instance coming into the Army, it's a disciplined environment. But I think, and I'm not alone, but many others were coming into the Army in that period of 1941 and '42, that we were so accustomed to discipline that there was no necessity for punishment. In my basic training I never knew one individual that was courts martialed or that received an Article 15--in the old days I guess it was called a "104." You just didn't see that.

Interviewer: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

SMA Van Autreve: I have one of each.

Interviewer: One of each.

SMA Van Autreve: I have a brother and a sister.

Interviewer: Are they living today?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes they are.

Interviewer: Where is your brother living?

SMA Van Autreve: My brother lives in Delphus, Ohio, and my sister in Portsmouth, Ohio.

Interviewer: What does you brother do now?

SMA Van Autreve: He owns a very large rental unit. He has a moving and storage company and he is a landlord of homes. He's very heavy in real estate. He does very, very well.

Interviewer: What about your sister?

SMA Van Autreve: My sister's husband just passed away recently and he had been in the moving business. She's working just part-time.

Interviewer: What was the name of the elementary school that you attended and in what city or town was it located?

SMA Van Autreve: When we talk about elementary school, this is way back in the 1920's. You had eight grades of school and it was not called an elementary school. Then you had high school, which was four years of school. The sub-divisions that you have today did not happen during that period of time.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about that school.

SMA Van Autreve: It was Saint John's Catholic School. Once again, you always ask about the discipline. You accepted that way of life and when your were told to march, you marched. But if you got sick and you vomited, someone would take care of you and administer some care. There was a combination of caring and discipline. And when the nun--they used to have clappers--and when that nun's clapper sounded, you prepared to go where you were supposed to go.

Interviewer: Really, discipline is caring.

SMA Van Autreve: It is. There is a direct correlation between the two words. Absolutely.

Interviewer: In what town was your school?

SMA Van Autreve: That was in Delphus, Ohio.

Interviewer: Did you have a room for each grade?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. I'll tell you the thing that was most difficult when I went to Saint John's. I can remember vividly, to this day. The enrollment was standing outside waiting to enter the school. My mother spoke very, very, very little English and I didn't speak a whole lot. We finally ended up with a Sister Vivenzia, whose name I cannot forget because she was kind enough to come to my mother and offer her assistance. She spoke German, as did mom. That's the way I was entered in school.

Interviewer: How far was that school from your house?

SMA Van Autreve: It was a block, and I want to tell, I used to call it "The Block of Prejudice," because we had no Hispanics and we had no Blacks, we had no Jews, we had no Italians, we had no anything, but we had the Van Autreves, so I had to fight my way across that block just about every night.

Interviewer: What time did that school start in the morning?

SMA Van Autreve: We were in school at eight o'clock and we were out about three-thirty.

Interviewer: What was your favorite subject?

SMA Van Autreve: My favorite subject has been, throughout all of my life, I guess history was my favorite subject at the time. To a lesser degree, mathematics.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the Van Autreves, when they first moved to Delphus, Ohio. At that time you spoke very little English, is that correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about, what we were talking earlier about, the kids picking on you and how you had to defend yourself, just tell me about those days.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I don't think it was so much that the kids

were picking on me, because I did have some very, very good friends from first grade, on. But the bully of the school would use that as an opportunity, and Red Metzger out-weighed me about thirty-five pounds. I guess the major achievement in my very early life was the fact that finally, over a period of time that Red Metzger had beaten me into a pulp thirty of forty times, I finally reversed the tables and I managed to wale him.

Interviewer: Coming into a school where everybody is speaking English and you are now learning English, tell me about how difficult that was.

SMA Van Autreve: Have you ever been to school and you're in your first day and you've got to go to the toilet and you don't know how to ask to go?

Interviewer: It makes it rough.

SMA Van Autreve: It makes it a little rough. It makes it a little rough. And the other things that were obvious to me at a very early age, and in those days,--it's not as prevalent today--is the social status was very clearly defined. Now Jim Lang, whose parents were very, very socially prominent, could run around the classroom and make all kinds of noise and they would give him a little candy sucker in order to appease him. If I were to try that, or if Bob Kindly were to try that, we would be in the cloakroom.

Interviewer: During that time, about what time do you think you started getting fairly proficient in English; about what age?

SMA Van Autreve: I was doing very, very well at fifth grade level, with a couple of exceptions. I had so much difficulty in the words like "corncob". To me it was a "cornacob." I couldn't say "October." See, you just noticed I just... "October" was very difficult for me. Until I was a senior in high school, it was "Octaber." I just had difficulty with that.

Interviewer: It seems like you really overcame your Belgium accent

real easy.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, it was not easy. I have to attribute to a "Mrs. Justice." My mother worked for Mrs. Justice, cleaning the house, scrubbing floors, etc. Mrs. Justice was a very socially prominent woman in our hometown and she was very wealthy. She would sit with me and we would take the dictionary and go over the dictionary. She helped me immeasurably in doing a better job of speaking English. She was just a tremendous asset.

Interviewer: So Mrs. Justice was the key then.

SMA Van Autreve: She was one of the keys. Yes. When you are in a group where everyone speaks it well, and you do not, I would assume that most people would want very much to do as well, if not better.

Interviewer: What about your favorite sport? Did you play sports?

SMA Van Autreve: See, the incongruity of all of this is that very few people could afford a football; we did not have a football team. The school couldn't afford a football team. We had a patched-up basketball team. We used to play "King on the Hill," and once in a while some softball. In the evenings one kid had a football, so that gave us an opportunity and occasion. There was a big lot and we would just pass and kick and run. You know, there were no coaches for football. You just did everything happenstance. You didn't have too many opportunities to participate in sports either, because when you came home the first requirement was to do your household chores. In the Van Autreve household, we had a mandatory two-hour study period at night. Low and behold, once in a while you'd sneak a Horatio Alger book underneath your geography book, but if dad caught you, you were in trouble.

Interviewer: What about part-time jobs? Did you have a part-time job?

SMA Van Autreve: Not during the early years. People just did not hire somebody to mow the lawn. No, not until I was in high school.

Interviewer: What type of part-time job did you have in high

school?

SMA Van Autreve: I worked as a projectionist for the theater. I would go in during the noon hour, and during those days you had to run your film and put it between your fingers to catch any breaks that took place in the film. You had to repair it so when you went to work at six-thirty at night, that the film was ready to go. So I had a half-hour during the lunch period and I worked from about six-thirty until around eleven, and for that I received a magnificent sum of fifty cents.

Interviewer: Fifty cents.

Uh huh. It was a job.

Interviewer: How many years did you do that?

SMA Van Autreve: I did that through high school. I also delivered newspapers.

Interviewer: What about during the summer? When you were growing up, what did you and all your friends do for entertainment during the summer when you were not in school?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, the first thing you do in the morning is get rid of your chores. When we moved into the house--our house--there were three of us; the three kids. We had three different jobs and those took-up two or three hours. In the afternoon it was ours and we were free to do as we want; that was free time for us. We generally spent every weekday afternoon out at the pool. We had a community pool and that's where we spent afternoons.

Interviewer: Earlier, before we started this interview, you told me about being inducted into the Hall of Fame there in Delphus, Ohio. Tell me a little about that.

SMA Van Autreve: I'd have to get that piece of paper.

Interviewer: Let me stop the recorder while you get that.

(The Interview was briefly interrupted.)

Interviewer: We just took a short break while the Sergeant Major got a copy of the newspaper article in reference to the Hall of Fame

there in Delphus, Ohio. Tell me some of the people who were inducted with you.

SMA Van Autreve: No, it's two Delphus natives, but it's in Lima, Ohio.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay.

SMA Van Autreve: I don't have my glasses here, but we've got two Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. We've got Hugh Downs.

Interviewer: Hugh Downs is from news...

SMA Van Autreve: Radio and television.

Interviewer: Yeah.

SMA Van Autreve: He's from Lima, Ohio. There's Phyllis Diller. We've got a Nobel Prize winner. I think it's great that we had an opportunity, that the community would recognize my service as Sergeant Major of the Army. I'm very proud of that.

Interviewer: There's no reason why you shouldn't be proud. Once again, that's kind of a small town, isn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Delphus is a small town. There were only two people out of that group. A Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, and myself.

Interviewer: When I was talking with Sergeant Major Connelly, he said that in his small town of Monticello, Georgia, to this day they don't know what the heck the Sergeant Major of the Army is, because being a small town--in most cases--they're not in tuned to what is going on outside that town. He said, "Even half of my friends don't know what I was doing."

SMA Van Autreve: Well the nice thing about Delphus, when I was anointed as the Sergeant Major of the Army, they had a "Leon Van Autreve Day." We had the privilege of going down and spending the day with the community and the people in the community. They know more about the Sergeant Major of the Army than, perhaps, Monticello.

Interviewer: One of the nice things about it is they realize the

importance of a position like that, and like you said, they probably know more about the Sergeant Major of the Army than most places. I think there is an advantage of coming from a small town too, isn't there?

SMA Van Autreve: It's a very patriotic town. Delphus, Ohio is very, very, very, very supportive of the military.

Interviewer: Where is Delphus located?

SMA Van Autreve: It's located, and I'll give you two fairly decent size cities. Lima is in the proximity of Delphus and also Fort Wayne, Indiana. It's in the northwestern part of the state.

Interviewer: When you were going through high school, what were your favorite subjects at that time? Also, tell me a little bit about the school day; your normal routine, etc.

SMA Van Autreve: Well once again, you know, we had physical training. Physical training involved going out to this large field and those people... I was very much against this and this gave me an acute perception on individual recognition, perception, and caring. When we went out, those people who were the "super jocks" played softball. Everybody else just stood around. They did not utilize all of the students in varying types of physical capability. If you're not a very good softball player, perhaps you're a good volleyball player, or any one of a number of things. They did not attempt to do that and I became attuned to the worth of that in the Army when we realized that, at the old KD (known distance) ranges,

Interviewer: Uh huh

SMA Van Autreve: we let everybody else sit and not do anything. So that helped immeasurably to me, because we started a student training program with the entire group of people out there. That was very obvious to me as a kid, that there was a discrimination against anyone who was not a "super jock," because you only had two teams and you had about a hundred kids out there. The other kids didn't get to do anything.

Interviewer: The became the spectators then.

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SMA Van Autreve: Now in as much as my favorite subject, its history. About five days ago I talked to Mabel Rogers, who was my history teacher. She's ninety-six years old, in a nursing home. I get very emotional about this, because she took this kid--little Leon Van Autreve--and guided him, and supported him, and created in him a tremendous interest in history. She felt that I had some worth in life, that I was going to get somewhere, and she spent a tremendous amount of time with me to help me want additional education. I just love her dearly and I get very emotional because she, more than any other person I've ever met, gave so much of herself to make sure that Van Autreve got somewhere. I communicate with her. When I go to Delphus I spend time with her. I call her once or twice a year. We correspond by letter. Our only problem is that she is a "dyed in the wool Democrat," but other than that I just love her.

Interviewer: Do you agree that a person that has an appreciation for history possibly goes about the way he does things later on in his life differently, that he thinks and acts different than a person who never cared about history, because history kind of influences a lot in your life?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, history is prologue. I firmly believe that when most of our teachers in history do not... You know, I'm a history major: Phi Alpha Theta. Toledo University. I had a wonderful teacher there who had been in the military. But now, he taught history as being a vital part of America. It was not assimilating dates. You know, you've got to remember what happened in 1066, the Battle of Hastings, and that sort of thing. He talked about the Battle of Hustings and the impact that it had. He made history a course that was alive. I just love it. I just love it. It caused me to make history my major. We don't do that very well in some of our schools. The kid faces history as, "Well, here's a collections of dates that I've got to remember in order to pass my examination."

Interviewer: I think it's true that it's not important what dates President Lincoln was President, but what occurred while he was President.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. What caused it? What was the aftermath? That absolutely right.

Interviewer: I think a lot of our teachers destroy the desire to learn history because they want you to learn a laundry list of dates, rather than who was there and what happened during that time.

SMA Van Autreve: We had an opportunity at the University of Toledo. Our instructor took those who had the five highest in grades, and took them over to Bowling Green University. We were privileged to listen to Cayton, who was a historian, primarily about the Civil War. He made history just live. You could feel the deformation of the Confederate soldiers up on Lookout Mountain who were eating acorns and that sort of thing, and the results and effects of the Civil War. He gave it life.

Interviewer: You mentioned a few of your friends. We had Bob Kindly and Jim Lang. Who were some of your other real close friends when you were in high school?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, there was Jim Hutts, who was our neighbor. We got along very, very well. As I said to you before, you didn't have the social interaction after school in those days. Jim Lang has passed away. Jim Hutts, I haven't seen for a couple of years. Bob Kindly and I get together quite often. I saw Bob last year. He's coming through San Antonio here very shortly. He's been my friend since grade one.

Interviewer: Did you attend a college or university prior to entering the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Not prior to entering the Army. I went on the GI Bill in the post-World War II.

Interviewer: A little later on we'll talk about your college. You served in the Ohio National Guard, correct?

SMA Van Autreve: I did. In 1938, '39, and '40.

Interviewer: What motivated you to join the Guard?

SMA Van Autreve: I'm going to be very candid with you and tell you it was an economic consideration; you were paid. That was the ultimate reason that four or five of us from Delphus joined the Guard over in Spencerville, Ohio.

Interviewer: That's probably why a majority of the people joined the Guard back in those days, wasn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. It was an extra source of income. Dollars were really hard to come by. You know, when I got out of high school I worked for an optometrist. I worked for Dr. J.K. Miller. I worked five and a half days a week, and I made seven dollars a week. So an extra buck or two was a lot of money.

Interviewer: How old were you when you joined the Guard?

SMA Van Autreve: Let's see. I graduated when I was seventeen and I would have been in the latter part of seventeen, or eighteen.

Interviewer: What unit were you assigned to, and where was it located?

SMA Van Autreve: It was the 148th Infantry, Headquarters Company, in Spencerville, Ohio. I spell. S-P-E-N-C-E-R-V-I-L-L-E.

Interviewer: Do you remember what platoon or squad you were assigned to at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I was in headquarters of the Headquarters Company. I was able to recognize a typewriter and as a consequence, I became a clerk.

Interviewer: So you was highly qualified because you could recognize a typewriter.

SMA Van Autreve: What a misnomer.

Interviewer: You joined, of course, as a private. What rank were you when your unit was activated or when you came on active duty?

SMA Van Autreve: I left them in 1940. I was discharged because I had accepted a job in New York with the Long Island Railroad. I don't

remember what rank I was when I was discharged, quite frankly, because I don't remember anybody getting promoted. I'm serious.

Interviewer: Back in those days, once you became an NCO you had to wait until somebody died.

SMA Van Autreve: Died. Absolutely. Died or politically disappointed someone.

Interviewer: So you said, at that time, when you were in the Guard you worked in headquarters. Did you spend all of your time in headquarters?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, and we did some close order drill. But I just want to tell you that the transition from those days, when I was first in the Guard, and today, the difference is absolutely worlds apart. It's worlds apart. And you really can't blame them. You know, you come in for two hours. It's all disengaged because the next time you come back, you almost have to relearned what you had been taught previously. We didn't have any educational systems that they could go to, to further enhance their capability.

Interviewer: At that time it was more like the old militia system, really. I wasn't the Guard as we see it today.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, by no means, no. By no means, no. Gee, we went to two places. We went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. I, quite frankly, can not remember anything we did that was truly outstanding. The one thing I do remember though, is that when we came in... We had been out in the field and it had rained. That's cranberry country out there; sandy marsh. We were dirty and bedraggled. They had a band to meet us when we came in. I will never forget the impact that band had on us, because everybody started to straighten up. Shoulders back and you feel very, very good about the fact that you've done something. I've always supported bands in the military, because I know what it did to me as a young kid when we came in out of the field at Fort McCoy. The second one was at Camp Perry, Ohio. It was not too bad there because the NRA

(National Rifle Association) had the area and we had some fairly decent buildings to eat in, and we had these built-up canvas things, you know, the boards come up four or five feet on the sides and then you have a canvas top. But, there again, we spent time on the KD (known distance) range and then we would go out on simulated maneuvers. We had a 30 caliber machine gun--the old water-cooled type--mounted on bicycle wheels. That's what I did. For three days out in the field, I, and one other fellow, we would take turns pulling that 30 caliber. I don't know what it was for. I never fired it, but we hauled it around. There just was not the support from the United States Army for the National Guard, in those days. You know, you all had to sort of self-learn everything. You just didn't have the imparities and the educational system. We could go on and on about the NCOES (Noncommissioned Officer Education System) contributions. That was the road map for the Noncommissioned Officers Corps. They didn't have that sort of thing. We can't demean them, because the capability and the influence and the support was not there

Interviewer: How often did you meet, a month, when you were in the Guard?

SMA Van Autreve: When I was in the Guard in was a weekly meeting.

Interviewer: What did you normally do during that drill session?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, the first thing you do is kick-off at, for instance, seven o'clock. By the time everybody gets started in the thing, it's seven fifteen or seven twenty. The last twenty minutes you're looking forward to getting out of the place. As I said, it's disconnected training. Here you are, for two hours, and you get about an hour and fifteen minutes of training, whether it be close order drill or whatever. Then the next week, you've got to spend fifteen or twenty minutes rehearsing what you had done the previous week.

Interviewer: I think the Army finally going to the MUTA 4 (four Multiple Unit Training Assemblies) where you're working all day Saturday

and Sunday...

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Oh yes. Absolutely.

Interviewer: It gives you a chance to accomplish something. Tell me about the NCO leadership in the Guard. How do you think it was?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, I tried to assess that. That question has been asked of me before. My platoon sergeant was really a nice guy; a gem. But he didn't teach me a damn thing. There was too much congeniality. There was very, very, very little discipline.

Interviewer: What is the old saying? Familiarity breeds contempt.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, this guy was such a nice guy, and I'm only with him two weeks. Of course, we were preconditioned, from the standpoint of discipline, so he did not have to make any extra endeavor in order to get us to do something. We were conditioned to that sort of thing. When somebody tells you to do something, you do it. So he did not have the problems. He didn't have the problems with drinking. He didn't have the problems with dope. He didn't have the problems with the recalcitrant individual who did not want to perform.

Interviewer: What about the morale in the unit?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, since we didn't do a whole lot, it was pretty nice, you know, when you're up there on Lake Erie and you've got a place to go swimming. You finish your training, maybe two o'clock in the afternoon, and that's a pretty nice place to go; and you got paid.

Interviewer: Did you volunteer for induction into the military, or were you drafted?

SMA Van Autreve: I was drafted into the regular Army.

Interviewer: Were you married at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: No, I was not.

Interviewer: Where were you employed when you were drafted?

SMA Van Autreve: I was working, at that time, with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. I had gone to work, initially, with the Long Island Railroad. Then, wanting to be near my home, I worked for the Baltimore

and Ohio Railroad. I was working out of Lima, Ohio.

Interviewer: When were you inducted?

SMA Van Autreve: October 9, 1941.

Interviewer: What was your reaction when you received your induction notice?

SMA Van Autreve: I was very, very much concerned because I was going to have to leave my girlfriend. You know, I had absolutely no idea what induction meant, or what we were going to undergo, the only thing that was close to me was the fact I had a girlfriend, and gee, I was going to have to leave.

Interviewer: You was going to have to leave your girlfriend

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah, but there was no remorse on my part. And this is true. This is God's truth. In fact, as I told you, Delphus is a very patriotic community, and when you received your draft notice, people would clap you on the back and say, "Hey, man, that's alright."

Interviewer: When you were inducted, did you have a choice of service or were you automatically inducted into the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: I was inducted into the Army.

Interviewer: For what was the term of your service?

SMA Van Autreve: I think it was indefinite. But you see, this was prior to Pearl Harbor and I, quite frankly, can't tell you; I don't remember. You know, it's hard for people to understand that you're in that environment--in those days--the length of service didn't mean too much to you; it was immaterial. Why should I... To me, at that time, why should I remember how long I'm going to be here, because when Pearl Harbor happened, I was at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. We thought that was only going to last three or four weeks. You know, "We're going to take Japan and we're going to wipe them off the face of the map," never realizing that things were going to be a little different.

Interviewer: At what military installation did you enter the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: We went down to Toledo, Ohio for our physical and

then went to Fort Benjamin Harrison. We were there about three or four weeks before we received our assignments.

Interviewer: So actually, that was a reception station for you.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you do while you were waiting at the reception station?

SMA Van Autreve: The same old thing. You know, you pull KP (kitchen police) one day, you're out policing the area, and doing these nondescript jobs.

Interviewer: Let me ask you about your basic training. Where did you take your basic training?

SMA Van Autreve: Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Interviewer: What time of the year did you take your training?

SMA Van Autreve: It was in November and December.

Interviewer: Tell me about the weather during that time.

SMA Van Autreve: It was pretty miserable. Weather was not a determining factor. I don't know quite how to say this, because if it was cold we accepted it's cold. You didn't commiserate and bitch and gripe, and all that sort of thing. You just did what you had to do.

Interviewer: Coming from Ohio, there's wasn't too much difference.

SMA Van Autreve: No, there wasn't too much difference.

Interviewer: How long was your basic training?

SMA Van Autreve: Eight weeks.

Interviewer: When you were drafted, I think at that time, you had a serial number and then some people had a company number, or something like that.

SMA Van Autreve: 3-5-0-4-0-1-6-5

Interviewer: When you were inducted, at that time, they didn't have the "US" in front of it, did they?

SMA Van Autreve: No, they didn't. No. 3-5-0-4-0-1-6-5.

Interviewer: Later on they added the "US" if you were inducted and

the "RA" if you enlisted.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah.

Interviewer: What were the billets like that you lived in during basic training?

SMA Van Autreve: They were decent. They were the new buildings, those which you now see being condemned and torn down. They were favorable. The thing about it though, that I might say--it seems inconsequential--but we had rifle racks in the barracks. In the evening we could take our rifle out and practice, and that was not to practice to shoot somebody.

Interviewer: Yeah

SMA Van Autreve: Or kill some kid, or do any one of a number of things. We didn't have to put three padlocks on the arms room. We were able to do that.

Interviewer: What about the food?

SMA Van Autreve: The food was "old country style." You know, and those again were the days when we had the long plank tables. You had the mashed potatoes and it was a mashed potatoes and meat affair; very seldom a desert. You were training so hard that whatever you had was great. And the other thing is, the rule "you don't shortstop." That's the only time I saw any infraction of discipline and I saw fighting, was when someone try to shortstop the "pass the potatoes."

Interviewer: You keep the potatoes moving, right?

SMA Van Autreve: That's right.

Interviewer: Did you eat family style?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, we'd have eight, ten or twelve people around the table. You never knew who you were going to be sitting beside. You just rushed to grab a seat, because you didn't have too much time to eat. The valuable thing was time to eat.

Interviewer: While you were in basic, how often did you perform KP?

SMA Van Autreve: Possibly once, because I then became a acting squad leader and that negated my having to go on KP. I think sometimes-- I'm trying to remember, in retrospect--that I sometimes think that's the reason I got to be that "acting jack" because I didn't want to pull KP.

Interviewer: That was an incentive, right? What other type details did you normally perform while in basic training?

SMA Van Autreve: Our training, we started pretty early in the morning. We were out there at six o'clock for the first formation. At five forty-five, if my memory serves me correctly, I think it was five forty-five when the bugle blew and then we had fifteen minutes to get dressed and get outside. We had the formation and then came back in to wash up and go for breakfast. It was mandated that we make retreat. Now we didn't get trucks and all that sort of thing. Our training areas were all within three, four, or five miles and we had to hike to those. Sometimes, in order to make retreat... You made retreat in starched khakis. Now here you coming running up that hill--Agony Hill--and you get in the barracks and you're all sweaty. You don't have time enough to do anything else, but you would stand retreat in those starched khakis. I might add, that's the only time of the day that I saw the first sergeant. That was the only time of the day I saw what was known as an officer. NCO's conducted ever facet of our training and they lived with us, and they ate with us, and they slept in the same billets, the whole business. I never got to see an officer except on payday; on payday I got to see an officer.

Interviewer: The NCOs lived in the cadre room at the end of the barracks.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Remember the old ones.

Interviewer: Yeah.

SMA Van Autreve: Let me tell you, it's a sad--not a sad thing--but it's odd that the one thing you wanted to do and the reason you wanted to be a sergeant, was not because of the money, it was because

you could live in a room; your own room in the barracks.

Interviewer: Have privacy.

SMA Van Autreve: That was THE thing. The only thing he had was a bed and a little old make-shift table. He didn't have a lot, but that was status. That was it.

(End Tape OH 94.2-1, Side 1)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-1, Side 2)

Interviewer: Sergeant Major, as we continue the interview, as the last tape ended we were talking about the incentive to become a sergeant because you could have your own cadre room and a little bit of privacy. Is there anything else you would like to say in that regard?

SMA Van Autreve: That was an opinion, and not just Van Autreve's; that was an opinion shared by everyone. And it's odd, that in those days the incentives to progress were not predicated on monetary value or compensation, but on those little things like that very thing I was talking about; to get into that room. Remember those days?

Interviewer: Right.

SMA Van Autreve: You know, we all valued the opportunity to be in there. And if you were an acting sergeant, you got to be in the end bed down by the room. You didn't have to clean latrines. You didn't have to go on KP. Oh, I was in "hog heaven." I'd wear that little corporal stripe down there like a wheel.

Interviewer: What about the heating in the barracks? Did you have to old "pot belly" stoves?

SMA Van Autreve: No, No. We did not. No, we had central heating. We had the furnace.

Interviewer: The coal furnace.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What part of the country did your fellow recruits come from?

SMA Van Autreve: They came from the Ohio, the Michigan, and the

Illinois area, primarily. As I said, and this is repetition of what I said previously, no disciplinary problems. No infractions. But I have to tell you that I... Of course I was there when Pearl Harbor happened, and I was on guard duty. And I and my cohort--I don't remember his name --were on guard. Do you remember how the guards used to come up, meet one another, and turnaround? This car came roaring down through the street, lights out. We had been so imbued with the possibility of Japanese intruding into the confines of Fort Belvoir, that we just started shooting. So that necessitated our appearing before the Company Commander, and then we had to go see the Battalion Commander. I want to tell you, just going to see the Company Commander in those days was something horrendous. But go see the Battalion Commander, we were absolutely terrified. We thought we were going to be lined-up against the wall and shot, because of what we had done. They really had us imbued. And it was funny. We were wearing the old World War I helmets.

Interviewer: The flat helmet.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah.

Interviewer: Who was in the car?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, they were later picked-up by the MPs (military police) and they were two cadre who had violated curfew and they were trying to sneak on post.

Interviewer: You fired live ammunition?

SMA Van Autreve: We fired at them.

Interviewer: But you didn't hit the car.

SMA Van Autreve: No. You were just terrified, see, because you are thinking, in those day and that youth, God, we believed everybody was a member of the Japanese Army.

Interviewer: That was back in the days when there was a Jap behind every bush.

SMA Van Autreve: That's exactly right, exactly right.

Interviewer: Did you feel real close with your fellow recruits?

Was there good teamwork?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. I'll tell you, the training was excellent, because it was hands-on training. Virtually everything we did was outside. You went through the theory of demolition and then you went out and you cut that piece of time fuse, you inserted it in that non-electric cap, crimped it, and put it into the dynamite. So you did everything very carefully and very well. It left a lasting impression. So we got modicum of theory and a whole lot of practical experience. It was very, very good. The only objection I had in later years was that we spent a lot of time on what was known as a "fixed bridge," which is a wooden trestle-type bridge that you put up. I never had an opportunity throughout my entire military career to construct one or see one constructed. I do, however, understand that over in the Far East they did do some of that type work. I sort of resented that during my later years, because I could never see the reason for doing that.

Interviewer: Was it an engineer oriented basic?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. It was engineer at Fort Belvoir. Yes.

Interviewer: Was that just basic or was it a combination of basic and AIT (Advance Individual Training)?

SMA Van Autreve: We had no AIT in those days. We just had the basic.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the outstanding noncommissioned officers who gave the training?

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. Of course now, the squad leader was a corporal, and he had an acting jack; I was one of those. The platoon sergeant was a sergeant. Our's was so good that he became a staff sergeant, which was almost unprecedented. But the staff sergeant that we had was from West Virginia. Forgive me for not remembering his name because I should have, because he was my role model for the remainder of my life. This guy was absolutely impeccable in dress. When we came in out of the field, if you saw him on a Saturday afternoon, if you saw him

on a Sunday, he was dressed to the intent degree. Footlocker counseling. He gave us footlocker counseling every night. Every night he was out there on that footlocker, available to us for questions or discussion. He took Bob Klein and I out to the field, because we were supposed to be fairly decent possibilities for NCOs. I had a very high pitched voice--almost feminine--as did Bob. He would get on one side of the field, I would get on the other, and the sergeant would be in the center. We had to holler commands at one another to build up that voice. He took of his time to do this sort of thing. Everyone developed a tremendous appreciation for him because he was always there. He was always there.

Interviewer: Later in the interview we normally ask the question about, what we call "the footlocker NCO." But I think this would be a good time to talk about that. Years ago, you had that "footlocker NCO" that would come into the barracks and spend time. He would come by on the weekends. He spent time in the barracks sitting and talking with the soldiers. Later on we got away from that. We got the sergeant that, at quitting time, he wanted to get in his car and go to the club, or go home, or go to his other job. Do you think we have lost a lot by not having that footlocker type NCO?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, absolutely. I was Sergeant Major of USARAL (United States Army, Alaska) and we relieved a platoon sergeant over in the 75th Rangers, and brought in another sergeant; airborne type. He was an SFC (sergeant first class). We had a lot of disciplinary problems with the rangers. I had been over to see Major Ferguson several times that we were going to have to do something. Either move them out in the jungle or do something with them, because they were so reprehensible and had provided so many problems. But this new guy came in and set up a roster. Everyone went on that roster; officers and noncommissioned officers. They wore civilian clothes and had a duty to come in from six to eight, at night, and just sit. It's like everything else. You

lose the perception that this an officer or a noncommissioned officer because he's there, and after a while you see this thing sitting there and you start conversing with him and pretty soon you're letting him know what the problems are. They found out much more about the unit. The incident rate dropped to absolute "zero," within three months after this SFC came into that outfit. He finally became the First Sergeant. It all changed in just three months, because of that "footlocker counseling" and because of the availability of personnel, during a free time, when the opportunity for someone to come up and talk to you, just one-on-one, was available. I'm not too sure we do that as well now as we're supposed to.

Interviewer: Do you think that also applies to the battalion sergeant major staying a little longer, and the first sergeant staying a little longer, so the officers might come in and ask some questions? Do you feel that sometimes our young officers are reluctant to go up and ask that first sergeant, or ask that battalion sergeant major something?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I would ask this question. I wonder how many battalion commanders have ever addressed their sergeant major because the cuffs on his trousers are in disarray, if he looks sloppily. I wonder how many uniform... Because they are just a little in awe of that sergeant major. The company commander may be in just a little awe of the first sergeant, and he sometimes is reluctant to take necessary action against the appearance of the first sergeant. Maybe that there's a possibility that he's a drinker, or any number of things. You know, counseling is moral courage. A lot of people may have physical courage, but they can't meet the demands of moral courage to call it as it is.

Interviewer: It doesn't have to be done in a disrespectful manner.

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely not. No. Absolutely not.

Interviewer: While you were there, at Fort Belvoir, you said the noncommissioned officers taught all of the subjects.

SMA Van Autreve: All the subjects.

Interviewer: The only time you saw the officers or the CO (company commander) was payday, right?

SMA Van Autreve: Payday. Of course we would see the Chaplain on occasion. We might have military law, which was a mandate, we'd see an officer there.

Interviewer: Tell me about your daily inspections.

SMA Van Autreve: Let me just tell you. Of course, we fell out, and it was dark. So sometimes, being particularly cold, you could take the old wool coat that we had--the very long wool coat--and some of the guys, you know you couldn't get them out of bed, at the last minute they'd grab their coats and put their coats on, with nothing on underneath. Well, the first sergeant was no dummy. We get out one morning and all of a sudden, two big spotlights come on and we have an inspection. "Everybody take your coat off."

Interviewer: Oh, oh.

SMA Van Autreve: So we had three guys who were in their underwear. The first sergeants got them out, and in those days, I'm telling you, you had to dig a six-by-six in the sand. You know, you scoop the sand out with a spoon. But the three of them taught us all a lesson. "Hey, wear your clothes when you get out there, because that first sergeant has been down the road."

Interviewer: It also was kind of chilly, wasn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Absolutely.

Interviewer: What about your weekly inspections?

SMA Van Autreve: Very, very difficult. Very, very hard. And this is another thing. You didn't have anybody who tried to goof-off on an inspection. Of course, I guess you find that today in your basic trainees; they do the same thing. They're trying very much to satisfy the wants of the drill sergeant. They don't get contaminated until a later assignment somewhere else. It was very, very difficult, but it was very rewarding because the outstanding person in each platoon, at

Fort Belvoir, was called out and the platoon and the first sergeant would commend him for his appearance. Those were worthwhile things in those days.

Interviewer: Those were held Saturday mornings?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have both in-ranks and barracks inspections, at the same time, or did they alternate them on Saturdays?

SMA Van Autreve: No, that was on Saturday mornings and that was both. You had the in-rank and the lay-out.

Interviewer: How often did you have dismounted drill?

SMA Van Autreve: Every day. Let me say this. I want to address that point. I have a firm conviction. Van Autreve feels very strongly about the fact that close order drill is excellent, because you take a group of people who have not been accustomed to having been told to do anything, particularly in today's environment, and all of a sudden some guy's telling them, "turn right," "turn left," "about face," and pretty soon they begin to respond, because we've set-up a Pavlovian condition of response, and your being conditioned to listen to somebody and you realize that this guy with the stripes is the person in authority. He's telling you what to do and pretty soon you become--you really do--you become conducive to that. We don't do as much close order drill in later life. At Fort Hood, Texas, about ten years ago when I was up there, the Sergeant Major of III Corps got together with his Commanding General and they instituted a course for E7s, because they found that some E7s in the main--not all, but some--could not have a platoon stand at attention and tell them to march forward and do a "right turn," "left turn," or whatever. I think it does cause a conditioned response. I firmly believe that, and it carries forward.

Interviewer: A conditioned response is critical in battle.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, that's right. You cannot contest the sergeant. We had some of that in Vietnam. You can't contest the sergeant

when he says that "This is a life or death situation." "Hey, you're telling me to go there? I don't want to go there." We had examples of that in Vietnam, and far more than anyone is willing to discuss.

Interviewer: Tell me about your physical training program.

SMA Van Autreve: There, we did not have very much of a physical training program, because we were--after we had eaten and everything--we were on the road by seven-thirty for training. You had to be there at a mandated time, even if you had to double-time all the way. And we did our five-mile hike, or ten-mile hike, or twenty-mile hike with a full field pack.

Interviewer: Did you have any chemical warfare type training at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: No.

Interviewer: Did you have weapons qualification?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, we had the old .03 Springfield. Yes we did. But there again, we spent maybe two or three days going through the BRASS; the BREATHE, RELAX, AIM, SIGHT, SQUEEZE, firing, just preparing for your firing range. You get out to the firing range and it was great for the guys on the firing line, but not for those people standing behind; I make that point. It just really got to me because you're standing there, just trying to keep warm, instead of having classes, instead of having some worthwhile training going on while the people are firing KD; we wasted all that time.

Interviewer: I think that was one of the reasons, years ago, they came up with the warm-up buildings at Grafenwohr, so if a tank unit was firing, those not firing could be in the warm-up building and receive training.

SMA Van Autreve: And that makes sense. Because you stand out there, you the frozen chosen, and you're so cold you can't do anything and you really can't teach a class in that environment without a warm-up tent. First of all, when you come off the KD you've got a nice place to

go--you don't have to live miserably--and you can get some decent instruction to make it worthwhile being in the field all day.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your training was realistic?

SMA Van Autreve: It was very good. It was excellent training.

Interviewer: How do you think that prepared you when you went overseas, in World War II?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I would like to go into that a little bit later, because I was in other areas that sort of caused degradation of what I had been taught at Belvoir.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me some of the humorous things that happened while you were there in basic training.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I think that was the most humorous. The other was, we had four or five people who, for some minor indiscretion, had to clean all of the cigarette butts and all that sort of thing, out from underneath the buildings. Now the buildings were raised on posts, about four or five feet above the ground. They got in there and this one kid had to take the cigarette butts and bring them out and put them in the garbage can. So this one kid, he just dug a little hole and he put the cigarette butts in the hole. Standing in back of him was the first sergeant. He had to take ten cigarette and dig ten six-by-sixes and put the cigarettes in them. You know, that's just too damn demanding, but the guy was really a "pain" anyway, so nobody had any displeasure seeing him punished.

Interviewer: According to my research, after you completed your basic training, you were assigned directly to a unit. You didn't have AIT, correct?

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. No AIT.

Interviewer: Before I start asking you about your training and your units, were you assigned primarily to the combat arms, combat support, or combat service support, during your military career?

SMA Van Autreve: I was a combat engineer.

Interviewer: So you spend your entire military career in the combat engineers.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) did you hold?

SMA Van Autreve: I think it was a twelve bravo (12B). Yes.

Interviewer: Did you attend an NCO academy?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Where was it located?

SMA Van Autreve: The academy that I attended was when I was with the 54th Engineers, and it was in Munich, Germany; it was a constabulary academy.

Interviewer: That was before it became the Seventy Army and moved down to Bad Tolz.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What year did you attend that academy?

SMA Van Autreve: I attended that just after I reported in. In 1948, of course, I came back in the Army. I was at Fort Knox, Kentucky for a brief period of time. Let me just say, that was the period of time we had a lot of officers that chose to become enlisted men, and it stagnated up the promotion capability on the part of the enlisted men. Some officers can't be noncommissioned officers, and some can do very well. But it really destroyed the faith of the NCO Corps and the possibility of getting a promotion. In fact, one of the things that really got to me was, we were ordered out to police this parade ground. It's raining like mad. There's about two inches of water. And we're out there to pickup cigarette butts. I swore to myself that if I ever did anything like that, somebody ought to hit me with a ball bat. I left there and went over to the 185th Engineers. That was a pretty horrible situation in those days, because we didn't have too many personnel. It was a good thing that Cuba did not decide to invade the

United States of America, because we were just absolutely and totally unprepared for anything. God, we had a difficult time training--any engineer training--because we did not have enough people within the company. We spent most of the time in the company scrubbing floors and washing windows. But we did form a unit and I was the senior NCO for it. We trained seriously for about three months to get ready to go to West Point and be a bridge demonstration team on the M426 and the M38 floating bridge.

Interviewer: While you were down at the constabulary NCO academy, in Munich, what unit did you say you were assigned to then?

SMA Van Autreve: I was assigned to Company A, 54th Engineers. And I might say that, of course, the old academies were a good idea for their time, but you spent too much of your time making your bed so that you could bounce a fifty cent piece; that was the ultimate criteria. You spent so much time washing the latrine and the floors, and all that sort of thing. But it was a pretty diversified program. I guess we had about two hundred people attending from all types of units. The thing that was most rewarding for me was that I became the "number one graduate." There was a Brigadier General Clark there, who was the Commandant.

Interviewer: Bruce C. Clark

SMA Van Autreve: Yep. My reward for having been the number one graduate was a twenty-five dollar savings bond. But many years later, when I was at Fort Knox, Kentucky, there was a consideration for two E8s for Fort Knox, Kentucky. I got a personal letter from Clark and he stated, "I see you were a number one graduate in my constab." He said, "You will be the E8." So I tell these students, "Do your best, because you never know what the end result is going to be." There's a payoff day.

Interviewer: What rank were you then?

SMA Van Autreve: Staff sergeant. But you see, people in those

days had a reluctance to go to school because your future was jeopardized if you took disciplinary action against an individual or if he failed the course, so nobody wanted to go. The only way I got to go, I just arrived, and Marsh was the First Sergeant. He was screaming because nobody would go, and I volunteered. My baggage hadn't arrived. I went to the Class X (unserviceable) clothing down in the supply room. I had to put brown shoe polish on the Ike Jacket, because it was so frayed. But I enjoyed it. It really paid-off for me; it really paid-off. The amazing thing about all of this was that--first of all--nobody wanted to go; number one. And number two, when you did graduate, you didn't see any of the senior NCOs -- none of them from any of the companies -- that had a representative attending that school, being in attendance. That really gives me heartburn when you have some young man graduating from BNCOC (Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course) or ANCOC (Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course) you should be there to indicate to him that you appreciate what he's going through and make him feel that he's a part of the company or a part of the battalion. We do very poorly in attending graduations of our very fine young soldiers.

Interviewer: I came in the Army in 1958, and during many of the first years, an NCO academy or a school allocation was normally given to a person that they could do without and to get him the heck out of the unit for a while.

SMA Van Autreve: Excellent point! Excellent point! And the bad part about all this is because we have an upcoming inspection, so we do not allow the supply sergeant to go. We do not allow our key personnel to go, and as a result, we send in a substitute who is much inferior from the standpoint of soldier capabilities. Then this guy gets the additional points and is promoted ahead of this really outstanding young kid. He's deprived of an opportunity because he is not permitted to go to school. Now we don't do that with the officers. We don't do that with them. And I still think, to this day, some of that is being

done. I believe that.

Interviewer: I think it's done a little less than it was then, because now you have to make those certain gates for promotion.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: I think we've finally gotten wise in that area.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, and I think these young soldiers are a lot smarter than I was when I was growing up. They want to get promoted and realize "Hey, this is one of those things that goes into that whole promotion."

Interviewer: Did you notice, when you were in the NCO academy, that you had a lot of soldiers that shouldn't have been there?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, absolutely.

Interviewer: They fell in that category we were talking about.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. My supply sergeant was just absolutely a brilliant young man. The company commander and I used to fight about that all the time. "Mac has to go to the academy. I looks good on his record." When Mac's turn was up, he got out of the Army; he left the Army. He was just a definite asset to our Army; we should have retained him. We needed to send him to school.

Interviewer: What did you find most challenging about the NCO academy?

SMA Van Autreve: The thing I found most challenging was when we... You know, Bruce Clark, of course, had been a cavalry guy and we spent a lot of time on cavalry and on things that had to do with the cavalry; their formations and equipment. Here I'm an engineer and I've not been exposed to that. I'm not that versatile, so I found a little difficulty when we went into these war situations and I had to take the place of an S3 or an operations officer, or something; that was a little difficult.

Interviewer: What other type of military schooling did you attend?

SMA Van Autreve: I did the 059 course. It was a four and a half

month course at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I did a combat engineer course at Murnau, Germany. I did a surveying course at Murnau, Germany. I was pretty well schooled from the standpoint of a combat engineer; the 059.

Interviewer: Did you go to any special Army training, such as airborne, ranger, etc.?

SMA Van Autreve: Not until I was fifty-two years old.

Interviewer: At the age of fifty-two, what course did you go to?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, all of the time I was in Vietnam, I'm sitting right behind the General--right in the doorway--and I kept looking out and I kept saying to myself, "I wonder what it would be like to jump." You know, to be airborne. So we got to Alaska and we had the 75th Rangers. We had our own training site. I went to see General Hollingsworth and I said, "General, I would like to jump out of an airplane." After a long diatribe about my stupidity, he finally acquiesced and said, "Go ahead." So I put myself on orders and I went over. And I want to tell you, I was in pretty good shape, but at fifty two to keep up with these young kids is tough. I would tell them all day long how easy it was and what a snap it was. I'd get home and Rita had to rub me down. I was black and blue. The 34-foot tower assaulted my virility. They would red flag me all the time. I would go off that 34-foot tower and I'd look up, and sure as hell, there was a red flag.

Interviewer: Unsatisfactory.

SMA Van Autreve: It was just to keep me running back and forth. When I finally stood up with the other group and received my "wings," my parachute badge. I told them, "Let me tell you something, I am once again the Sergeant Major of USARAL, and don't, don't, don't, don't ever try to inflict any injury or punishment to me again." Oh, they worked me over. But they are great kids. I'll tell you, they really are wonderful.

Interviewer: How did you like your first jump?

SMA Van Autreve: I found it exhilarating. My third jump I had a

little problem because my one leg went through the ice and I torqued my leg pretty bad. So they took me to the doctor and they got an Ace bandage and covered my leg. They had to carry me out to the jeep, carry me into the plane, push me out the door, because I had to make my five. I was going to make my five if I had to die.

Interviewer: So that was when you were Sergeant Major of U.S. Army, Alaska?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Now let's talking about your units of assignment. We've talked about training. Now I'd like to discuss actual units of assignment. The first one that you were assigned to after you completed your training at Fort Belvior, where was that unit located?

SMA Van Autreve: I was temporarily at Fort Knox pending assignment. Then I went to the 185th Engineers.

Interviewer: Where was the 185th Engineers? Was that at Fort Knox?

SMA Van Autreve: No, that was at Fort Campbell?

Interviewer: Didn't you also get some extra training at Fort Bragg?

SMA Van Autreve: Well yes. Bragg was before we went overseas.

Interviewer: When you joined your first unit.

SMA Van Autreve: We're talking about the 15th Engineers in January 1942, when I left Fort Belvoir and went down to Fort Bragg.

Interviewer: Right.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah, okay. Fort Bragg.

Interviewer: That was your first TO&E unit of assignment.

SMA Van Autreve: You're absolutely right.

Interviewer: Then down there, you got your additional training before you went overseas.

SMA Van Autreve: You see, there are certain things in life that you see that create an impression. We pulled in on the train--into Fayetteville--and got on the trucks. It was about midnight and it was

cold. We get down to our quarters and the mess hall is open; at twelve o'clock at night. Now we're talking January 1942. There's hot dogs and hot coffee. That made an impression on me. I was really impressed with my unit, because at twelve o'clock at night there was some food and coffee. When we got down to our billets, we didn't have to go draw blankets or sheets, because the beds were made already. That left a lasting impression on Van Autreve to do the same thing any time that you had that same particular circumstance.

Interviewer: They must of had good leadership to think of and do something like that.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. We had an excellent first sergeant. We very rarely got to see him, but he was excellent. Then we had a guy named "Jim Coleman," who was really an outstanding noncommissioned officer. Our training was excellent. However, it was very disciplined. Where I came from--in Delphus, Ohio--no one ever cursed anyone else. You didn't call anybody an S.O.B. Boy, that was just not tolerated. So when the sergeant called me an S.O.B., I replied in kind, so I had to dig a six-by-six in the sand, which means, for every two shovelfuls out, one comes back in, so you're out there all night. But our training was good. Every platoon had a combat squad. In the combat squad you had a half-track, a 37mm anti-tank gun, a 2.36 rocket launcher, a .50-caliber machine gun, and a .30-caliber machine gun, and that was the makeup. The 37mm was absolutely the most worthless sling-shot that the United States Army has ever had. Unfortunately they learned, how be it a bit late, that that 37mm was ineffectual. The 2.36, we went into combat thinking that that was the greatest thing that had ever been made, because it made a lasting impression when we saw its lethality at the range. But, you know, that thing would bounce off of a Tiger tank.

Interviewer: That was the old bazooka, right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. The first one before the 3.5. The 3.5 was better. We suffered from that in Korea, incidently, by sending 2.36's

to those kids over there. But we did train and we trained hard. We did get some infantry tactics and then we moved out into the woods. That was in the preparatory stage getting ready for overseas. Hope Rast, who was our company commander, called me in and promoted me to sergeant, --which amazed me--and told me that I, along with a couple of others, was going to go to the 16th Infantry. So we go over there and we were issued these black outfits, knuckle-knives, and all that sort of thing, and a tommy gun--the old .45-caliber tommy gun with the drum. We shipped out of there and went to Little Creek, Virginia; that was our training base. We trained down there for about two months. It was an area much like the area the were going to meet in Africa. We didn't realize it at the time, but it did turnout to resemble it very, very closely; geographically.

Interviewer: The Japanese hadn't bombed Pearl Harbor yet, had they? This was about, what? Mid-part of 1941?

SMA Van Autreve: No, no, no, no.

Interviewer: Oh, that's right. This was in '42.

SMA Van Autreve: No, no. We went down to Fort Bragg in January of '42.

Interviewer: Yeah, it had just happened.

SMA Van Autreve: Uh huh.

Interviewer: So the only question in your mind at that time was, "Which way am I going, to Europe or the Pacific?"

SMA Van Autreve: No, really, that was not a question. It really wasn't. We kinda wanted to get out of Fort Bragg, because it was so densely populated. If you wanted to go to the theater, you got there an hour and a half before the show started and you were lucky if you got in. When you got your twenty-one dollars a month, if you went down to the PX or someplace to get a hamburger sandwich or something--on a Sunday evening when they had cold cuts for dinner in the mess hall--you had to wait in line for two hours. You couldn't go downtown. If you

went downtown to Fayetteville, and this is the truth, there were places that charged you more if you were a soldier, as opposed to being a citizen of that city. I didn't care for it at all and I wanted to get out of there. A lot of the other guys wanted to get out also. You just don't think of the consequences, because you've never been subjected to that sort of thing. You're twenty-one years old and you're not too smart.

Interviewer: When you left there, did you entire unit leave to go up to Little Creek, Virginia.

SMA Van Autreve: No, no, no, no. Just a select few. We were going up as demolition personnel attached to a unit out of the 16th Infantry.

Interviewer: About how many people went up there with you?

SMA Van Autreve: Two squads out of the engineers.

Interviewer: Two squads?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah

Interviewer: So you were sent up there for special training. Who were you attached to then?

SMA Van Autreve: The 16th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division.

Interviewer: Tell me about the training up there.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, it was very arduous. Oh gosh, we trained for fourteen, fifteen hours. You could eat three or four meals a day. A lot of it was night training. You learned to operate the various boats that we would be using. You had to learn all of the weapons that were employed. We spent a lot of time on stealth practice. You know, crawling on your belly in the sand and creeping-up on a sentry. We had a lot on using pole charges on pillboxes. In the old days we had a long pole and you had the demolition on the end of the pole. You'd place it up against the opening and "wham." So we spent a lot of time doing that.

Interviewer: How long did you say you were in training up there at Little Creek?

SMA Van Autreve: I guess about six weeks to two months.

Interviewer: Then, after your training was completed, where did you go from there?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, let me tell you. It's kind of humorous because when we were getting ready to go, we were on a destroyer. It was called the U.S.S. Dallas; 199. Now the Navy took umbrage with me when I made that statement on a previous occasion, in a speech, saying that the Dallas could not be a destroyer; it was named after a man, "John Dallas." I was able to verify that fact. We went down and they made us put on Navy uniforms. And those buttons. In order for you to perform some vital needs, to get those buttons open was an extremely difficult task. They have to ability to just go like this (The sergeant major placed his hand just below, and to the left, of his belt buckle and moved his hand downward at a 45-degree angle.) and get them open. We, in the Army, just had difficulty with that. We were afforded what they call "shore leave," and we had to go in groups to make sure that nobody got drunk or nobody said anything. We were aboard this destroyer and it was just a minuscule force. This was not the total force that was on the destroyer, because we were preparing demolition and getting everything ready. Then, just before we got to Africa, we picked-up the other people. Then they became a part of our total party. We went to Bermuda. We stopped in Bermuda to strip the ship and put in shrapnel mats; hugh mattresses. Then we headed for Africa. The most disconcerting thing for me was the fact that, being the senior NCO of the group--a buck sergeant--I was able to stay with the chief petty officers, up forward on that destroyer. I didn't know about "general quarters." Nobody told us about that. So I'm down there in the afternoon--I'm reading--and all of a sudden this weird siren sounds and everybody takes off. I'm bewildered. "What am I doing here?" All of a sudden the doors in the bulkhead close. I'm in there, confined, and can't get out. Then I hear "woomp," "woomp." These depth charges were going off. I said,

"Holy cow!" I'm scared to death. When it's "all clear," I go up there and I go to the chief and I say, "Hey, you tell us what this general quarters business is." So we got our soldiers together and they gave us duty stations. We told them, "When you hear the siren, get up topside and go to your duty stations, whatever they may be." But that was terrifying for about twenty-five minutes for me, because I had no place to go; I couldn't get out.

Interviewer: When you were taking that training at Little Creek, was that training classified?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Was it classified "secret?"

SMA Van Autreve: I don't know what the classification was.

Interviewer: You were not allowed to talk about.

SMA Van Autreve: We were not permitted to talk about it to anyone.

Interviewer: So you left Little Creek and you started heading over toward North Africa. When was the 9th Division alerted for deployment to North Africa?

SMA Van Autreve: I cannot tell you that date, because we left as a separate unit. We were down at Norfolk and left from there.

Interviewer: So you joined up with the division when they got to North Africa.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, because we were in the same armada of ships.

Interviewer: Tell me a little more about that trip to North Africa. You said you were on a destroyer and you just mentioned your first encounter with "general quarters." What kind of a trip did you have over to North Africa?

SMA Van Autreve: I would like to tell you that when you sleep way up forward in a destroyer during a storm, and if you like roller coasters, there is none that will compare, because that bow slowly gets up, up, up, up, and then with a resounding crash, down it comes.

If you don't get seasick, you've got to be something from out of this world; you have just got to have been subjected to a whole lot of that. Those storms were tough. They had lifelines rigged fore and aft so you would have something to hold on to. I think the value of it, for the Army, was that we were so sick and tired of being on that destroyer that we would have fought the entire German Army that had been gathered at Port Lyautey, just to get off.

Interviewer: How long did your trip take to North Africa?

SMA Van Autreve: I don't remember. I really don't remember.

Interviewer: You encountered a lot of rough weather?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes indeed.

Interviewer: Where did you land in North Africa?

SMA Van Autreve: A place called Port Lyautey.

Interviewer: What part of North Africa?

SMA Van Autreve: French Morocco.

Interviewer: When you made the landing...

(End Tape OH 94.2-1, Side 2)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-2, Side 1)

Interviewer: When our last tape ended I just asked you about your assigned job when you landed in North Africa. You were with the engineer detachment to the 9th Division.

SMA Van Autreve: No, it was not an engineer detachment. It was a demolition group assigned to the 60th Raiders.

Interviewer: Okay.

SMA Van Autreve: Our mission was to go up, in a destroyer, up the Oued Sebu, which is a river. In order to do that we had to go through this big anchor chain that was across the river as an obstacle. That was the gun platform for the invasion, if you will.

Interviewer: So they used the destroyer for the gun platform.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Our job was to do the demolition work. Oddly enough, we were fighting the French Foreign Legion. We fought them

for about three days before they capitulated.

Interviewer: Then they began fighting for the Allies.

SMA Van Autreve: Then we began fighting together. In fact, at the end of the third day, when hostilities had ceased, both groups joined together and honored the burial of those who had participated; both American and French Foreign Legion.

Interviewer: So after you made the landing, what was your job?

SMA Van Autreve: After the three days or after the initial landing?

Interviewer: After the initial landing.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, we moved into the cork forest and we rejoined our former units. I got to be very busy because there were a lot of duds. There were mortar shell and, in fact, two rounds off the U.S.S. Texas--14-inch rounds--which had been fired by the Texas. There they are, they're being used in a building downtown to elaborate the appearance of the building; to hugh monstrous shells. I had to get rid of those, because they were live. We'd get calls from the various infantry units. I didn't know anything about this; I hadn't been trained for it. I find this mortar shell and what you do is just dig around it, pick it up, and carry it away; you don't know any better. You don't realize how lethal this stuff is. So we kept pretty busy. Then we began training the infantry soldiers about mines and mine warfare, because some of the soldiers had been killed. We lost one of our soldiers attempting to illustrate the lethality of a mine field. In those days we used what we called "prima cord mats" to detonate mines. It was stupid and foolish. We didn't find that out until later. You don't know what anything is about and the problems it can cause until you've tried it. You make a mat, with four to six inch squares, out of prima cord. Prima cord is peten. I think it is petentetronitrate, but it's an explosive and it goes about eighteen thousand feet per second. What you do with that, you make this mat and lay it over the mines and

set it off. The downward pressure is supposed to cause the mines to explode. In this one case, the sergeant went up to look at it and was scuffing with his foot. The sear pin on the mine had been fractured; not completely. When he scuffed it, it was enough to make the mine go off, and he was killed. But we had lousy mines. We had an M5, a spider type anti-tank mine, which was absolutely deplorable. The only time I saw one go off, Freddie Abbresese--from New England-- backed over one and it blew out the tires. Now this is the sort of thing we were putting out there to stop German tanks.

Interviewer: I wouldn't have much affect on a Tiger.

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely not. But that's what we did in Africa. We laid mines and I picked up hundreds of mines. In fact, I got to be a semi-expert because I did so much of it. The Germans had so much time and the Germans were very methodical. Everything is by pattern. If you would stand there and look long enough, pretty soon you could see the indentation in the earth, which indicates there is a mine located there. And then you took that and measured it against the size and most of the time you could determine if they were anti-personnel mines scattered throughout. But the one thing you could never determine was whether it was booby-trapped underneath unless you channeled underneath the mine. We ran across more of that there than any place else in Africa.

Interviewer: In fact, you're entire time in Africa was working with mines. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. You don't get scared too much when you're a twenty-one year old. But you get scared when you take an infantry squad out and their intent is to capture a couple of Germans or get information. You're the lead guy, on your hands and knees, going through the barbed wire and through the mine field with a bayonet, with tracing tape behind you. The only people in front of you are Germans. You'd get through the mine field and they'd take off on the mission. You'd have

to wait there until they got back. You're all alone; by yourself. I did that more times than I can remember.

Interviewer: You also ran into the problem with the wooden mine they called the "shoe mine," didn't you?

SMA Van Autreve: That was in France. See, what we used to do... I was assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 60th Infantry. There I went, with my truck and my squad. We reported to, at that time, Slick Wilson; Lieutenant Colonel Slick Wilson. He would assign us to a particular job. This night it was raining like the devil and we were in this barn. They sent a message for us and that was our first encounter with shoe mines, which was an anti-personnel mine. It was effective enough to blow-off part of a foot, which was what they wanted to do because then you commit three people; two stretcher bearers and the guy who was wounded. But you had to probe for them. If we had metallic mines, we had the, I think it was the ANCR625, which was the mine detector. But these, this was strictly hands and knees work, with a bayonet, trying to find that shoe mine. We never found any that were booby-trapped in any way. It was not a pleasant experience. You talk about picking up mines. I think it was at Cevennes La Man, wherever. It had been used by the Germans as an airport; it had a concrete landing strip. One of the Spitfires coming in hit a mine and exploded. So I had to go over there and we had two hours to clear that mine field; to clear those runways. The only way we could do it was... We had Al Drell, God bless him. He was the driver. There was one man on the right fender, I was on the left fender, and Al Drell was the driver. We piled sandbags up and sat on top of the sandbags. Al was driving about five miles an hour. We were using visual detection because we've got to clear those runways because the Spitfires were coming in. We found three mines. Luckily they hadn't buried any. They just laid them on top of the runway and we found them very easily. But if we had hit a mine, the three of us would have been gone, because those Teller mines were loaded with about

eleven or twelve pounds of TNT, or whatever. This kid, Al Drell, just had all the courage in the world.

Interviewer: While you were with the 15th, that was in North Africa. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Were you with the 15th when you went on up through Sicily?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: After you left North Africa, of course you were still clearing mines. I asked you about the shoe mines. I remember reading in one of your interviews where the unit found itself right in the middle of a mine field, and luckily none of the mines exploded.

SMA Van Autreve: That was in Africa. We had pulled into this area; the company. I'm going out for nature's call and I see these rock carnes. I say to myself, "Gee, they use those in the desert to mark mine fields." So I go looking around and sure enough, here we have interspersed throughout the area--not by pattern, but just permissively strewn, mines; Italian mines. And they had... You know, your memory goes blank on some of this stuff, but I think it was an N5 or an N3, which was very, very dangerous. There they were; we were in the middle of a mine field. We had not hit one with any one of our vehicles. So I go to the Company Commander and I tell him about it. Everybody stayed in place until dawn's early light. But the mines were so poorly done. The trip wires were real heavy trip wires. There were no booby traps. It was somebody just throwing mines out. They were armed, but we did not suffer a casualty and we did not lose a truck. What a startling revelation when you're standing there answering the call of nature, oblivious of everything in life, and all of a sudden you look down and see an indication of a mine field and realize that you're in it.

Interviewer: That could kinda cause a panic, as far as the Commander is concerned.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, and a reluctance to go answer nature's call.

Interviewer: While you were with the 15th, tell me about your landing in Sicily, after you left North Africa.

SMA Van Autreve: We were participating in the invasion and we got a German air strike, so they called for volunteers. So Bob Klein and I, we volunteer. Now we do not volunteer out of bravery. We volunteered because they assured us, that if we volunteered, we could mess with the crew, because what we ate and what they ate was totally different. So we wound-up passing shells. It was kind of terrifying. I was not so much the noise, but that bomb dropping from an airplane--no matter where it hits within a thousand yards--you can hear that thing whistle and it gets ever increasingly louder, so you feel that it's coming down right on top of your head. The second thing that is so disheartening, is all that stuff that is being fired up in the air comes back in the form of shrapnel. We had a couple of crew members get hit, just from the shrapnel. But the peace to resistance was after it was all over. We were able to eat in the crew's quarters, and we had French toast, hot chocolate, pancakes, and eggs; it was worth it. It was worth it.

Interviewer: How long did you do that?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, just during the attack. The attack lasted maybe an hour or an hour-and-a-half.

Interviewer: How did you cross the Mediterranean from North Africa to Sicily? Was it by LST (Landing Ship, Tank; a large landing craft) or what type ship?

SMA Van Autreve: Maybe it was an LST. I'm kinda vague about all of that because the only thing that I really remember is when we landed. We're sitting out in the harbor and this ammunition ship gets hit. You know, all that explosion, and you've got the bombs dropping. That is the only part that stays with me.

Interviewer: Tell me about some of your activities in Sicily?

SMA Van Autreve: We went to Cefalu--C-E-F-A-L-U, I believe--to setup camp. Immediately I got started on the mine business again. What happened was. some of the children were being killed because the Italian hand grenade--we used to call it "The Red Devil"--armed itself in flight. When they would hit, sometimes you'd have one that would not go off. The kids were picking them up and they asked for help. I had an interpreter and a driver, and I'd go out for a week or two weeks, and I'd visit all these little villages perched way up on mountaintops. My intent was to find those things, no matter where, and destroy them. In fact, we found one in a church. The people just treated us beautiful. I really had a great time. The possible consequences were devastation, because what you had to do in some places was just pick it up and carry it out. But a lot of kids were killed with that sort of thing. Then we had a tremendous amount of the regular Teller mines to work with.

Interviewer: After the Sicilian Campaign, you went to England to prepare for the landing in France. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: How long were you over in England? While you were there, what were you doing?

SMA Van Autreve: We had our normal training. But I was primarily sent out as part of a team to instruct in demolition, booby traps, and develop booby trap awareness, and to demonstrate anti-personnel devices. I spent several months doing that.

Interviewer: Mostly conducting training and familiarization.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, primarily to imbue those people with the possibility of booby traps. When you open that door or you flush that toilet, take a look around; it may be your last look if you don't.

Interviewer: The Germans were masters of booby traps, weren't they?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. They were very methodical and painstaking.

Interviewer: When they laid-out a mine field, because they were so methodical, did that work to your advantage?

SMA Van Autreve: It did after you've been there a long enough time so you can start picking out the pattern. Now it got more difficult in France, because when the mines were laid, they were not laid with as much care. The beaches, yes, but later in they were strewn a little more permissively, and they began to get a little smart about things. For instance, they used abatis, which are trees that they cut and they fall across the road to provide a barrier; well and good. But pretty soon they started taking mines and putting them in the shoulders of the roads. So when a truck comes up to the abatis, and tries to turnaround and goes off the road, you lose a truck. The next thing he started doing, he started booby trapping the abatis. In fact, it's kind of humorous, this abatis was laced with trip wires and I'm in there trying to get this stuff squared-away. You know, you've got branches and everything that you're fighting. This face suddenly looks through there and I hear the noise. I told him, and this is what I said: "Look, get the hell out of here. Don't you know what you're doing?" The bushes part and I'm looking at two stars on a helmet. I thought, "Holy gees." He was very nice about it. I explained what happens, so he had a strategic withdrawal and allowed me to continue on with my work.

Interviewer: Where did you land in France, and when?

SMA Van Autreve: We landed on, I believe it was on D+2 (June 8, 1944) and we landed in the vicinity--it's inland--in the vicinity of Sainte-Mere-Eglise. I can't tell you the name of the beach anymore. The ungodly part of that landing was the clothing we had to wear. We wore impregnated clothing to protect us against possible gas attacks. It is hot and it smells. Those were ungodly uniforms that we had to wear.

Interviewer: Tell me about some of your activities while you were in France with the engineers. Once again, you're still doing the mine

clearing. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Doing the mine cleaning. I worked a whole lot with the 3rd Battalion of the 60th Infantry. And let me tell you. Here I am, a sergeant, my company commander tells me where I am to go and what I am to do. I get out there and get the truck. From then on, my procurement of gasoline, my procurement of food, my procurement of substance for my squad and myself, is up to me. We have to do it. You know, you do it without a problem. It is absolutely amazing what noncommissioned officers can do under conditions of extreme adversity. Really. That's why I'm so sold on noncommissioned officers, because not I alone, but there were many others who were just as functional as I was. I would do that work for them; any kind of work they wanted. But it was primarily in the field of demolition. We're going down this little road and we took some mortar fire. Everybody cuts off the side of the road. We have to go cut this anchor chain. There was a great big chain across the road, between these concrete pillars. So we have to go out there. Now this was the fortune of circumstance, because we're up in this grove of fruit trees. We get the word that we've got to go down and break the chain. I take a couple of half-pound blocks of TNT and I go down with one of the people in my squad. We're on that road and all this mortar fire is going on. We didn't get hit. We blew the chain apart and went back. Three people had been killed up in that orchard that we had left. So I was better off going down to blow the chain than staying in the orchard. Another interesting thing. I happened to be a bystander when General Manten S. Eddy met with General Patton and I hear General Patton tell Manten S. Eddy, who was the Commanding General of the 9th Infantry Division, to go to Cherbourg and let nothing slow him down. You don't get next to Patton very often. I thought that was quite a thing. Here I am, a little old noncommissioned officer, and I'm listening to all of this. I'm the representative from our company. I was with that 3rd Battalion of the 6th Infantry for

something--what I don't know--but I was privileged to stand right near the two of them and hear everything going on that was going to take place between there and Cherbourg.

(There was a brief pause in the interview.)

Interviewer: I stopped the tape recorder for just a few minutes. Sergeant Major, while the tape recorder was off, you were talking about General Patton driving down the road. Go ahead and tell about that.

SMA Van Autreve: This was in North Africa. I'm out in the mine field, and when I'm working out in the mine field, I do not wear a helmet. You know, you've got trip wires and if the thing falls off and it hits one of those three-pronged "Bouncing Betties," which deprives you of your virility, you're very careful. There I was, my pants legs rolled up, no helmet, and I was wearing no shirt or undershirt. I'm out there and I'm really concerned with what I'm doing, because I'm trying to pick out this pattern and see whether or not they've got any of those, I think they call them the C35, which is that three-pronged affair that goes on the "Bouncing Betty." All of a sudden here comes a major. He's screaming at me and I look around and there's an entourage out on the highway out there; about fifteen vehicles. This major is really getting on my case about my uniform. Now when General Patton first came to Africa, after he had been there a month or two months, they started setting up all of these little areas where you could appear before a lawyer or whatever and you would be fined if there was a uniform infraction. He had big signs. "No tie, Zingo." This sort of thing. So the major marches me out there and who do I see, but General George Patton. I heard him and seen him at Fort Bragg, North Carolina just before we got ready to go to war. He's really letting me have it, sprinkled with epistasis. You know, he could really handle profanity. He's telling me what a lousy... Oh, he was just up one side and down the other. And old Holtrast comes up; my Company Commander. And Holtrast asked what the problem was. Patton was going to fine me

for being out of uniform. Hey, I'm twenty-one years old--twenty-two then--and I'm scared to death because I'm talking to General Patton. But Holtrast, he maintained his cool and told him what I was doing. He let me off, because if it hadn't been for that, Van Autreve would of had a courts martial on his record.

Interviewer: Also, I think I read someplace that you actually appeared on the front page of the Stars and Stripes, while you were clearing mines in North Africa.

SMA Van Autreve: We had a discussion about that, because it was so vague that they didn't know if it was me, or not. But do you know the picture of the guy with the mine detector out in front of tanks? I don't know if you ever saw that one or not. Well, that actually did happen to me. I had about three tanks behind me and I had the mine detector and I'm going down the road, sweeping. About five hundred, eight hundred yards down the road, the road turned and there's a defilade back there. This German tank starts firing. Now he's firing right over my shoulder, and "zoom," I'm in the ditch. Well, the tank fire slacked after about fifteen or twenty minutes. The tanks are gone and I'm out there alone. Here I am. The law was "Don't let anybody get your mine detector." You know, it's secret. It's classified, and all that sort of stuff. It wasn't really, but that's what we were told. So I go lugging my mine detector back. It takes me about five hours to get back to my company, because I don't know where they are. That's a terrifying experience to get in the middle of one of those deals. WOOM. That 88 just, WOOMP, WOOM.

Interviewer: When you're in the middle of the desert, it kinda hard to navigate, isn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: You're darn right it is. It's very difficult to get back to your unit. I had a hard time doing that.

Interviewer: By the way, how long were you in North Africa, before you made the move over to Sicily?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, the only thing I can use as a measuring point is the fact we made the invasion of Africa, on November the 8th, and we made the invasion of Sicily, whenever that was. (July 10, 1943)

Interviewer: You was there during the entire North African Campaign, as far as the American involvement.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. We landed at Port Lyautey and we went to Tunisia and Algeria.

Interviewer: Were you in Europe during the entire war, or did you leave after you had enough points? When did you leave?

SMA Van Autreve: No. What happen to me was, I had malaria in Africa and I had hepatitis in Sicily. Then in France, just as we were approaching the German border, I had a malaria attack. They gave me what is known as "limited assignment." What a misnomer that is. They assigned me to the 723rd Railway Battalion, because I had worked for the railroad before I came in the Army. We were at Versailles. There's the palace. This is the gardener's house. A beautiful appearing structure, but in the basement where we lived, there was about three inches of water. The stove had to be propped-up with a bunch of wood so it wouldn't drown-out. That was water. That's where we got up, we walked around in it during the morning, we brushed our teeth with it, and you could almost bathe in it. That was the first introduction to Versailles. The second was, I go to the rail battalion and I need new shoes. They don't have my size. I wear eleven-and-one-half, they gave me ten-and-one-half. I had to cut a slit in the side to accommodate my feet. You go out with the train and what you do, you've got a lantern and a fusee, and you go out the back of the train. You have two jobs: To warn any approaching train that you are there; and deter anyone from stealing anything. Now you know that's a hell of a lethal weapon; a fusee or a lantern against someone who's going to attempt to deprive your train of any of its valuables. You're out there for five hours; seven hours; eight hours; with no food. I tried to get back to my

unit, because I could get more to eat and I could be better clothed. I might get shot at a little more, but it was worth it. I wanted to get out of that outfit, but I didn't and that's where I finished out the war.

Interviewer: Let me go back to Africa, just a moment. You were telling me, during a break, about how you used a well to take a bath. You had five guys out there. Tell me that again.

SMA Van Autreve: We're out there at this well. We had lice and all that sort of thing, because we didn't bathe for a long period of time. Water was comparatively scarce. We found this well and what we were going to do is lower a guy down into it, get him wet, pull him up, he soaps up, and the next guy takes his turn. Here comes this German airplane. We saw a lot of them in those days; a lot of them. He must have been a real nice guy, or he didn't know whether we were Italian, German, or what, because we were naked. He chased us all over that desert, stark naked. Stark naked. When that soap gets on you and it dries on you, you can't get the soap off. He'd fire a couple of bursts, not to hit anybody, he just scared the hell out of us. Later we thought it was funny, but at the time it was not. It was a horrendous experience because we thought he was going to try to kill us. We thought that "American" was written all over our bodies. But he evidently didn't know who we were, because he didn't try that. He must of had a heck of a good time laughing about us running around, bare naked.

Interviewer: You also told me about drinking water. Do you remember the one about the camel?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, we were on North-South Road and we were doing a lot of mine work there. Now some of those were booby trapped and that induces and causes concentration. We look up and over there are a couple of Germans. They're as scared as I am. So they start firing. The only thing I had was a .45 caliber pistol; I couldn't hit a barn with it. So I fire a couple of rounds. They would go that way

and I would go this way. So we take off and go through the woods. The artillery must have thought we were a sizeable population out there because we started getting some overhead air bursts. So we get down to this creek and we're in there about seven or eight hours, drinking water out of the creek. So we decided that it was safe; the firing had stopped and everything is quiet. We start up stream and there's a dead camel--with maggots and the whole thing--laying in that stream bed. We had been drinking that water. Talking about Africa, here is another experience. I worked with the Goumeir's . That is an Atlas Mountain tribe, I believe. Soldiers to the Corps and the people in charge were French officers and French noncommissioned officers. I did some mine work for them. We go out at night and we're going along the beach. Their mission is to get this artillery outfit and kill a couple of them. So I probing going down there. Finally we get to the place and we cut off into the woods. I'm there alone. First, I don't like being alone. About two hours later, I feel something on my helmet. I'm terrified. I don't know what it is. But the Goumeir's identified me by tracing the outline of my helmet. I had to take about four or five of those, but I did not appreciate going with the Goumeir's. They were absolutely outstanding soldiers, but terrifying to be around. They had absolutely no regard for life; their own or any one else's.

Interviewer: Like the Turks in Korea.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, God.

Interviewer: So you were with the 723rd Railway Battalion when you got ready to come back to the United States. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Right.

Interviewer: You went from there over to Camp Lucky Strike.

SMA Van Autreve: Camp Lucky Strike, in France, which was the place where most of the people were accumulated prior to being shipped back to the United States.

Interviewer: When did you depart Europe?

SMA Van Autreve: It was in the latter part of July '45.

Interviewer: You decided to get out of the Army. In fact, you were discharged and then you came back in later. Before we get to that. Tell me about your trip back and your discharge from the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: We went to Camp Lucky Strike and this was just like heaven, because it was the first time you were able to get really outstanding food. We had a gym. We had theaters. In fact, there was a tremendous amount of open gambling going on. No disciplinary infractions because everybody wanted to make sure they got go home, so nobody misbehaved. It was a pleasant couple of days there, awaiting shipment.

Interviewer: When you came back to the United States, you were discharged. What did you do after you were discharged?

SMA Van Autreve: I went home and worked for my father for a period of time. Then I went to Ohio Northern University. I had an accident on New Years Day. I, and my girlfriend, were driving over to Lima, Ohio. It was very icy, with sleet, and a tree limb had fallen in the road. I hit that tree limb. I got hurt, but not too badly. I was not incapacitated. But she suffered some bruises. We were able to drive over to Lima. My insurance had expired, so economically, that put me in a bind because her parents were going to sue me and all that sort of thing. I said, "What will I do?" Here I had been going to Ohio Northern University and everything was working out very well for me. I go to Lima, Ohio, where I picked up the bus to go to school, and I meet the fellow whom I had come into the Army with, and he's a recruiter. So he invites me in to have a drink. Those two or three drinks resulted in my being reintroduced into the United States Army.

Interviewer: When you started drinking you started thinking about the good times and also...

SMA Van Autreve: I thought about the bad times. I thought, "My God, how am I going to pay-off the damage to my car and the possibility

of a law suit from this girl's father and mother."

Interviewer: When you came back in, where were you assigned?

SMA Van Autreve: Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Interviewer: Before we discuss your other assignments. Let's talk about your other combat assignment in Vietnam, and then I think this is a good time to get a comparison of how things were in World War II versus Vietnam, particularly when you start looking at the way the soldiers behaved during the two different wars. The leadership, etc. During which years did you serve your tour in Vietnam?

SMA Van Autreve: '67, '68, and '69. It was about twenty, twenty-one months.

Interviewer: During that time you were assigned as the Sergeant Major of the 20th Engineer Brigade.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Where was the 20th's headquarters located?

SMA Van Autreve: The headquarters were located at Bien Hoa. We had about twenty thousand soldiers and they were primarily assigned throughout the southern portion of Vietnam.

Interviewer: III and IV Corps.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, we were down south. The 18th Brigade was up in the northerly section.

Interviewer: What was the mission of the 20th Engineers?

SMA Van Autreve: We were primarily in construction and road building. That was the primary emphasis.

Interviewer: The size of that brigade was a heck of a lot larger than a normal engineer brigade.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yeah. I think we ran between eighteen and twenty thousand.

Interviewer: So you actually had combat engineers and construction engineers.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes we did.

Interviewer: That was a big area of operation.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes it was.

Interviewer: When you got there you became the Sergeant Major of the 20th Engineer Brigade. Is that correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Let me tell you about that. Let me tell you about that. I had gone up for Sergeant Major of the Army. Now I went up three times; the third time was a success. We talk about democratization. There certainly is a lack of it in the United States Army. The first time that I competed was when Wooldridge was chosen. What I did was, I had to be selected above the Engineer Group Sergeant Major. I went to, and was selected by, V Corps, as their representative.

Interviewer: This was in Europe.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Then I went to Seventh Army and again was chosen. I went to USAREUR (United States Army, Europe) and I again was chosen by O'Meara. Now I was chosen to be that representative and I get a nice letter--I've got a copy inside--from General Johnson stating that he had twenty-seven people who he considered for Sergeant Major of the Army. He congratulated me and told me that Wooldridge was to be his selectee. But the part about this is, I did not take over as V Corps Sergeant Major, or the Seventh Army Sergeant Major, or USAREUR. I went back to my battalion. So when I went over to Vietnam, the first three days you went through indoctrination. The USAV (United States Army, Vietnam) Sergeant Major was in the same cantonment area and he was there for the night. So I go in and I'm preparing to go to bed and he said, "Join us and have a drink." I said, "No, I don't care to." I did not drink anything throughout my tour in Vietnam. So he got a little insolent and he was very perturbed because I wouldn't join them. Well the 20th Engineer Brigade Sergeant Major was there, semi-inebriated. He left the area, walked outside, and going back to his hooch he stepped on a beer can. He tripped and fell and broke his leg. So the next day they're thinking about who going to be the Sergeant Major of the 20th

Engineer Brigade, because this guy is in the hospital. By the time he gets out of the hospital, he's ready to go home. There was a Warrant Officer Jackson, who went through my records. He went to see the general--General Chapman--and said, "We've fellow here who has been up for Sergeant Major of the Army." As a consequence, I became the 20th Engineer Brigade Sergeant Major. Not because of my qualifications, but because of a beer can. A beer can. Had it not been for that beer can, I would have gone to the 588th Engineer Battalion, and I may have ended up in the United States Army as a battalion sergeant major.

Interviewer: While you were the Sergeant Major of the 20th Engineer Brigade, did you have many discipline problems within the brigade?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. Not only in the brigade, but we were collocated with the 101st (Airborne Division). The disciplinary problems in either one of the two areas sort of infringed on the other area because we were so close together. Yes there were problems. There were problems with thievery; there were problems with dope; there were problems with drinking. It was a very, very difficult time. We had developed some permissiveness. I think the thing that eluded us was the capability of bonding people, because people came to you, not as a unit, but as one, two, three, four, five, six replacements. You take a month in order to get indoctrinated. You over there praying for the next five, six, or seven months that you're not going to get hit. Then in about a month-and-a-half you prepare to go home. You're not together long enough to create a true bonding, in the true sense of the word that we enjoyed in World War II. What the German required was such a primary facet of leadership and a capability; bonding. Making people do things for one another. We had a hard time with that. We had a hard time. Another problem that we had, that concerned me deeply, was the fact that pretty soon the private and PFC began to think that the E7 was a senior noncommissioned officer in his

company. Because, in some cases, not all cases, but in some cases we had the First Sergeant using the rationale "I've got to be here to get supplies up forward and make sure everything gets to my troops out in the field." At the same time he is enjoying a hot and cold hooch and a hot and cold mamasan. I finally got together with the old man and if we went out to the field, and they had been there for any length of time... You know, our Rome Plow team kids had the Rome Plows. That was their job; to penetrate the jungle. "Clearing Teams" they were called. These kids were out there, dirty, filthy, and they worked twelve, fourteen hours a day. They were subject not only to being shot, but they should have gotten Purple Hearts for the ants and the snakes and all those animals out there that gave them so much torment. The First Sergeant was not out there to do something for them, even by his presence. We found that to be happening in too many cases. I would take the helicopter and go back and get that first sergeant, and he went to the field with me. We had to reintroduce some first sergeants to line troops, and troops to first sergeants. It was pretty tough. The other drawback to Vietnam is the fact that we had officers vying for combat time--command time--and maybe putting in six months. So you're introduced to this company commander and in two or three months you begin to assimilate his philosophy, and then he leaves. Another company commander comes in and you start all over again. My feeling is that resulted in the loss of lives.

Interviewer: We were talking, during the break, about the rapid turnover of soldiers in Vietnam, how not only did that create problems as far as morale was concerned, but the ability of the unit to perform its mission. You said that over in Europe you didn't know how long you were going to be there, but at the same time you had that teamwork and you worked it out real well. In Vietnam, did the rapid turnover of your young NCOs affect the unit's ability to perform its mission?

SMA Van Autreve: Well absolutely, because, once again, you're

not together long enough to the point where you're willing to give your life for your fellow man, although many did that. Many did that. But you did not mean as much to your fellow man as if you had been together for a year, a year-and-a-half, or two years. Hey, it takes you sometime to figure out how to fight Charlie. That takes some time. You know, we became seasoned warriors after about six or eight months. I became an outstanding mine man--expert--after six or seven months. In Vietnam you did not have six or seven months to prepare and to train and to figure out what Charlie was all about.

(End Tape OH 94.2-2, Side 1)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-2, Side 2)

Interviewer: When the last tape ran out, we were talking about the short tours in Vietnam and how it affected leadership. You made the remark that over there you didn't have six months to prepare and train and find out what Charlie was all about. Go ahead and continue that.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, you know there are a lot of incongruities in Vietnam, as far as I was concerned. Among those is the fact that if you went down to Saigon it was absolutely fantastic to go somewhere and see the food that they ate. The Sergeant Major of the First Log (Logistics) invited me over because he and I had served together at Fort Belvoir, years before. I get there and he's got one side of the building devoted to a lounge, to a kitchen, to a bedroom. On the other side he's got a freeze and a refrigerator. This guy has got Philippine cigars; he's got lobster; he's got steak; he's got the whole business. It really gets to you when you go out to Black Horse, Bearcat, and you see the way these kids are living. You go out into the jungle, and you know, we had soldiers with everyone. We had some soldiers with Special Forces up at the top of Nui Ba Dien. When you go on the top of Nui Ba Dien, these guys were not luxuriating with any steak. You know, their fatigues were ripped and they were dirty. The only water they had was what they gathered in this huge tarp-like thing in a hole. There was too much

incongruity between the soldiers in the jungle and the soldiers back home.

Interviewer: Are you talking about the mountain they call the "Black Virgin Mountain?"

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Nui Ba Dien. We occupied the top and the Special Forces were up there. We had a squad, sometimes two squads of engineers up there. Charlie was in the center and then we were down at the base.

Interviewer: Nui Ba Dien was a lone mountain that had raised up out of the Delta.

SMA Van Autreve: And it was not far from Cambodia. But you see, if you're a kid with the 9th Division or with the 1st Division, or with any one of the divisions, when they bring you off the line and you come back, they feed you, they clothe you, you shower, and then "WHAM," after two weeks you've got to go back. You see the guys that are back there permanently, enjoying that type of life everyday. They've got the swimming pools, they've got massage parlors, they've got the whole works. And it's just too much. Just too much. If I were that young infantryman out there fighting the leaches, the snakes, the spiders, and everything else, let alone Charlie, I would get very dishearten.

Interviewer: Let me ask you something about the morale and discipline. Do you think that the soldier, the engineer soldier, out there building a road and working real hard, that as long as he was busy he didn't have the same drug or discipline problems that he may have had later on when he came back to base camp?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. You know, they brought the infantry back but very seldom did they bring the engineers back, or the transportation guy back; the kids running those trucks out there for ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day, and who did a tremendous job. With our engineers it was the same way, you took them out, and unless they went to Vung Tau... We had disciplinary problems in Vung Tau because it was a

recreation center and we had a unit right there. But the other troops out there--the Rome Plow kids and the other kids out on Route 4 someplace--had no disciplinary because they worked until it was dark, and when it was dark, he worried about if he was going to live until the next day. He was dirty, filthy, didn't always get to shower and get cleaned-up. He had no mamasans, no massage parlors, no theaters, and he was working so hard that that became almost the only thing in life for him. When you're subjected to all this stuff that went on back... I got sick and tired of seeing the kind of food that people would eat when we would visit, for instance, the unit that we had in Saigon. They thought they were doing me a big favor by exposing me to steak and all that. It just made me mad as hell. I tried to get the old man to move them out in the field. Get them out of there.

Interviewer: Now I would like to ask you about your non-combat tours. We've talked about your two combat tours. What I would like to do is go back to your first non-combat overseas tour, when you were with the 54th Engineers in Germany. When you were with the 54th Engineers, where were you stationed and what was your assignment at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: I was assigned to Boblingen. Incidentally, there was no support activity; no sponsoring-in activity. So when I arrived, in Stuttgart, I've got to get on a train and get to a place called "BERBlingen." Now it's B-O-B-L-I-N-G-E-N, so I called it BOBlingen. So I'm trying to get a ticket to BOBlingen. Nobody knows what I'm talking about. I finally found a German who spoke English and he told me it's pronounced with an umlaut, and it's pronounced BERB-lingen. That's the way I got to Boblingen. Then I had a hell of a time getting from Boblingen out to the 54th. The lack of sponsoring in was terrible. As I was telling you, when I reported in to A Company, I hadn't been there two weeks when First Sergeant Marsh was going on a rampage because nobody wants to go to the academy, and I took the

opportunity. It really paid-off for me. I was with them for about a year, year-and-a-half. I rose rather rapidly. I became an E7, and in those days we did not have E8 and E9. Colonel Koich--now a retired two-star and lives here in San Antonio--called for me, and back in those days it was a terrible thing to have a lieutenant colonel of a battalion send for Van Autreve. So the Company Commander is all upset. The First Sergeant is all upset. I go in and he says to me, "You're going to be the First Sergeant of Headquarters Company." I said, "Sir, I don't want to be the First Sergeant of Headquarters Company." He said, "You are the First Sergeant of Headquarters Company, period." So I became the First Sergeant. Now this is the thing that I really want to get to. I become a first sergeant without having the vaguest idea of what a first sergeant does. They said, "You make out the morning report." I asked, "What's a morning report?" So for about a month-and-a-half, I am studying my head off every night, trying to find out about duty rosters, and morning reports, and all the attendant stuff that we have to do; the administrative features of being a first sergeant. Now the rest of it I could handle very well. We had some strong disciplinary problems--the first sergeant had been relieved--and I took care of those. I took care of those; we didn't have any 104's or Article 15's. We put on full field packs and we marched. I marched them around this big quadrangle so everybody else in Headquarters Company could see it. That reduced our number of problems, dramatically and rapidly.

Interviewer: In other words, if you got in trouble, instead of getting a Article 104 or an Article 15, you put on a full field pack and marched around the quadrangle.

SMA Van Autreve: But I went with them. But the thing I want to point out is, we did not have a preparation stage for a new first sergeant. Later, when I became a first sergeant, I would take a platoon sergeant and put him in my slot, for a week, and he would work with me. Then we would rotate them. That was because I felt so helpless when I

went in there. It's absolutely terrible. Here I am working with the duty roster and I thought that what you had to do with the duty roster was ENSURE, ensure that you maintained a roster of people so that when it was his due time, that he got his duty; guard or whatever it was. I did not realize the IG (Inspector General) looked for something that was beautifully hand-scripted. I finally got an artistic individual to do my duty roster, and that satisfied the IG.

Interviewer: And on the morning report there could be no mistakes.

SMA Van Autreve: And legible. With my poor handwriting, I would have flunked the course. But I get another guy in who's got a beautiful Spenserian-type handwriting and he does it for me, and they came by and thought I was great. I had not been prepared, administratively, to be the First Sergeant of the company.

Interviewer: Did you have a lot of married people in your company at that time, or was the number relatively small?

SMA Van Autreve: It was relatively a small group. A lot of the guys were living with women downtown. We had a few that were married.

Interviewer: But those were mostly in the upper grades. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. So don't forget now. Don't forget that in those days we had USAREUR Circular 3. Before you could marry a German, you had to get the Company Commander's permission and you had all sorts of problems to go through. They tried as much as they possibly could to stifle the opportunity for a GI to marry a German. They made it very difficult for them, so as a result, you didn't have very many. You had perhaps surreptitious marriages, or surreptitious getting together or living together.

Interviewer: What was the biggest problem the young soldier encountered being stationed in Germany, at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: He did not have too many problems, because there was a favorable mark exchange. He could eat very, very well. I had tailor-made uniforms and tailor-made shoes, because the mark

exchange was so favorable for us. I guess we had some minor problems with alcoholism, but not a whole lot. The disciplinary problems that I encountered were no where near anything that we had in Vietnam, or in the Post-Vietnam Era.

Interviewer: Your second non-combat overseas tour was in Korea, with the 8th Engineers. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: When did you serve with the 8th Engineers, in Korea?

SMA Van Autreve: Was that before or after. I had a tour in Indonesia, also.

Interviewer: Your tour in Indonesia, that was while you were assigned to the Engineer School.

SMA Van Autreve: Okay, that's later.

Interviewer: Yeah.

SMA Van Autreve: In Korea, I was over there for a year. We were up on the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) and assigned to the 1st Cav. I had some problems there. The primary problem there was, the guys all had hot and cold hooches down in the village. I didn't have too many problems because what we did, we had OP-7, which was an outpost on top of a mountain. I did the same thing I had done as a first sergeant with Headquarters Company, 54th Engineers. We put on a full field pack, a canteen full of water--the rucksack was full--and up we went. I was in the best physical condition of my life, walking up that mountain. I would tell the guys, "You've got a choice. You've got me or you've got the Company Commander. One of them is going to give you a record that is going to taint you for the rest of your life. If Van Autreve and you run up that hill, when we come off of the hill, we're friends." I would walk them up and down that hill, and I only did that for about a month. After that we had no problems.

Interviewer: Did you serve as First Sergeant the entire time?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. It was kind of an odd company, in that

we not only had our troops, but the KATSUSAs (Korean Army Troops Supporting the United States Army), which were the Korean Army soldiers integrated into the company. We also had the KSC (Korean Service Corps) work force. We had about two hundred and eighty of those, which were collocated with us; just adjacent. They thought I was an Indian and they were terrified of me. I'd go down there, if they had a little problem, I'd go (at this time the Sergeant Major gave an Indian war-whoop.) That's true. They were so terrified, evidently from the movies that they had seen about Indians scalping and that sort of thing. Nobody could understand how we had this huge complex with these KSC's and we had no problems. I'd just go down there and walk around that compound and it was straight. The only other I would do was, every month I would buy them a barrel of what is called "mocollie,"--which is the lowest form of alcohol you could possibly get--and dried fish; every month. If I had no problems, I would call them together and we'd do that. Another humorous thing. Somebody stole my Christmas tree lights, so I put the village "off limits." Now you realize, in those days, a first sergeant had a lot more power than he's got today to do those things. I put the village "off limits." Here comes the "head mamasan." She asks me, "Why you no let soldiers go to vil? Women got no money." I said, "Somebody stole my Christmas tree lights." She said, "You get Christmas tree lights." The next day I got all of my Christmas tree lights. I told her, "You steal paint, cement, wood, the vil is off limits. Okay." We didn't lose another thing. We had been losing six-by sixes. We had been losing bags of concrete. They were breaking into our billets at night. You know, they're so stealthy they would come in and take it and you wouldn't know it until the next morning. But the head mamasan and I got along real good.

Interviewer: They didn't want to mess up their income.

SMA Van Autreve: No.

Interviewer: What do you think was the most common problems for

the soldiers living in Korea, during that tour?

SMA Van Autreve: Loneliness. I guess the availability of sex was such that it provided a problem. We did have a high incidence of venereal disease. Once in a while you would have some fights that would break-out between a KATSUSA and a soldier. In most cases that was a sad mistake on the part of the soldiers, because the KATSUSAs would up and just absolutely whip them with Taekwon-Do, or what ever they had; they were pretty physical. We had an occasional fight.

Interviewer: How was the leadership over there?

SMA Van Autreve: I appreciated the fact that I had two good lieutenants. Lieutenant Quintennas was my Company Commander and he was an intelligent, bright young man. He allowed me the latitude to pretty well run the company. We just had to do more as a first sergeant. We ran motor stables. Once again, it was a year-long program. And it got as bad as Vietnam. You've got your problems because you've got a constant turnaround in your motor sergeants, your supply sergeants, your mess hall personnel. Cooks play an important part in the health and welfare of your command. If you've got somebody who's a good feeder, it helps to make a good company. But the VD gave us a problem, but not too much drinking. Because each and every company had a little bar, but the guys were pretty well behaved, because once we got them started on OP7, going up and down that hill, we didn't have any problems.

Interviewer: Outpost Seven was right up on the DMZ, wasn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. That's way up there. In fact, we had difficulty getting vehicles up there.

Interviewer: Your third non-combat tour was when you went over to Indonesia.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: You were a part of a team sent to Indonesia to establish the Engineer School for the Indonesian Army.

SMA Van Autreve: It was called a MILTAG (Military Technical

Advisory Group) Team.

Interviewer: You came out of Fort Belvior. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: I was at Fort Belvior, Virginia

Interviewer: Tell me how the organization of this team came about, and how you were selected as a member of the team.

SMA Van Autreve: Well Colonel Rich, my Battalion Commander, was selected to head the team, and he asked me if I would go. Rita did not take to that very kindly. I respected the colonel. I liked him. I liked working with him. I just felt that that was my obligation. If he was going to go, then I was going to go. So we started looking out for people to fill-out the team. We took courses in the Indonesian language, but we were not quite prepared when we got there. We were prepared from the standpoint of individual capability in having expertise in his particular area of engineering, but when we got there the hotel had fallen into disrepair. The swimming pool was no longer there. The food was not as good as it had been highly touted. And the United States Army had no problem with the Army of Indonesia. The Air Force of Russia had no problem with the Air Force of Indonesia. So here we are, riding around, sneering at one another. We're riding in Russian vehicles. We see Chinese flags. We see Russian flags and we see Russians. That was a little difficult to get along with. We were not highly accepted in the communities; in the city. We did have one momentous event that would occur about every month, which was the fact that we could drive down into Djakarta, which was the capital --about fifty miles away--and have a chocolate milk shake and a hamburger at this hotel which was owned by one of the American airlines.

Interviewer: How many members were on that team?

SMA Van Autreve: We had about sixty-five members.

Interviewer: Did you have a mixture of civilian and military?

SMA Van Autreve: No, we were all military.

Interviewer: So you didn't have any civilians working with you

then.

SMA Van Autreve: No.

Interviewer: What was your duty assignment?

SMA Van Autreve: I was the all around guy. I was the First Sergeant, from the standpoint of the discipline enforcement. I was the Adjutant. I just had a multitude of jobs.

Interviewer: Did your Indonesian language training help you out?

SMA Van Autreve: It just gave us enough to get by. We were fortunate in that Good Year had a rubber plantation and had some American employees who were kind enough to invite us for social interaction. That made life there a little bit more bearable.

Interviewer: Tell me a little about the routine you went through to help set up that school and what worked well, as far as dealing with the Indonesians, and what problems did you have?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I don't think we had enough on customs. Every different country has different customs. When you get to Indonesia it is just a little more prevalent. We got along very, very well with the officers who were attending the school. They had a definite appreciation. We, in turn, developed a tremendous appreciation for the Indonesian soldier because, I'll tell you what, he was a gutsy guy. They put on a demonstration for us that was worst than combat. They hurdle over knives. The knives are buried in the ground and the point are up. And the slide for life is over bayonets and over all sorts of obstacles that could be very penetrating. I didn't mind it. It was difficult because most of us were away from home. But once again, there was a lot of prostitution that we had a concern with and a problem with.

Interviewer: What is your most fondest memory of that tour? And then, what is the least fondest memory?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I guess the worst thing that happened to us was that we had our first casualty from amebic dysentery; he was a young captain and a really super nice guy. He was happily married and

had kids. He was the first to go. Now many of the rest of us suffered amebic dysentery but did not feel the true ravages of the disease until we came back to the States. I understand that several died after they came back to the States. That was a very disappointing thing because he was such a nice young man, and he died there. That was pretty hard to take. The most pleasant aspect? I had a young engineer. This kid had graduated from college and had an engineering degree. He had some sort of payback to the Army. He and I played tennis every afternoon at four o'clock. That was the pleasant part for me.

Interviewer: Did you eat and live in a civilian hotel?

SMA Van Autreve: This was a hotel surrounded by something like cabanas; we had three people in ours. The officers were all in one large area. Another disturbing thing that happened to us while we were there, and it had nothing to do with Indonesia, President Kennedy was assassinated while we were over there. That was kind of disheartening to us. I also hurt my back. Something happened to a crane and they had somebody hurt. Two of us went over to assist in lifting this weight and I ended up with a severe back problem and had to be evacuated to Clark Air Force Base, in the Philippines. That was a pretty painful episode. The other episode that I remember, we had a little veranda, about ten or twelve feet long and seven or eight feet wide. It had a little concrete bench out at the very front edge. I used to go out there and do my push-ups every morning. I'm doing my push-ups and all of a sudden the top of this concrete wall is beginning to move. There was this boa constrictor up there, about ten feet long and as big around as my leg, so he and I parted company. That was his place, not mine.

Interviewer: You didn't argue with him.

SMA Van Autreve: I didn't argue with him.

Interviewer: When you went back to Germany, on your fourth non-combat tour, you were assigned to the 317th Engineer battalion.

Where was the 317th stationed?

SMA Van Autreve: When I first joined them they were at McNair Kaserne. I came in with Rita. I was never so disillusioned in my life, because the place was filthy.

Interviewer: Where was McNair?

SMA Van Autreve: McNair was right outside of Frankfurt. There was a huge coal pile out in the quadrangle. Some of the windows were broken out and they had blankets in them. We went in to the PX (Post Exchange) and snack bar. There was profanity. I go tell this one fellow, I said, "Look, I'm here with my wife. Let's just knock this off." Boy, he started cursing me up one side and down the other. I'm in civilian clothes and he doesn't know who I am. I said, "You know, you should say that." Finally I hit him with one of these metal trays. He was going to pull a knife on me and all this stuff. So I was very disillusioned. I said to myself, "I'm going to get out from underneath this." I went to see the Battalion Commander; he's new. We talked about what we were going to be doing. We've got four companies. One company is in Giessen and three companies are on site with us. The next morning we had reveille and about seventeen or eighteen people show up. Well that started it. That started it right there. We fired a first sergeant. We got the other first sergeants together and had a very, very strong indoctrination. But let me tell you, we had some discipline problems in those days. As an example: I had been there about two weeks and I go to the theater with Rita. We come out of the theater and there's this guy throwing these big ash cans and garbage cans into the people coming out of the theater. He's either bombed or under dope. I go talk to him and he had an utter disregard for what I had to say. A captain is going by, in uniform. I said, "Captain, I want you to witness this because I want to place this guy under arrest." He said, "No, I don't want anything to do with it." He walked away. Well that gave me an indication that things were pretty tough. So Colonel Manitsas got

together with the officers and I got together with the senior NCOs. We fired one first sergeant and then we started. It took us, my God, four or five months to get that place squared-away. Then we moved from there to Leipzig, Germany. While there, I received an additional task. I was made the senior housing coordinator for Fichstein; we had about ninety families there. I want to tell you, being the Sergeant Major of the battalion was easier than being the senior coordinator of that housing area. You know, if you just live there, when you go home you are within the confines of your apartment. When you're the coordinator, you're getting all of the gripes, the moans, the complaints. You begin to find out who's beating who. You find out about child abuse. You find out about who is having sex with somebody else's wife. It just absolutely amazing. So when I got home on Saturday noon, I spend the next five, six, or seven hours, in Fichstein, going from apartment to apartment trying to settle domestic disputes. Oh, man! That was really a chore. But there again, we go into Leipzig and the place is an absolute disgrace. It was a POL (Petroleum, Oil, Lubricants) storage point. It was absolutely despicable. We had no PX. Once again, the windows were broken out. The sinks are torn off the wall. The toilet bowls are turned over. We really had a job to get that thing squared-away. We had all of the NCOs together to determine pathways. We laid our own walks. We got a PX in; that's another one that took us five or six months. You see, one of the things, one of the points, one of the opportunities for anyone to grade you in your efficacy is to determine how well you do then you have an alert. Well, God, when I first went in there, on the first alert we didn't get out for four-and-a-half hours; you were supposed to be out in two hours. I was screaming and hollering. Oh, it was a real sad story. After we had been there about six months, we were clearing in an hour-and-a-half or an hour and forty-five minutes.

Interviewer: When you moved into that kaserne, had the Americans

moved out or did they just have troops there that just didn't give a darn?

SMA Van Autreve: They had troop there that nobody cared for. Nobody cared for. Because you can't have two companies without having some access to some form of entertainment. We put in a club. We put in a PX. You know, somebody has got to care for people.

Interviewer: The reason I asked you that question, when you talked about broken out windows, blankets over the windows, the state of the latrines, it sounded almost like an abandoned kaserne.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh gees, it was terrible. It was terrible. We put in rose bushes. We planted trees. I'll tell you, that really got to be a super outfit. We instituted a lot of things. If we had an NCO who a problem, his first sergeant would bring him before the other first sergeants and myself, and the first sergeant would tell us what his problem was. The sergeant would tell us what his problem was and try to state why he felt that he was not guilty of anything. Then our little board would determine what was to be done. We would issue a written reprimand, if we thought it was necessary. People may argue about this, but whenever we wanted to put somebody out of the Army, after we had conducted that board and apprised higher headquarters what we had undergone, we did not lose a case; not one. Because it was NCO business --NCOs taking care of NCOs--and then we would make our recommendation to the Commander. We did not lose a case.

Interviewer: During that time when you were Sergeant Major, what took up most of your time?

SMA Van Autreve: I think the first five or six months I had to spend most of my time in the field. Colonel Manitsas was very, very intelligent. He had gone to the Air Force War College. He said to me, "You know, I don't think the troops care very much for me." I asked, "Why, don't they salute?" Right away I'm prepared to raise hell with somebody. I said, "I think we can fix that, sir." It's raining like

hell and we've got Company B out putting in a Bailey bridge. So I get the jeep driver, we go over to the mess hall and we get one of these big coffee urns full of coffee. I said, "Sir, we're ready to go out. B Company is out building a bridge." He said, "It's raining." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "I'll get my poncho." I said, "No sir, you can't wear a poncho when you're building a bridge. You can't wear a poncho. Certain segments that are picking up those six hundred and ten pounds of weight, you can't do it very well wearing a poncho." So we go out. He's soaking wet. So am I and the driver. He goes to the Company Commander and he tells him, "I'd like to talk to the troops." He stands up in the back seat of the jeep and he calls everybody over. He said, "Hey, you're doing such a great job, we're going to have a coffee break. Twenty minutes for coffee." So under the tent they go and they have coffee. We drove back. He said, "How why did we do all of that. Look at me, I'm soaking wet." And he's going on. It wasn't two days later when he said to me, "Everybody is saying hello." You know, the word gets around among these kids. They saw the Battalion Commander sharing some of their misery. "Hey, this colonel is a nice guy." That sort of thing. We had a battalion formation every Monday morning. We always picked some outstanding soldier, or soldiers, and we recognized them in front of the battalion. Every Monday morning. Every Monday morning. Pretty soon we got things pretty well straightened out. We trimmed our trees and cut our roses. Incidentally, I visited there when I was Sergeant Major of the Army. It was not an anticipated visit. My roses were gone. My trees looked like the devil. The Sergeant Major and two of his first sergeants were in the club--it was seven or eight o'clock at night--and we had a hearty discussion. I want to tell that the leadership does not exist throughout all of our Noncommissioned Officers Corps. Some do a great outstanding job. Some do a lousy job; you wonder how they got where they are.

Interviewer: There are so many parts to leadership, and keeping

the area beautiful has as much bearing on morale as anything else. There are a lot of NCO who get channeled in one area and let everything else go.

SMA Van Autreve: Yep. I was making a visit over in Germany, when I was Sergeant Major of the Army. I visited this one battalion and the Sergeant Major had these tables lined up; about fifteen or sixteen tables. On the tables were things like the M16, gas masks, and other items. All of the NCOs had to go through this, and he judged them. If an NCO failed to pass the course, he was out there Saturday afternoon going through it again. He said to me, "It's not taking very long for me to get the NCOs into the system of knowing what is going on about equipment and people." I was very much impressed by that. I'd go other places and you could immediately see, from the appearance of the place, that the Sergeant Major should not have been a sergeant major.

Interviewer: You were assigned to ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) duty at one time, wasn't you?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes I was.

Interviewer: Where were you assigned?

SMA Van Autreve: Toledo University.

Interviewer: How long were you assigned there?

SMA Van Autreve: I was assigned there a little over three years.

Interviewer: Did you work with general military subjects or was it tailored toward the engineers?

SMA Van Autreve: No, no, no. This was primarily infantry. I was an instructor. I understand that today the enlisted people are not permitted to be instructors in the ROTC environment. I don't know if that's true now or not. But I know that it did exist for a while. During my tenure, I was allowed to do that. I instructed in military history and logistics. I was able to the instruct the freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Concurrently with that, I was allowed to go to school. Our PMST (Professor of Military Science Training) allowed us

to go to school if we maintained a certain grade average. That was special for me.

Interviewer: What was your rank?

SMA Van Autreve: I was a master sergeant.

Interviewer: What was you major at that time? History?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, that was my major.

Interviewer: How much schooling did you complete? How many semester hours?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh gee, I don't know. I accumulated somewhere in the vicinity of a total of about a hundred and forty semester hours. But I have gone to Toledo University, Ohio Northern University, University of Alaska, Methodist University, University of Maryland, and George Washington University. You know, every place I go. Some places it was not as easy as others. In Alaska I took German. I took German three times because of field commitments.

Interviewer: While you were in that ROTC assignment, what do you remember most about that assignment?

SMA Van Autreve: The thing that I remember most was I was the advisor to the "Pershing Rifles." I don't think they have them anymore. But this was a group of gung ho young kids. I'll tell you, I have never been so impressed with a group of people in my life that the Pershing Rifles. In order for them to perform their obligation to belonging to that, they had to get up before five o'clock in the morning, and they did their drill from five to six, or at night. They were just a grand bunch. Some of them came out of Toledo University and became lieutenant colonels and colonels. I'd get Christmas cards from them; this was many years later. It was real heartwarming.

Interviewer: What did you find must frustrating?

SMA Van Autreve: I don't think I entertained any frustrations. I was very, very happy with what I was doing. We lived on the campus. They had quarters designated. I lived on campus and we had an air

conditioner and some other conveniences of life. I worked with the Junior DEMOLAY on riflery. I worked with the Catholic high school and supported them with communications for football games. I worked with the guys at state, breaking concrete. I spent the rest of my time studying. I didn't have much free time. I think that's what causes frustration, when you feel as though you don't have anything to do or you're not making any contributions.

Interviewer: When you first got the word that you were going to be assigned to ROTC duty, what was your reaction?

SMA Van Autreve: I'll tell you how that happened. My Battalion Commander was C. Craig Cannon. Koisch had been my first Battalion Commander and he was replaced by C. Craig Cannon. Now everybody was apprehensive because Cannon had been Eisenhower's aide. Mrs. Eisenhower and General Eisenhower were the Godfather and Godmother of the children. So everybody is apprehensive about this big wheel that was coming in to take over the battalion. But he was one of the greatest people, and he was my mentor. He was my mentor. I was invited, along with my Company Commander, to participate when they had officers' call. I'm underneath of a M2 steel-widen treadway bridge and the approach is starting to sink. So I crawl under there, with another platoon sergeant, and we're trying to get some heavy timbers under there to prevent that thing from going down. Although it's merely an exercise, nonetheless we've got a brigade back there that has got to cross that bridge. I'm trying to pull this big piece of timber and all of a sudden it gets shoved toward me. I look back and there's my Battalion Commander underneath that bridge approach. I just couldn't believe it. One time he put me in charge of the company. I was acting company commander. AND... This is a long story. In those days, now we're talking 1951, '52, '53, the battalion commander never came to your house. We have a baby. Our Robin is about a year or a year-and-a-half old. Someone knocked on the door; it was Mrs. Cannon. Mrs. Cannon comes in and says, "Rita, I want to see

your baby." Rita's aghast. She trembling. She doesn't know what to do. They walked in. I had an artist paint nursery scenes on the walls. And this little kid had taken out of her diaper what should have been in the diaper and smeared it all over the wall. Mrs. Cannon cooed and picked her up, and washed her. Colonel Cannon called one day. I was getting ready to leave. He said, "I understand that you're going back to the States." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I haven't received my orders yet." He said, "Where do you thin you ought to go?" I said, "My father had emphysema and he is in bad shape. I'd like to be near dad." I couldn't think of anyplace. That was all. That was the end of the conversation. Just a couple of nights later there was a knock on the door. And in walks the Battalion Commander and his wife. Jesus, a battalion commander in 1954. So he's sitting on the couch. In one of the segments he reaches down and he said, "Look. What's this piece of paper?" I said, "Gee, I don't know." So he handed it to me and I read it. I had been assigned to Toledo University, just eighty miles from home. Cannon did that. Cannon did that. We were friends. He invited us to Heidelberg when he was a brigadier general. We met all those important people and he always never failed not to introduce us. I would have killed for that guy, and so would everybody else in the battalion. He relieved some officers and got rid of a couple of senior NCOs, but he was just the epitome of everything. He made you feel like you would give your leg before you would hurt him or do anything against him. So that's how I got to Toledo University.

Interviewer: When did you leave there?

(End Tape OH 94.2-2, Side 2)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-3, Side 1)

Interviewer: Today is February 4, 1994. This ia a continuation of the interview with Sergeant Major of the Army - Retired - Leon L Van Autreve. When our tape ended yesterday we were discussing your ROTC

assignment to Toledo University. I had just asked you when you left Toledo University. When did you leave?

SMA Van Autreve: 1957

Interviewer: From your assignment at Toledo University you went to the Armor Board at Fort Knox, Kentucky. How was you selected for that assignment?

SMA Van Autreve: Quite frankly, I did not go immediately to the Armor Board. I was assigned to the 54th Engineers and I was in the S2. I had been there for a short time and a friend of mine, who was over at the Armor Board, another engineer, came to me and said, "Van, I think you ought to try to come over because we are on new equipment that is being introduced into the Army and you have a hands-on opportunity." He said, "It's real exciting." So I put in for it. And I had known a Captain Roberts, who was over there. He helped facilitate my transfer over to the Armor Board.

Interviewer: When you were with the 54th, you were assigned to Headquarters Company for that brief time. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you say that you were in Operations?

SMA Van Autreve: In S2.

Interviewer: Tell me about your assignment to the Armor Board.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh it was fascinating. It was really great. There was a tremendous sense of independence. We would work under arduous to test the equipment. For instance; if you were going to test booby traps, you would go into a very darkened area and you would attempt to install the booby trap under those conditions. We did a lot of emplacement of mines, field fortifications, and barbed wire entanglements. We worked with the new mine detectors that were coming out that would pickup non-metallic objects. It was really neat. I had my crew and I was given the responsibility doing it. There's nobody looking over your shoulder all the time. You feel pretty independent.

As a consequence, because of that independence, you feel as though you should do just a little more work and spend a little more time to make sure that your product is better. I thoroughly enjoyed my tour with the Armor Board.

Interviewer: What duty position were you assigned to there?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I was over there working in the Engineer Section as an E7. This was about the time that the E8s were introduced. So we had about seven people who were applying for the E8 position, thinking they were in the zone of consideration. I'll tell you quite frankly, I was told that I would not be an E8 because I was Catholic. I never heard something like that before in my life. I thought that was just horrendous. But I did receive a letter from, now four-star General Bruce Clark, a personal letter to me stating that I had graduated as the number one student in his constab and I would be the E8 selected. So I then became the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Engineer Section.

Interviewer: How long were you assigned to the Board?

SMA Van Autreve: About three years.

Interviewer: Let me ask you a few questions about your first sergeant and platoon sergeant assignments. We didn't discuss that yesterday. You were assigned as a platoon sergeant to Bravo Company, 54th Engineer Battalion. As a recap, where was the 54th Engineers stationed?

SMA Van Autreve: It was a constab unit and it was stationed in Boblingen, Germany. It later made a move to Leipheim, Germany. In the initial stages I was a platoon sergeant there and I suddenly get this call to go talk to the Battalion Commander, who was a Colonel Francis P. Koisch. When you walk in the door you're filled with trepidation because in those days you are going to see a lieutenant colonel battalion commander; that's heavy. Your Company Commander is sweating out why you have to go. You're sweating out why you have to go. The

secretary said, "You can go on in." I went in and reported. He's sitting behind the desk and he said, "You're going to be First Sergeant of Headquarters Company." I said, "Sir, I don't want to be First Sergeant of Headquarters Company." I was very happy. I was in familiar surroundings. I didn't want to move out of my area. He said, "You will be the First Sergeant of Headquarters Company, period." I had no alternative. So I go over as the First Sergeant--an E6--of Headquarters Company. Well that turned out to be a blessing in disguise because that led me to become a first sergeant E7. I picked up the diamond while there. We finally became Company of the Month several times in succession. But my difficulties, I think I referred to those previously. The difficulties you have is that there is no road map on how to be a first sergeant. I didn't know what a morning report was. I didn't know what a duty roster was. So you're a self-taught first sergeant because no one has laid-out the ground work for you or given you any assistance. None of the schools I had attended prepared me for that position. That's very arduous to do that, besides getting a headquarters company, which to me is more difficult--mostly--than a line company because your people are spread all over the area. It was very rewarding for me because it did get me my E7, and I did get to wear the diamond.

Interviewer: Back then the E7 was the top man.

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. There were no E8s and E9s. That was it.

Interviewer: Tell me about the chevrons that you wore as a first sergeant E6.

SMA Van Autreve: You know, we had a difficult time because there was a period of a couple of years where there were stripe changes. In fact, we had a stripe change and I had to take one off. I went home and my father was very angry with me because he thought I had been reduced. I had a difficult time explaining that. In fact, it was difficult for me to understand. But I was wearing one down and three up, I believe at

that time.

Interviewer: Didn't the E6 have three up and two down and E7 had the master sergeant stripe.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. And you didn't know who was who, or what rank he had. That's right. I think that's another thing. When I finally got my diamond there was absolutely no difficulty in looking at myself in the mirror and knowing who I was and what I was.

Interviewer: Tell me a little about your activities when you were a first sergeant. What was the most rewarding?

SMA Van Autreve: I guess the most rewarding thing is that I had a major for a company commander who allowed me the latitude to do what I wanted. We had some heavy disciplinary problems in Headquarters Company. I realized that people would look in horror and askance at what I'm about to say, but when we had difficulty, once again the same policy applied that I used throughout my military career, you can either do it for me or you go see the Company Commander. If you went to see the Company Commander you knew automatically that would be a 104--later it was an Article 15. With me it was a rucksack. We had the same equipment. I went with you and we both marched together around the quadrangle for about an hour or an hour-and-a-half. We did that in the quadrangle so the other troops could see what was happening. So they knew there was going to be punishment of some kind if there was an infraction. We had some difficulties. I had one fellow attack me with a bunk adaptor. I had two other guys who had been under the influence of alcohol that waylaid me one Sunday afternoon as I came out of my office. We had some problems. But over a period of time those problems diminished. I guess that made me very, very happy that we got to the point and place where I didn't have to worry about whether or not I was going to have to discipline somebody every Monday morning. The other thing was, it was great for me the first time the Major and I hung that sign up that said "Company of the Month." The first time in two years

the Headquarters Company had been elected Company of the Month. Then we did that a couple of months in succession.

Interviewer: So you got outstanding support from the Major then?

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Interviewer: What did you find most frustrating when you first took over as a first sergeant, other than getting involved with the duty roster and the morning report?

SMA Van Autreve: It was a new avenue. As I told you, there was no road map to direct me in which direction to go and how to get there. The first sergeant whose place I took had been relieved. I found that very disheartening because when you're in total and in visible ignorance of something that you're about to take on, it hurts your ego. I'm not too smart anyway. I was very disappointed at the onset of that thing. But that happens in the military and you can override that.

Interviewer: How many times did you serve as a first sergeant?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I served as first sergeant there, of course. In Korea with the 54th Engineers. I was first sergeant from then on with one brief exception, when I was a master sergeant senior instructor at the University of Toledo, and a brief period of time that I was the senior bridge instructor at Fort Belvoir, prior to my getting promoted to E9 and going over to the 91st Engineer Battalion.

Interviewer: As you progressed through your different assignments as a first sergeant, did you see any change in the leadership within your companies?

SMA Van Autreve: No. See, I don't understand. There were not that many problems. The problems that began, did not occur, from my standpoint, until such time as we were in the Vietnam War and during the Post-Vietnam Era. Prior to that time, we might have somebody that had maybe a DWI or maybe there was a fight. I really had no serious leadership problems. Serious problems did not become readily apparent to me until they started around 1965, '66, '67.

Interviewer: When you were Senior Instructor in the Bridge Department at the Engineer School at Fort Belvoir, when were you assigned to that position?

SMA Van Autreve: Here was the fiasco. I was assigned to be a first sergeant at Fort Belvoir. First of all you're very disillusioned because you're coming into the organization and you find that nobody, once again, there's no inprocessing, there's no one to meet you. There's no one to "glad hand you" and say "Welcome aboard." You go into a transit billet. Here I am at ten o'clock at night and I've got to draw my linen. Then they wanted to put me out in the bay. We had some E4s and E5s who were sleeping in these nice little rooms. I queried, "Why am I going out into the bay?" Then we had a little bit of a discussion and that was kind of a forerunner of what I was about to be exposed to, because when I did get over to B Company, there was a first sergeant there. It was a very political arena. Politics, in those days, was prevalent in the Infantry Centers, the Artillery Centers, and the Engineer Centers. Fort Belvoir was no exception. I had no alternative but to accept another position, because the first sergeant had already been named and in place and there was nothing else open. They offered me the opportunity to be an instructor down in the basin and I took it.

Interviewer: As the Senior Instructor, what were your duties?

SMA Van Autreve: We did instructing in primarily float bridging. We did have a Bailey but we did M4T6s and the old M2 steel-widened treadway bridge. We had primarily bridging, and some mine warfare. But we ran the gambit of engineer subjects.

Interviewer: Also, at Belvior, you were the Battalion Sergeant Major of the 91st Engineer Battalion.

SMA Van Autreve: Let me tell you about the political aspect of this thing. I am recommended to go before the board. I had called my previous organization to make sure that my records--my 201 file--had been forwarded because they were not there. I was assured that they had

been sent. When I appeared before the board, there was a Major Cunha, C-U-N-H-A, presiding. I was told by the board that I could not appear before the board because my records were not there. I assured Major Cunha that my records had been sent because I had been in telephone communication with my previous organization. So he delayed the board. I'll never forget Major Cunha because of the pressure Major Cunha applied on the Headquarters. The records had arrived but, supposedly misplaced. Had it not been for Major Cunha I would have become a sergeant major, because he pursued the matter so diligently. They finally did get the records. They had been laying on the Sergeant Major's desk for a period of two days. You had to play the political program in order for you to survive. Those of us who did not do that suffered the consequences. It all predicated on someone like a Cunha to come along who feels that you've been maligned and does something about it.

Interviewer: Back in those days we had homesteaders and anybody new that came in were outsiders, right?

SMA Van Autreve: Homesteaders. You'd go into the NCO club and the homesteader, God forbid if you sit in his chair at the bar. I was a non-participator, but it was almost a requisite that you go to the NCO club, and while you're there you managed to buy a drink or two for the supreme beings; the senior noncommissioned officers. In fact, I had a major conflict with Tony Wagner, who was the Sergeant Major of Fort Belvoir. He came to our unit when I was Sergeant Major of the 91st and referred to us as the "Ninety Worst." I'll tell you, hell broke loose. I remember that day clearly. It was in our mess hall and we ran him out. We had some tough times. I had the opportunity to take over Fort Belvoir and I declined it because I had asked that I get people like John Spooler and a couple of other noncommissioned officers whom I knew very well and were excellent, outstanding noncommissioned officers to assist and abet me in my program. But to do it alone was virtually

impossible. So I told them "no," that I wouldn't take it unless I could get those people.

Interviewer: Was the 91st a combat engineer unit?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. But we were primarily in a support position for the Engineer School.

Interviewer: There at Fort Belvoir.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: You were also assigned as the Battalion Sergeant Major of the 317th.

SMA Van Autreve: May I go back to the 91st.

Interviewer: Sure.

SMA Van Autreve: I had been the 91st Sergeant Major for about a year-and-a-half and Colonel Clark called me in and said that I was to be interviewed by, I think his name was General Powell of CONARC (Continental Army Command). Now this came out of the blue. I don't know how it ever happened. So I go to Davison Airfield and I get on a private plane; the General's plane. You know, you've got a young kid --a sergeant major--getting on this plane flying me to CONARC Headquarters. I'm told that I'm being interviewed for the position of CONARC Sergeant Major. I talked to a Sergeant Major Green, who was THE Sergeant Major of CONARC. I said, "What does the job entail?" He said, "Oh, it's kind of ceremonial." That was the wrong word to say. So I went in to see the General. I would hope, that today, people would understand that when you're going to go see the CONARC Commander, your legs start to tremble the minute you start up the stairs to get to that office. So I am very much in awe, but I'm positive that I didn't want the job. The Executive Officer, when I told him that I didn't want the job, said, "You will do what the General wants." So I went in to see the General, saluted, and right off the bat I said, "Sir, I don't want the job." He was very gracious and asked me why. I said, "Well, I've been told that it was primarily ceremonial and I just don't want that

kind of job." We had a nice conversation. He said, "Sergeant Major, if you don't want it, you don't have to take it." And I flew back to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. But no where is there any record in my records of the fact that I had been interviewed for the position of CONARC Sergeant Major.

Interviewer: While you were at Belvoir, as a sergeant major, the Cuban Crisis broke out. Why don't you tell me about the problems that you had while you were sitting and waiting? The same problems that you addressed in a previous interview.

SMA Van Autreve: We were on alert status. We loaded up and prepared everything for the move-out, but we did not do anything right. A testimony to that was the fact that when the alert had been lifted and we unloaded, our typewriters were junk. The paper and everything was water soaked. We just did not take appropriate action and appropriate procedures in order to ensure that our equipment would be workable when we arrived on site if we did have to go. That was a lesson learned. If you do anything, do it carefully and do it well in preparation.

Interviewer: How long were you on standby?

SMA Van Autreve: We were on standby six or seven days.

Interviewer: So you did not actually move-out. You stayed there at Belvoir.

SMA Van Autreve: We stayed right at Belvior, with everything locked and loaded.

Interviewer: You were also the Sergeant Major, as I said before, of the 317th Engineer Battalion. Where was that battalion located?

SMA Van Autreve: It was located first in McNair Kaserne and was collocated with a signal unit. It was just outside of Frankfurt.

Interviewer: In one of your previous interviews you talked about the 317th and how it changed. You made a statement, to put it bluntly, "had turned into a crummy unit," before you had gotten there. When you

arrived you had to use some positive leadership. You also had to correct the situation and it turned out to be one of the better units. Tell me about the battalion when you first got there and how the transformation took place.

SMA Van Autreve: Well here you are. You're going to the 317th. Once again, no welcome committee. Rita and I arrived and we go to the snack bar. There they are, barefoot, no shirts, no undershirts, vulgarity, profanity. I admonished one of the individuals and said, "I'm here with my wife." He says, "Who gives a," you know. Well we had a slight altercation. I report for duty. I get there in the afternoon and we have a Colonel Manitsas, who had just arrived. We began discussing the problems. We were not really aware of the problems. I didn't find out what the problems were until the next morning when we attempted to have reveille, and I told you about that, previously. I also told you about the state of disrepair of the billets. I go to the motor pool and people are sitting around, lounging. One or two people are working. It was really a mess. Really a mess. I talked with Colonel Mamitsas on what to do and he said, "Use the green light principle. If I think you're going too fast, I'll just throw up a red light." So we called the first sergeants together and laid the law down. They had two weeks to get the barracks cleaned up. We would have roll call for reveille. Anybody missing roll call would come and see me, along with the first sergeant, platoon sergeant, and squad leader; the whole bunch. It took us about two months to start getting things intact. The people realized there was a reveille and there was a retreat, they would maintain clean barracks, they wouldn't have any blankets stuffed through windows, they wouldn't have loud parties at twelve or one o'clock in the morning; that took the relief of one first sergeant. Fortunately, I had a couple of other good sergeants. Williamson came in. Parson came in. Escabido came in. They were really sterling people and we worked together and really, we got the battalion squared

away, but it was a hell of a tough job. I mean it was tough.

Interviewer: What was the mission of the 317th at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: It was a combat engineer unit, but we did spend a lot of time on one of the primary facets of our endeavor, which was to cross the Rhine and any other rivers. So we were out doing a tremendous amount of bridging; both Bailey and the M2 steel-widened treadway. So we spent the majority of our time doing that.

Interviewer: So you had sections and platoons away from the companies and the battalion for extended periods of time.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, but the primary bridge site that we had was located about six or seven miles away, in Gunzburg, so we were able to do that. We made a transfer for McNair to Leipheim. That was near Gunzburg, which was a crossing site for us. Occasionally we would go out in the field and spend a week or two weeks out in the field and do that very same thing on the Rhine.

Interviewer: Tell me more about your assignment as the Brigade Sergeant Major of the 20th Engineer Brigade.

SMA Van Autreve: I've just got to tell you, an engineer escalating to any position is just something people won't believe. But here I am. I had been up for Sergeant Major of the Army. I'm assigned to the 588th Engineer Battalion in the 20th Brigade. The custom is that you spend two days at Headquarters getting acclimated and getting your information about the Brigade, its intent, and what it is supposed to be doing. We stayed in a hooch and in this building we had, at that time, visiting was the USARV Sergeant Major, and we had the 20th Engineer Brigade Sergeant Major who was there because the USARV Sergeant Major was there. There was some drinking going on. I was invited to join them, but I declined. I was taken to task by the USARV Sergeant Major because I did not join them in drinking. I went to bed. Well evidently the 20th Engineer Sergeant Major was well fortified, and when he left he stepped on a beer can, tripped, and broke his leg. Now he was about to leave

anyway, so this left the 20th Engineer Brigade Commander with a quandary. But the Warrant Officer Jackson went to General Chapman and said, "We have a Sergeant Major here that was considered for the Sergeant Major of the Army." So Chapman looked at my record and he agreed, and I became the 20th Engineer Brigade Sergeant Major because of an improper police call; someone left a beer can lying there in the path of the 20th Engineer Brigade Sergeant Major.

Interviewer: You was also over there longer than the normal eleven or twelve month tour.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah, I stayed about twenty-one or twenty-two months; I extended. We had so much turmoil and turnover, and I was strongly opposed to that because it resisted our bonding program. You've got people continually being introduced, not by units, but by ones, twos, threes, fours and it didn't give the squad, platoon, or the company that bonding that long time association brings about. I felt that I was pretty well versed in what was going on and I really did firmly believe that I could be of some degree of assistance. I felt strongly about that so that's why I extended. That did permit me to have two R&Rs (Recreation and Relaxation)). On the second R&R, my wife said to me, "If you extend one more time, somebody else may be in your bed." So I declined to extend any further.

Interviewer: Did you have very many of your battalion sergeants major that had the same feeling as you and extend their tour?

SMA Van Autreve: Not very many, but we had excellent brigade sergeants major. Once again, John Spooler was one of those who just did an excellent job. He was a good man. In fact, he and I were in consideration for that 20th Engineer Brigade Sergeant Major slot. He's a very, very good man. He did an outstanding job. Of course we had disciplinary problems. We had drive by shootings. We were collocated with the 101st Airborne and the blame of the problems rested with both. By the way George Dunaway, was the Sergeant Major of the 101st. You

know, engineers out in the field work. The Rome plow teams that we had out there, these kids were absolutely the most fantastic guys. Everyone of them should have received awards, not only because of Charlie. They're penetrating that jungle and I used to ride in there with them. You've got hornet's nests, ants, spiders, snakes. You've got every type of centipede that has ever been created, and everything that can inflict some sort of bite or wound; there out there. These kids had no showers. It's tough. They really worked hard. The thing that really got me was the minuscule application for rewards for those people who participated. We had kids out there on Route 4. They dug their own revetments. They became infantrymen at night and bulldozer operators and any kind of asphalt operators during the day. It was really, really hard. I really admired those kids. But my problem was, when I'd go out to the field, I found that not as many first sergeants were out there as should be out there. The rationale by the first sergeants was, "I've got to be back at home base in order to provide the necessary supplies for the troops in the field." That's a lot of crap! What he wanted was that air conditioned hooch with a hot and cold mamasan. That's what he wanted. So I finally worked it out with General Chapman and I would take the helicopter back and I'd pick the first sergeant up and out to the field he went. At that time, among many of the companies, the philosophy was "a senior NCO is an E7," so we got the first sergeants involved.

Interviewer: The number of personnel in the 20th Engineer Brigade was much larger than a normal brigade. Is that correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. I think we ran somewhere in the vicinity of seventeen to eighteen thousand.

Interviewer: So you was actually almost the size of a division. Just about. Wasn't you?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. And the difficulty was, they were spread throughout all of, God, throughout that entire southern area. You know,

you've got troops at My Tho. You've got troops up on Nui Ba Dien. You've got troops out with the Special Forces. You've got Lai Khe, An Loc. You can just go on and on. They were spread all over the place. In all fairness, you try to see them all, because they've got varying problems. It's amazing sometimes that the problems that were out there could have been taken care of very easily within the chain of command. One first sergeant, whom I held in extremely high regard, I had asked General Chapman to present him with a letter of appreciation. I went out to a place, out in the My Tho area, and it's just a little island accommodating this company. They're doing some road work. It was a very desolate area; a tough area. The first person that he took me around and introduced me to was the "burn man." Now as you know, in Vietnam we got rid of fecal matter by burning. Here's this kid out there, clean, neat, not overly articulate, but very proud of what he was doing. Now it was a necessity that you have this person. He was vital to the sanitation program. He introduced me to this guy and told me what a great job this kid was doing. This kid told me, "I know a lot of people don't want this job." He said, "But I feel that I'm pretty important." He went on to tell me how he did it and everything else. But the thing that impressed me was the First Sergeant was aware of the fact that this kid was doing this job and doing it well. You know, a lot of people are only interested with a few people or with the interest of the senior people in his command as opposed to the private and the PFC. This first sergeant was totally aware of all of his people. So I had General Chapman send him a letter of appreciation for his excellent leadership.

Interviewer: You know, for future references for those who might be reading this years from now, you might explain how the latrine system worked, with our cutoff fifty-five gallon drums, etc., so they know what a "burn man" is.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, that's right. When you go to the john

you cannot afford, because it was our policy, to contaminate the environment. So what you've got to do is get rid of the waste. That's done by burning. Now here's a cutoff fifty-five gallon drum filled with fecal matter. You add some diesel fuel and burn it. The odor is not the greatest in the world. It certainly isn't the cleanest job in the world. It hardly is the most desirable job in the world. But somebody has got to do it. This kid did it and did it well and felt that he was performing a service, which he did. Which he did. People, down the road, most probably won't believe that that thing was as prevalent as it was in Vietnam.

Interviewer: Just like a lot of soldiers today. If you mention KP, it's foreign to them.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, absolutely. Kitchen Police, no. You know it wouldn't be a bad idea if we had kitchen police and we had grease traps so that some of these young men who refuse to comply, that would be a nice little additional chore for them.

Interviewer: Particularly the "outside man."

SMA Van Autreve: Particularly the grease trap cleaner.

Interviewer: When you got ready to leave the 20th Engineer Brigade, you did not have an assignment. It is kind of interesting how you received your next assignment and how much flack that kinda created for Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway, when you went up to Alaska.

SMA Van Autreve: I will allude to that a little later, if I may. But in retrospect, going back to the 20th Engineer Brigade. I spent a great deal of time with General Chapman going to change of command ceremonies. You know, we had a six-month tour for officers, mostly, in order for them to get command time. The soldier, the platoon sergeant, and the first sergeant was there for a year. I think that contributed to casualties by virtue of the fact that, you know, the young captain or major comes in and he's there for a period of six months. He spends a month or two getting acquainted. He's got his philosophies that he

attempts to apply. He doesn't have a true knowledge of what Charlie is like. He's there five-and-a-half months, then he gets ready to go and he gets the "medal package." I think that the enlisted people are very much maligned from the standpoint of receiving just reward for their contributions.

Interviewer: That problem also occurred at the battalion level too, didn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. Absolutely. I can cite an example where a bridge was blown. General Chapman was not there and I flew out to the bridge site. I got there about an hour-and-a-half after the incident. We had people already working and they were getting ready to put in a floating bridge to take the place of the concrete bridge that had been blown. They were doing a great job. This senior officer came by about four hours after I had been there. The bridge is almost completed. I sit on the awards board for the 20th Brigade and I receive this recommendation that he receive the Silver Star for being at the scene and for his major contributions. Hell, he didn't make any contribution. But that's the sort of thing that really go to you. The other thing that got to me in Vietnam was the incongruity of the environment in Saigon as opposed to My Tho, Nui Ba Dien, Tay Ninh. You know, for the soldiers out there, that was horrible. They not only had to survive Charlie, and all kind of booby trap devices, they had to survive kids attempting to kill the soldier. They had to survive all kinds of bugs, insects, and everything in the world. Then you go back and take a look at the people in Saigon who are eating steak. I told you about the sergeant major who had this very luxurious area. Half of it was devoted to a living area and the other half was devoted to refrigerators and freezers filled with all the exotic foods. There was too much disparity between the fighting guy and non, non, non-fighting guy, and that was hard to take. I imagine if I were an infantryman and I came back into the Long Binh area for two weeks of showers and

cleaning up, I would have one hell of a resentment when I looked around and I saw the massage parlors, the theaters, the clubs, and all that sort of thing, and then I had to go back out in the boonies while they stayed. But getting back to the Dunaway incident. Dunaway and I were collocated; the 101st was right next to the 20th Engineer Brigade Headquarters and we got together quite often. He came by one day--it was at noon--to tell me that he had been selected as the Sergeant Major of the Army. While we're having our conversation, he said to me, "The reason I dropped by is to tell you that I'm very much impressed with your effort and what you do. I'm going to attempt to do the best I can to aid you in future assignments." I have a letter. I have it here, where in George Dunaway said that I had not an assignment as of yet, but he had recommended me to General Seamons as one of the contenders for First Army. Well, the time went by and I finally received orders to go to Alaska. What I didn't know at the time, and what I did not find out until later was, there were a lot of people vying for that position in Alaska. In fact, one sergeant major wrote me and asked me to trade jobs with him, because he wanted to go to Alaska. Then I find out that George's assistant had gone downstairs--it used to be in the basement--to the Assignment Branch. The sergeant major there used to carry a slip with seven names on it; those were rotators. They were senior noncommissioned officers who continually rotated from senior position to senior position. That was the political program, once again. But while he was there he overheard the conversation that Van Autreve was not going to Alaska, that someone else was going in his stead; one of the favorite seven. Well he told George about it. Now George went to those people and told them that he recommended that I be, he did not say that I HAD TO BE, but he did not think that it was fair. It involved the two-star general and a three-star general and it finally involved the Chief of Staff of the Army. I did go to Alaska. And I will never, never stop thanking George Dunaway for having

influenced me, not as an engineer, but as a sergeant major who he felt had some upward mobility capability. And I appreciate that.

Interviewer: We were talking yesterday how, for so many years, you got stuck in a battalion assignment, and had you not gone to Alaska where you had a general to recommend you, it would have been difficult, or maybe you would not have been selected as Sergeant Major of the Army.

SMA Van Autreve: Well that's right. You know, here you are. You vie for consideration as Sergeant Major of the Army. You go through Group; you're selected. You go to V Corps; you're selected. You go to Seventh Army; you're selected. You go to USAREUR; you're selected. General O'Meara writes a personal letter to General Johnson about being considered. You get a nice letter from General Johnson that you're one of the twenty-seven finalists. Congratulations, and all that sort of thing. But when you're not selected, you don't take any one of those positions that you have obviously been selected in preference to the existing or incumbent sergeant major. I go back to battalion.

(End Tape OH 94.2-3, Side 1)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-3, Side 2)

Interviewer: Sergeant Major, when the last tape ended you were talking about being selected over in Germany, while you were at a battalion. You were nominated to represent USAREUR and you became the representative for USAREUR as a nominee for Sergeant Major of the Army. When you wasn't selected, you went back to your battalion. Tell me about your thoughts when that occurred.

SMA Van Autreve: You see, quite frankly, knowing the climate by that time, having been in the Army for some time, knowing the climate you accepted the political consequences of being an engineer. The second time I went up, when Copeland was chosen, the thing that go to me a little bit was: we're lined up--the six or seven aspirants for the position--and here two or three generals come down and they say, "Hello, how are you?" "Great." They come to me and look at me with a absent

look in their eyes. "Who and the hell is this guy?" So everybody else is well known because they've all been down the same road in the infantry, Special Forces, whatever, but this engineer, nobody knows. So Copeland is chosen and I go all the way back down to my battalion. But you sort of anticipate that sort of thing after a time.

Interviewer: Let me ask you about your assignment up in Alaska. I would like to address a problem that I understand has existed for quite some time in Alaska. In 1983, one of the NCOs from the Sergeants Major Academy went to Fort Richardson to visit the NCO Academy. Upon his return to Fort Bliss, he stated that he was amazed how long some of the NCOs stationed there had been in Alaska. He also made the remark that some of the NCOs were more interested in talking about the fine hunting and fishing than the training of young NCOs. Was this unique to this particular time frame or did a similar situation exist when you were in Alaska?

SMA Van Autreve: Well first and foremost, General Kelly B. Lemmon, who was an old cavalry officer, had requested somebody from outside of the infantry arena to be his Sergeant Major. He was intentionally sent there for the purpose of getting those problems straightened out. You know, in those days senior NCOs visited troops units during Saturdays and Sundays, on occasion, to find out how they were doing. I had been there about two or three weeks and I discussed with the General the fact that on Saturdays and Sundays there was a complete absence of officers and senior noncommissioned officers. So on a Friday afternoon, two o'clock, along with a group of MPs, we went out the main gate. Here we've got this long line of traffic and the MPs are taking license numbers and names. The officers reported to General Kelly B. Lemmon and the noncommissioned officers reported to me. It took about three days to interview all those people. General Kelly B. Lemmon informed the officers that there would be a letter of reprimand. I did not have that tool but I made them aware of the fact that there would be a

problem if there was a repetition and from then on there would be very few cars leaving post, camp, or station before four-thirty in the afternoon. It was really horrible. Here we are, we got a population of E1s, '2s, '3s, '4s, '5s, '6s left totally alone in that environment. The hunting and fishing equipment, trailers, and everything else were all taken up by the officers and noncommissioned officers. So we had to assume that there was a democratic way of doing this so that there was an apportionment not solely to the E1s, '2s and '3s, but a slice to them, a slice to the NCOs, and a slice to the officers. The same thing with cabins down at Seward, Alaska, which is a favorite place to go and fish. We had boats down there; Army boats. We had to ensure that a certain amount of those cabins would go to the lower grades, and then entice them to go because they were afraid to go because they thought that once they got there some officer or senior NCO would bump them. We realized that there ought to be a slice to go to the officers. There ought to be a slice for the noncommissioned officers. But there also needs to be a slice, and not a disproportionate share, for the E1s, '2s, '3s, '4s, '5s. This kid, this E4 or E5, is married and he loves his wife and his kids as much as I love mine. You don't treat them too fairly, but you don't treat them unfairly. That message got out after a while and the troops responded very favorably.

Interviewer: Where was your Headquarters located?

SMA Van Autreve: We were collocated with the Air Force right outside of Anchorage, Alaska. And then we had a headquarters that was at Fairbanks. There was a brigadier general there. Then we had Fort Greely, which was our Northern Warfare Training Center. It was smaller and was commanded by a colonel.

Interviewer: Then, of course, you were at Fort Richardson.

SMA Van Autreve: Fort Richardson, which is near Anchorage, Alaska and collocated with Elmendorf, which is the Air Force Base.

Interviewer: Also during that period of time, the Army came up

with the idea of the Junior Enlisted Council, the 24-Hour Hotline, the Open Door Policy, and other programs like that for the junior enlisted personnel. It created a lot of problems throughout the Army. Did you have a lot of problems with these programs we had to appease the enlisted soldiers and give them all the rights and, basically, take most of the rights away from the officers and NCOs?

SMA Van Autreve: I was so disillusioned that I went to General Hollingsworth; he now lives here in San Antonio and I see quite often. I went to him and I wanted to retire. Now I was not privy to attend the meetings. We had an E4 Council, with their wives, with General Hollingsworth. Then we had second lieutenants. As you said, we had the 24-Hour Hotline. Anyone could call in on the 24-Hour Hotline, castigate his company commander, castigate his battalion commander, castigate his first sergeant and sergeant major, and Colonel Zimbric would come to me and want me to do something about it. I would refuse. I said, "If the man has something to say, let him come here and say it, accompanied by his first sergeant who he is maligning, or his company commander, and let him tell me, or tell you." Zimbric had been one hell of a battalion officer but he came over on that hotline business and he just went ballistic. Then I'm called in by the General because an E4's wife had a problem. The heads of lettuce in Elmendorf were bigger than the heads of lettuce in our commissary at Fort Rich. I had to drive over to Elmendorf to look at lettuce heads, come back and match it against lettuce heads at the Fort Rich commissary. Now the difference was that one was sold by size and the other by weight. I was so angry that I took a head of lettuce, took it in with me and slammed it down on the table. When it was over I went to the General and I said, "General, I'm going to retire. This is just too much." You know, we had outstanding company commanders who had absolutely nothing to say. The second lieutenant ruled as a king. The same thing in the enlisted ranks. E4s and E5s were telling first sergeants what to do. The theater line became so bad

that we had to police it with the MPs. I'll never forget. I went to the theater. I'm with my wife. These two fellows were going to buck the line. I walked up--I was very nice about--and I said to them, "Look, you know that that's inappropriate; bucking the line." This one guy threatened me and said, "I've got something in my pocket. If I pull it out your 'A' is grass." I very forcefully told him that he was dumb enough to be wearing a field jacket with his name on it. So we took care of that the next day. I go into the theater. Now I had not been to the theater; this is my first time. I go into the theater and the "Star Spangled Banner" is playing and nobody is standing up. They've in there and they've got these canvas bags. It was a thing to do for a while. It's sort of a canvas bag and it holds wine. They're drinking wine and smoking. I went ballistic. I went over and got a couple of MPs and we turned the lights on. I said, "You can get your money back, but anybody in here that does not stand-up for the "Star Spangled Banner," the National Anthem, when it's played, and we're not going to stop playing it," which they wanted us to do for a while. I don't know if they do now or not. But I said, "you're out. You've got a problem, and it's going to be with me." I was so mad. I was so mad. Kelly B. Lemmon, he got madder than I did. He threatened to close the theater. So we had a meeting with all of the first sergeants and sergeants major and told them, "That theater will be closed if you do not get your people straightened out. You go and you find out what's happening, because we're not going to tolerate some one not standing up when they play the National Anthem. And they're going to stop this drinking in the theater." You know, women refused to go to the theater. And here, old dumb me, I'm in an all-male line and I'm with my wife, because I didn't know that happened. There were a lot of problems. Oh my God. The NCO Academy. I go over there and there's a captain in charge of the NCO Academy, who is being relieved. Who is being relieved. So I went to the General, and this time it's Hollingsworth, and I said, "Sir,

let's put a senior NCO in this thing and see what happens." You've got to know Hollingsworth. He skated up one side and down the other and he said if it doesn't work, I'll fire you and all that sort of thing. But we did manage a turnaround. They would take those senior NCOs, attending that NCO Academy, and they couldn't march a platoon to the right or left, or do an about face. It was absolutely horrible. They didn't pay attention in class because if you flunk, so what. You know, it didn't make any difference. If you don't want to go, you don't want to go. We had a hard time changing that around. But we had a good system. Lemmon and Hollingsworth, both would call in the officers and I'd get the senior NCOs. We got that turned around. We turned out to have a pretty damned good NCO academy at Fort Rich. It had been up at Wainwright but we moved it down so that we could keep closer control. We had some tough times. And you referred to a big problem. A major problem was these people had longevity. They were up there four, five, six years, because the hunting and the fishing and everything else was great. They had been allowed to get off post about two o'clock on a Friday afternoon and have a whole weekend. We stopped that deal. I had a meeting with all the sergeants major. I said, "We're going to meet once a month with all the senior NCOs; first sergeants and sergeants major. We're going to operate in this environment," I had a big wheel, "no one will sit with the same guy every time. You're not going to bring your unit in and sit with your unit people. We're going to mix you up." I said, "We'll have a formal function, in two months, in dress blues. One of the first sergeants got up and said, "I don't have dress blues." I said, "Get a pair." So we're walking out and he's dumb enough to say "Just who in the hell does that sergeant major think he is, telling me to get dress blues?" So I went back and went over his records. He had been there five years. I went to Hollingsworth and said, "I'm going to fire this guy." He said, "Go ahead." I gave the first sergeant two weeks to get out, move, find some place to go. He

came in and he had tears in his eyes. He wanted to know why. I said, "Because you've been here five years. You've been fishing too long. You've been hunting too long. You're going to go." I said, "Besides, I don't appreciate the fact that you made the remark 'who and the hell do I think I am'." Somebody said, "Gee, that's kind of harsh." Harsh, hell. You had to be on the ground and see what happened there. Because I had a tough enough time. Here I am, an engineer, in this environment with two infantry brigades, artillery, and everything else, and I'm having enough problems surviving in that environment. At night, every night, I'd study. I always had a policy. I would let them know, twenty-four hours in advance, that I was coming. I did that for two reasons. The foremost reason was that I wanted to get the manuals that pertained to the artillery so I could get five or six key technical questions. They thought I was smart as hell because I would go out there with those five or six questions on the artillery, or the infantry, or whatever. AND it gave them a forewarning that I was coming so possibly they could prepare a little better. They thought that was fair of me to do that than just hitting them on a moment's notice. The biggest reason I did it was so I could prepare some questions that made them think I knew what I was talking about. We had problems. I went to Greely. The sergeant major was so proud. He takes me into this room and it's got this black light. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Interviewer: Yes.

SMA Van Autreve: That's all that there. You could smell the marijuana. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well this we call the 'Isolation Room.' Here's the place you can be who you want to be." I said, "You've got a paint job coming up. This week you're going to paint that room and you're going to get rid of all that crap." You know, it was hard for these people to get accustomed to that because we were in this "The Army Wants to Join You" philosophy and that was a bunch of crap. Thank God I was in Alaska and I had generals like Lemmon

and Hollingsworth and Gettys that allowed me some latitude in trying to get that stuff squared away. We had a search and seizure problem. This major in the air unit broke into this guys locker and he found a couple of thousand dollars, a loaded weapon, and everything else. Because it was not an appropriate search and seizure, the case was thrown out of court. Oh, we just had all kinds of problems. I'd like to say this. We had our proportionate share of Blacks. We had some senior Black NCOs who were outstanding NCOs. And they suffered more than anyone else, because they were known as "Oreos." Their tires were slashed. Rocks were thrown through their windows. A good Black noncommissioned officer suffered hell. They suffered hell. Too much support was given to those who were non-contributors as opposed to the contributors. I have five or six that I still communicate with, because they stayed with it when it was tough and it was a hard life for them.

Interviewer: The amazing thing about the Army, when we came up with that slogan "The Army Wants to Join You," how things seemed to come apart at the seams and how quickly we finally got things together when we changed the philosophy and started making them be accountable and when things became more challenging for them. I remember that at that period of time many of us thought the Army would never recover. During that period of time things were terrible.

SMA Van Autreve: That was hard. But, on the other hand, I will say that the Alaskan soldier is the best trained soldier in the world because he works under some very arduous conditions. In the summertime he's out there in the tundra and they've got the "no see em" who can cause your eyes to swell shut. The netting is not small enough to preclude their intrusion. They get in and they bite and sting. The wintertime is horrendous because people develop that "cocoon philosophy." You're out there and you're in a nice warm tent in sub-zero temperatures. You have a hard time and it's a true exercise in leadership getting that guy out to go defecate. That's true. He doesn't

want to go out there to do it. You've got a hard time because the guy wants to go to bed; he's tired. But you want to make sure that he's got dry socks for tomorrow. Dragging an "aikio" through the snow is tough. An aikio is a sled with your equipment. That's a tough one. You've got to keep your equipment running because everything freezes up on you. Your gas lines break. Tires go to the dogs. You have a hard time maintaining your vehicles and keeping them in an operating condition. Imagine yourself working on an engine when it's twenty below zero. Those kids deserve a lot of credit. We had our problems but we had a balance.

Interviewer: Did you ever work with the Alaskan National Guard?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh absolutely! Absolutely. In fact, I guess I was the first guy to invite their senior NCOs to participate whenever we had any kind of a social event with our sergeants major. I would travel out to the villages with them. We had been told that there was a total lack of interest in the Eskimo National Guard and we tried to alleviate that.

Interviewer: I understand that because of their mission, particularly along the border and the Bering Strait, some were allowed them to keep their weapons and equipment at their homes. They are really dedicated people.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. In fact, I went out to St. Lawrence Island, which is very, very close to Russia, as well as the United States, and spent a week out there. You have to give those people credit, because here we are freezing to death and they're so acclimated to that low temperature that they function very, very well. The biggest thing is we failed in indicating to them an appreciation for their value. I must say that General Hollingsworth was very appreciative of them and we made it a point to visit them.

Interviewer: What do you think is the most rewarding about your assignment in Alaska?

SMA Van Autreve: The most rewarding is to go out and see these

noncommissioned officers operating under such arduous conditions and doing it so willingly. We had a contingency mission. I don't know if they still have it. Some of the flights that go across to Europe fly the polar route and we had a contingency mission in case that one of those went down. We had the troops jump in to provide immediate emergency care. Then we used Point Barrow as a jump off point to go to the pole. This is on the North Pole. A follow on. Now I want to tell you, the North Pole is cold. The silence is noisy.

(Interview was briefly interrupted by a telephone call.)

Interviewer: We had a short break. Sergeant Major would you continue talking about the North Pole.

SMA Van Autreve: The 75th Rangers jumped in. They were the initial group that made the foray. The temperature may have been thirty below zero, but your wind chill build-up, now that makes a jump a little difficult to do. But when you looked out you saw the undulating aspect of the North Pole and all of these ice flows that had built-up. It made it a very difficult area to jump into, and these guys jumped. There were some casualties. Fortunately on the first one we had very few. But it was a tough area to jump into. You had to withstand the cold and then you take a look at the landing site. You've got very few places that you have a level enough surface that you can land without hitting one of these ice flows that's sticking up at a thirty-five or forty-five degree angle. They were good soldiers. They were outstanding soldiers. You know, I took my jump training while I was in Alaska. I don't know if we've covered that heretofore or not.

Interviewer: We have.

SMA Van Autreve: We have? Then I won't go into that again. But it certainly was a pleasure to work with those soldiers out there.

Interviewer: I don't think I've ever met anybody who was stationed in Alaska who didn't like the duty. Everybody liked the duty. What do you think was the most appealing thing? Even the people who were

stationed far up north they, just liked duty in Alaska.

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think that most of the people who were there volunteered to go there and they tried desperately to go there because of the hunting and fishing capability. If you were to run a survey you would find that ninety-five percent of them were avid fishermen and hunters. Now you can't say that that attitude about liking Alaska so well applied also to the distaff side of the house. Because a lot of women had this tenancy to go into this cocoon program. They didn't want to go out because it was too cold. The difficulties, particularly with those people who were forced to live off post, here you take a woman out of Iowa, Washington, New York and you put her into that environment, and they have one car; some have no car. They have one car, so she's forced to stay home. She gets very, very tired of being housebound because the weather precludes her going out to do any number of things. A lot of the women did not like it there. They did not like it there.

Interviewer: Let me ask you about your promotion to E9. Then we'll talk briefly about the family, and then we'll get to your tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army. When were you promoted to E9?

SMA Van Autreve: I was promoted to E9 at Fort Belvoir, Virginia in 1962.

Interviewer: What was your assignment at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: That's when I was the Master Sergeant Senior Instructor.

Interviewer: Okay. When you make the rank of Command Sergeant Major where were you assigned at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: I was in the 20th Engineer Brigade. I was in that first listing that came out.

Interviewer: That was in Vietnam.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. I'd like to address that for a moment, if I may.

Interviewer: Sure.

SMA Van Autreve: You know, it's really nice. You suddenly become a command sergeant major and you get a nice letter from General Westmoreland and all of the generals are saying, "Hey, this is really great. You're a command sergeant major." I'm saying to myself, "What the hell does it mean? All you get is a piece of paper saying you're a command sergeant major. Suddenly I'm wearing this wreath. What does it mean? What do I have to do? Do I have any additional duties? Nothing is said about the requirements of being a command sergeant major. I don't know how it came about. I don't know what it's for. I don't know why it is. You know, it's just something that I'm wearing and there are so many people congratulating me for it, it must be worthwhile. It must be something great. But what does it mean? Once again, there's no road map laid out for me as to what's the meaning behind all of this. I know that it differentiates me from sergeants major, but that's not such a big deal." I just queried myself and talked to other people, but I couldn't find out why I am a command sergeant major. "What is the intent and purpose of doing so? Is it a recognition? If so, say so." There were very, very limited guidelines or information about the assumption of command sergeant major.

Interviewer: Were the other sergeants major equally confused?

SMA Van Autreve: I was the only one in the 20th Engineer Brigade that had been selected. There weren't very many so I didn't have anybody to talk to. I tried to talk to the USARV Sergeant Major but he had not been selected. He wasn't very happy about that.

Interviewer: Did you have any kind of promotion or recognition ceremony when you became Command Sergeant Major of the 20th Brigade?

SMA Van Autreve: Well let's see. I got letters from everybody, from General Westmoreland on down through General Chapman, who was the Brigade Commander. He said to me, "What does this mean, sergeant major?"

I said, "I don't know. I don't know, general. Perhaps it's a recognition factor, but I truthfully cannot tell you why." He just shook his head. But he wrote a letter of congratulations anyway.

Interviewer: Now I'd like to talk about your family. Once again I want to say that I thoroughly enjoyed spending yesterday evening with you and your lovely wife Rita. There's no doubt that Rita played a tremendous part in your life. Let me ask you about that special lady. What was Rita's maiden name?

SMA Van Autreve: Spinoza. S-P-I-N-O-Z-A

Interviewer: Where was she born?

SMA Van Autreve: She was born in Norwich, Connecticut.

Interviewer: What was the occupations of her parents?

SMA Van Autreve: Her father was a tailor, but her father and mother divorced when she was at a very early age. Her mother was a housewife. There were thirteen children originally. Two of them died at an early age, so there were eleven children in the family. So in addition to going to school, everybody was forced to work to contribute to the family's welfare.

Interviewer: When and how did you meet Rita?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh this is really strange. I'm home on leave in Delphus. My brother-in-law, who lives in Van Wert, Ohio had a small, small moving company. He called me and he said, "Van, I'm really hard up. I need someone to help on a moving job." He said, "The driver is sick and the helper is sick." He said, "So I've got to do the job and could you help me?" I said, "Okay." So here we go. Now Rita is from Brooklyn, New York and she has come to Van Wert, Ohio to take care of her sister Jean's son, because Jean had tuberculosis. They were still in the process of moving; moving by packer, my brother-in-law. We drive up. Rita swears to this day that she looked out the window and it was a case of love at first sight. I'm wearing a white t-shirt and khaki trousers, you know. She thought that I just looked so great. So we

made the move. And I've always said that I moved not only the furniture, but I must have moved Rita also. Now she's much younger than I am. This kid, you know, she's kind of pestering me a little bit. As we moved into the other house, on the landing she stopped and gave me a paper with her telephone number on it. I thought, "Gee, that's kind of bold." Once again, she's a little young. We finished the moving job and I remember saying to Jean, her sister, "Well, we appreciate being here." She said, "We'd like to have you come back for dinner." Well that's unusual. You know, you're a mover and somebody wants you to come back for dinner. But then I said to myself, "You know, people say that sort of thing. They invite you to come but they really don't mean it and hope you don't show up." About a week later I come home from work and my mother said, "You got a telephone call from a Jean Spinoza." I said, "Well, what about?" "They're inviting you for dinner." The mother had come from New York and they wanted me to meet the mother. Well, I'm moving into this trap and I didn't know it at the time. So I go over and we have dinner. The mother is very impressed with the fact that I'm in the military; that was a Godsend. She really thought the military was a great place and being a soldier was outstanding. I got along with her tremendously. So that led to a date. The first date I had with her, I met her at a place called "Dolly's Ice Cream Parlor." Here she was, surrounded by three or four giggling young girls. I thought, "Oh, this is it. No way. This is not going to happen." But I did. We dated. And all of a sudden, you know, the feeling starts creeping up. She said it was instantaneous. For me it took some time. But I'm out on another date with another girl and I suddenly realized that I'd rather be with Rita, so I called Rita up. This Carol that I was with wasn't too happy about it. But the greatest thing that has ever happened to me in my entire life was marry Rita.

Interviewer: When did you get married?

SMA Van Autreve: November 18, 1950.

Interviewer: Where was the marriage ceremony held?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, let me say this. This General Koisch, who told me I would be a first sergeant, and who was so hard, so callous, so tough, had called me into his office once again. It was the second time I went in to see him. On this occasion he said, "I understand that you're going home to get married." I said, "Yes sir." He says, "When?" I said, "Well we hope the ceremony is going to be on the eighteenth of November." He said, "That's all." My Company Commander said, "What did he say? What did he say?" I said, "I don't know. I just walked in and he said 'I hear you're going to get married,' and he said, 'when'." Two weeks later I received a set of orders to go to Heidelberg. I was going to be on an indoctrination program. They were going to indoctrinate me about Germany for a couple of weeks and send me back to the States. I was to have seven days leave in the States and then come back on a troop ship. And my job was to acquaint people with the customs of Germany. I didn't have to pay. I didn't cost me any money. The time was off. He set this whole thing up. This grouchy old garrulous character whom everybody was so terrified of had done that for me. I went home. Married in New York City. Rita, at the time, worked for Paramount Pictures and Charles Simonelli was the president of Paramount. He arranged for a honeymoon night at the Waldorf Astoria. Now I am terrified because I had seen the Waldorf Astoria in movies. I said, "Are you sure? Are you positive?" She said, "Yes." We get to the Waldorf Astoria and I said, "Van Autreve." Well they had listed me as Leon Autreve. The gay said, "We have no record." I said to Rita, "See. See what happened. This is not the right place." You know, it's so opulent. God, it's so gaudy. It's so expensive looking. I just felt uncomfortable being there. I said, "Are you sure. It's Van Autreve." He said, "We've got an Autreve here." I said, "Oh thank God." (Sergeant Major Van Autreve then made the sign of the Cross.) Boy we had a suite. We had champagne. We had the fruit. We had

everything. We had everything. That was truly a great, great present; that night. You see, one of the advantages also of my being there was, there had been some problems with my citizenship. So I had to go to Toledo, Ohio to verify the fact that I had derivative citizenship as of 1938. So part of our honeymoon was to go and do that also. Then I was on "Operation Briefer" and came back to Germany on the troop ship. My job was indoctrinating everybody on customs. What to do and what not to do in Germany. What the German people were like, and that sort of things. I was very much impressed and I remain for ever indebted to General Koisch.

Interviewer: Did you just have one trip across doing that?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Just one. He did that in order for me to be able to come back to the States to get married.

Interviewer: Before I continue on asking questions about Rita, let me ask you something that neglected to ask yesterday. Tell me how you became a citizen of the United States.

SMA Van Autreve: Well that caused a quandary. There was some difficulty and I've got seven or eight endorsement letters about whether or not I was a citizen of the United States. First of all I went to Hopkinsville, Kentucky and they couldn't give me an answer. I wrote to Washington, D.C. and they couldn't give me an appropriate answer. Their recommendation was that I go to Toledo, Ohio, where the records were kept for the State of Ohio, which I did--along with Rita--during one of our honeymoon trips. They were able to verify the fact that in 1938 I had received what is known as a "derivative citizenship," which you acquire when your parents become citizens. So that cleared up that matter.

Interviewer: Let's go back to talking about Rita. After you got married, where was the first Army post where Rita joined you?

SMA Van Autreve: She joined me in Leipheim, Germany. Of course you had a waiting period of about four months, but we were very, very

fortunate. We had brand new quarters. Brand new quarters. She came over on the U.S.S. America and took a train from port to Leipheim. When she got off that train I thought that was the most beautiful thing that I had ever seen in my whole life, and it's been that way ever since.

Interviewer: Did she adapt to Army life real well?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes she did. You know, in those days we didn't have all those things available to the family that we have today. Our Sunday afternoons were spent playing softball with those people who lived in the area. We created our own programs and games. We had no ACS (Army Community Service). We had none of the other places you could go. If you had a problem you went to the first sergeant. And he didn't have too many tools to take care of your problem. The Army has come a long way from the standpoint of supporting families and family considerations. There weren't too many families because, you know, a lot of our soldiers became enamored with German women. We had a USAREUR Circular 3 which was semi-prohibitive and made it very difficult for you to marry a German gal. We just didn't have the number of married people in those days as we have today. We didn't have the number of cars, kids, and cats that we have today.

Interviewer: Most of you married people were of the higher ranks, weren't they?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Where were the best quarters that you lived in and where were the worst quarters that you lived in?

SMA Van Autreve: You're going to say that this guy, you know, is off his rocker. Nice quarters make a difference. But if you're with your family, poor quarters become nice quarters. Your wife does a great deal to enhance the quarters. You know, I went to visit Leipheim a couple of years ago with Rita and I looked in the quarters, and God, they seemed so small as compared to here. Yet, we moved into brand new quarters and we thought they were great. We thought they were fantastic.

I don't remember ever living in bad quarters. I didn't appreciate my quarters very much when I was in Fischstein when I was Sergeant Major of the 317th at Leipheim, because I was the coordinator for the whole area. Those were very difficult times and I didn't get to see too much of the quarters. But quarters just don't mean that much to you as long as you can be with your family. I say that sincerely. Some people think he's putting out hog wash. Now when we moved into quarters at Fort Myer, a couple of changes were made that enhanced our quarters and made up appreciate them. The Sergeant Major of the Army had a basement that other people didn't have, and it was furnished. We didn't have the old ring around shower. We had a regular state line shower. Rita got so incensed because we were the only people that received it, she went to see the Commanding General of MDW (Military District of Washington) and asked why, that it was unfair that we should receive this consideration and they did not. So he came down and looked at it and they changed all the showers on Fort Myer for the enlisted people. We had some small things that made living better.

(End Tape OH 94.2-3, Side 2)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-4, Side 1)

Interviewer: Sergeant Major, we were talking about the different quarters over in Germany. You were talking about the quality of quarters you had at Fort Myer. You were addressing the shower situation and how Rita talked to the Commanding General of MDW.

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think the general's name was General Davidson. He came by on a tour and he knew Rita pretty well. Rita was very, very active, so he knew Rita pretty well. He asked her if there were any problems and Rita said, "We have this shower curtain on a circular pipe." She said, "You have to confine yourself within that curtain and it's not very convenient." So he said, "We'll take care of that. Anything else." She said, "No." They fixed it and he came by, about a week later, and dropped in for coffee. He's got this entourage

of engineers that go with him every place he goes. They were all having coffee and Rita says, "You know, I feel a little embarrassed because we've got this new shower system and nobody else has, and it's not very fair." The general says, "Well, I guess you're right. Maybe we ought to take care of that." So Rita's contribution to that street was the fact that they got new showers.

Interviewer: The quarters that you had at Fort Myer, where were they located?

SMA Van Autreve: It was 835A. We were located right across from the old commissary. It was down toward the school.

Interviewer: The reason I asked, over the years they have moved the Sergeant Major of the Army's quarters several times. Haven't they?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. What has happened, you know, each of the Sergeants Major, I think, has made living just a little bit better for his successor. I think that's great. Every one has further enhanced the quarters for the Sergeant Major of the Army. I think that every one of the Sergeants Major of the Army has done something a little better for the person who followed him.

Interviewer: After you married, Rita was very active throughout the remainder of your military career. Tell me some of her activities, first of all when you were a first sergeant and then a sergeant major. And as you moved up, the activities increased. Tell me how she got involved.

SMA Van Autreve: In the very, very early days, when I was the First Sergeant of A Company, in Leipheim, Germany, we only had four cars in our parking lot. We had few people who were married, and Rita would visit. Rita did all the Christmas decorating in the mess hall and in the building; she's rather artistic. Halloween or anything that came around, she did all of the decoration for everything. Every Sunday morning we'd go to church. After church I would go visit the company; check out the company. She'd go into the dining facility and she would

have coffee. The first couple of times there would be one or two of the people sitting with her. Pretty soon she had an audience of twenty, twenty-five, thirty people. Then it became forty or fifty people, because the kids didn't have anything else to do on a Sunday morning. They would come in and chat with Rita because, I guess, Rita was sort of like their mother, or sister, or girlfriend. That was her major contribution in those days because there just weren't that many things available. She later progressed in ACS. What we used to like to do is visit the E1, '2, '3 wives clubs. We used to go to those quite often, which was very rewarding because they're very candid; the wives of an E. They'll tell you what they think, even if you're the Sergeant Major of the Army's wife; that doesn't make a difference to them. But if you join and stay with them and start the interaction, pretty soon they begin to respect the fact that, hey, you're a decent human being. You're no different that we are. The one thing that I think Rita liked and hated to do the most was when she was with the Arlington ladies. They would be present for the funerals. There would be occasions where no one would be there, or maybe a sister or a wife. That really broke her heart.

Interviewer: She was on a list, along with some of the generals' wives, to present the colors to the family.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. She was very, very involved in every aspect. Now she is not the authoritarian type. She really is not. In Alaska she became the honorary president. She didn't like the title because she felt that degraded the title of president for the person that did the work. She really got along beautifully. She got along beautifully with everyone, and the great thing about her, Rita, to this day, my wife, having been in the military all these year, is not too sure whether he is a general or a corporal. That's the truth. That's the truth, because she appreciates the fact that, hey, he's wearing stars, he's a general. We go to any social event, she is talking

to the wife of a PFC or Spec Four, or an E5, you know, whatever. I'm her husband and I'm not JUST supposed to say this, but she is really a nice lady. A nice lady. Far more than I deserve. Far more than I deserve.

Interviewer: One thing. Last night when we were talking, you could definitely see the pride she has. I know you miss the military, but she misses it very much also.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes.

Interviewer: But once again, with you being on the speaking circuit, at least she's got a little bit of contact with the military.

SMA Van Autreve: She gets to go with me. She was with me when I went to Germany. She goes with me to the Sergeants Major Academy. I do the two hours with those attending the Academy and then we do about an hour with the wives. That's rewarding to both of us.

Interviewer: A little later on we're going to talk, in depth, about her involvement when you were the Sergeant Major of the Army. Let me continue with the family. You have how many daughters?

SMA Van Autreve: I have two beautiful, outstanding daughters.

Interviewer: You do not have a son?

SMA Van Autreve: No, I do not. I have a grandson/son. My one daughter is a flight attendant. Whenever she's flying, he stays with us. So he's with us, on the average, about two or three days a week. I take him to school and I put him to bed at night. I help him with his homework. He is my son/grandson. But I'm very fortunate. My other daughter has a daughter who is now twenty-five months old. We live near one another. I have a beautiful family.

Interviewer: Which airline does your daughter work for?

SMA Van Autreve: Northwest Airline.

Interviewer: Where were they born? Were they born in a military hospital or in a civilian hospital?

SMA Van Autreve: Military hospitals. Robin, who is the elder, was born in Augsburg, Germany. The youngest was born at Fort Belvoir in the

military hospital.

Interviewer: How well did your children adjust to the pretty frequent moves that you made, and also to military life?

SMA Van Autreve: The moves were not difficult for them when they were in their teens, you know, in grade school. But when I was in Korea and Robin was in Delphus, Ohio, going to high school, she was a cheerleader and very much involved, then she has to leave it all and leave her friends. Some of her friends still correspond today. That was very hard for her. It was very, very difficult. For a time she had a little bit of antagonism toward dad because it's dad's fault that we're making this move. The same thing coming out of Alaska. "It's kind of dad's fault because we're making this move again. Just at the time when everything is going good and I've got so many friends, I'm leaving school during the school year." It's tough on them.

Interviewer: Now that they've grown older, have they ever sat down and just kind of reflected on those days, and said, "Well all of those moves weren't as bad as we thought they were."

SMA Van Autreve: Exactly. Exactly. Robin and I were talking about that a couple of weeks ago. We were going through some pictures and there a picture of my retirement. I almost cried, you know. We reflected on the difficulties. But all-in-all, I think it made our daughters better. These kids, when they do attain maturation and have to go out into the world, they're already seen part of the world and they're better prepared for the difficulties that they have to encounter.

Interviewer: I think you briefly mention some of that, but what do you think were the positive effects of your children growing up in the military?

SMA Van Autreve: First and foremost, I think that particularly in today's age and in the days of Alaska, they're in an environment that has more discipline than the outside environment. The schools are not

penetrated as heavily with dope dealers. We did, in Alaska, find this young kid, about twelve years old, with about eight thousand dollars. He was selling dope in the schools. But it is not a prevalent there as it is on the outside. When Robin finally did go to a high school, which necessitated her traveling to the school, it was about ten or twelve miles away in Anchorage, she told me often, she said, "Dad, you have no idea what it's like out there. It's totally unlike our schools on the military installation. You've got better police protection." We had so many activities. We were right near Arctic Valley. The kids loved to ski and we'd go skiing. We just had a lots to do.

Interviewer: Whenever you deployed and went somewhere where your family couldn't join you, where did they stay?

SMA Van Autreve: On the occasions when I was in Korea, Rita was in New York taking care of her mother who was dying of cancer. When I was in Vietnam, she was in Delphus, Ohio taking care of my mother. My father had passed away and my mother had some severe physical problems and Rita took care of her during that period of time. So when I was absent, she had her hands full.

Interviewer: When you reflect back, what do you think was the most enjoyable time for you and your family?

SMA Van Autreve: Alaska. Alaska, because on weekends, and two or three nights a week when I got finished--I'd leave the office about six o'clock--Rita would have a lunch packed and we would go up to Arctic Valley and we would go skiing. The kids loved to ski. Rita and I loved to ski. We'd go up there and eat. They had lights, so we could ski at night. We would go, on occasion, to Seward and go on fishing trips; everybody liked to do that. If you did nothing but take a drive out to Donali Park or something, the scenery was beautiful. We thoroughly enjoyed Alaska.

Interviewer: What do you think was the most trying time for both you and your family?

SMA Van Autreve: I guess Vietnam, during the TET (Oriental New Year) Offensive, because Rita was really, really, really upset because I guess the stories back in the States were pretty horrendous about the TET Offensive. At Ben Hoa... Let me tell you about that. I want to just tell you about that. John Spoller, he was the Group Sergeant Major, and I'm the Brigade Sergeant Major. Every time I would catch John doing something wrong, he was fined. He had to buy me a bottle of Crown Royal. Every time he found me doing something wrong, I had to buy him a bottle of Crown Royal. On this particular night he called and he said, "Van, come on over. We've got navy bean soup." Now he was over at Long Binh and I was at Bien Hoa. It's a drive of about, I guess, three or four miles and you go through this tremendous rubber plantation. So we drive and we're in a good mood. The driver, a young kid, and I are talking about various things. We get to John's and we have our bean soup and I get my bottle of Crown Royal. About eleven o'clock we go back. We go down through this rubber plantation, which borders Bien Hoa, and we're talking and driving along, with no problem. At three o'clock in the morning, about fifteen hundred Viet Cong jumped out of those rubber plantations and attacked Long Binh, Bien Hoa, and other installations. Now they, evidently, said, "I don't know who these two nuts are going down this road, but we don't want to disclose our position so we won't shoot at them." They got hit. The minute we found out about it I wanted to go back to Long Binh and check to see how John made out and how the troops had made out, because they had taken some 122mm rockets. The driver said, "Please don't make me go." He said, "I don't ever want to drive another jeep in Vietnam." God, we were blessed on that one.

Interviewer: That was the famous "TET of '68" when the VC (Viet Cong) and the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) attacked all over Vietnam.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did your Headquarters get hit?

SMA Van Autreve: We took a couple of rounds. But we got those occasionally. But there was a tremendous amount of fighting going on just outside. But I might say, that when I became Sergeant Major of the Army, because of Bien Hoa and because of the TET Offensive, the WAC (Women's Army Corps) General, I can't remember her name. She had white hair.

Interviewer: Mildred Bailey.

SMA Van Autreve: General Bailey. Yeah. We had to appear before the DCSPER (Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel) because she did not want the females to do any familiarization firing with weapons. I was adamant about insisting that they do because if the enemy had been successful at Bien Hoa, women would have been throwing typewriters and spit balls. That what caused women to start familiarization firing because we had a knock-down, drag-out with General Moore over that.

Interviewer: Mildred Bailey, I think she was the last WAC general when they disbanded the Women's Army Corps. She was a very famous "hell on wheels" lady.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Boy, she was "hell on wheels" that day when we had our discussion.

Interviewer: A final few questions before we proceed with the discussion about your tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army. A little earlier I told you I would ask you some more questions about the civilian education that you received after you came on active duty. You came back into the Army in 1948. Is that correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: You attended Ohio Northern University. How long did you attend Ohio Northern University and when did you attend Ohio Northern University?

SMA Van Autreve: I attend Ohio Northern University in 1946 and '47, and a part of '48. I think I told you before, the thing that caused me to leave Ohio Northern University and come back into the Army was the

fact that on New Years Day I was with my girlfriend and driving. It was in daylight and a tree limb had fallen across the road and I hit it. It damaged my car, but I was still able to go where we were going. But my insurance had expired so I am liable for the damages to the car, which I could not afford on my pay. So I was disillusioned. I had not been hurt seriously, I thought, but pretty soon--the next couple of days--the pains began and I'm wrapped up and I'm in pain in my back. I'm going to Lima, Ohio to catch my bus to go to Ada, Ohio to go to school. I meet a young man whom I had come into the Army with in 1941; he's now a recruiter. Three drinks later he has me convinced the Army is the place to go, so I came back into the Army.

Interviewer: What was your major when you went to Ohio Northern?

SMA Van Autreve: History.

Interviewer: When did you attend George Washington University?

SMA Van Autreve: When I was at Fort Belvoir.

Interviewer: Once again your was a history major?

SMA Van Autreve: I was doing a minor in psychology.

Interviewer: We've talked about the University of Toledo. What was your major at the University of Maryland?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I was doing some language work there; German and French.

Interviewer: That was while you were in Europe.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: That was the branch out of Munich, wasn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah, that was the University of Maryland.

Interviewer: Alaska Methodist University?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, that was a carry-on once again I was in languages; I did German. German and we were doing some social studies. I did studies on drugs, drug affects, drug rehabilitation, sociopaths, and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: When did you get your bachelor's degree?

SMA Van Autreve: I got the notification just about three months ago. Just about three months ago.

Interviewer: You finally got it.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. I guess I've got a hundred and forty or fifty hours. We your going to, let's see, Ohio Northern University, Toledo University, Alaska Methodist University, University of Alaska, George Washington University, University of Maryland. Those were also desperate. You know, they're different places, different times. And I took German in Alaska--beginning German--three times, because of field commitments; I'd have to go out in the field.

Interviewer: When they send your transcripts from one university to the other, you find yourself losing credit hours.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. Losing and sometimes gaining.

Interviewer: When you were going to school, on active duty, did you go mostly at night, weekends, or a combination of both?

SMA Van Autreve: It was nights. Nights, primarily. You know, that's kind of difficult because in the wintertime in Alaska it gets dark. On one occasion I hit a moose, going to school. It was over on the other side of town, a distance of fifteen to eighteen miles away. Sometimes the duty day would end for me at six o'clock or six-thirty at night, which means I didn't have time to eat or change clothes. I'm wearing my uniform, zip, going to school because I've got to be there at seven, seven-thirty. It was a little tough. Fortunately for us, we did have some on-duty classes. I don't remember if it was degree gathering or not. With our problems with our divisiveness on race, I thought I should get into that, so I took Afro-American history. I took about three courses in that. I'll tell you, that was pretty tough; I was the only Anglo. There again, after a period of time I was accepted. The initial indication was there was some resentment of my being there and participating. After a while it got to be a little easier.

Interviewer: They started looking at your ultimate goal and found

it was the same as theirs.

SMA Van Autreve: I was there to find out what they were all about. I realized only too well that I don't know what it is to be Black. But I sure found out what it's like to be a foreigner, so I have some degree of empathy, not totally, but some.

Interviewer: Yesterday you made a remark, after I asked you the question how you felt about the basic training that you received at Fort Belvoir and how that helped you when you went overseas in World War II, you made the comment that you would like to get into that a little later because there were some other areas that you would like to compare. I guess you were talking about the degradation of what you had been taught at Fort Belvoir, etc. Do you remember what you were addressing at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I can say this, I can say that when we went to Fort Belvoir, I was very much impressed with the training we received. It was good training and it was tremendous for me because when I finally went to Fort Bragg, in January, I went with ten other people. We were almost light years ahead of those people who were stationed at Fort Bragg, because we had rigorous training. Now these people, as a rationale for their not being well trained, those people those people had been in for one year, supposedly. They came from the New England states. So they really were not too concerned about training, because, "One year and I'm gone." Well then, Pearl Harbor hit, so they are extended. There was a lot of bitterness. Now we came fresh on board. We'd undergone some very heavy training; daylight and a lot of night training. We really were ahead of those people from the standpoint of knowledge about weapons, and about mines, and about demolitions, and about bridging, and that sort of things, so that was a tremendous help. I was there a very short time before I became an "acting jack." I went from private to T5 very rapidly, and it helped. The other people who had gone with me to Fort Belvoir were also in the

same position. They were recognized at an early time. Two of us were called in by the first sergeant. That's almost as bad as going to see the CONARC Commander, to see the first sergeant in those days. He did this proverbial thing. He kept us waiting outside for about thirty minutes until the sweat drowns in your boots. Then we walked in and the only thing he had to say to us--he spoke broken English--was, "I'm gona give you advice. You listen. For the rest of your career, you checka, you checka, you re-checka, and you checka one more time. Because I tink you're goina be noncommissioned officers." That's all he said. Well boy, that's like getting the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Legion of Merit, all rolled into one, when you get an accolade like that from the first sergeant, in those days. But you know, that's the best advice I had ever received, because I almost lost a bridge one time because I did not do that. I did not check and I did not re-check. I almost a million-and-a-half-dollar bridge. So those were words of wisdom. God, we walked around like... Then the next thing, I make buck sergeant. I am a sergeant in the United States Army. In those days, Fort Bragg was filled with people. There were thousands. The theater lines were two or three blocks long. Any place, it was blocks long of people. It was very difficult. I took my buck sergeant stripes and I turned them around and held my arm firmly against my side, and walked up and down that theater line, about ten or fifteen times, so everybody could see that I was a buck sergeant. I could now go to the NCO Club. I didn't care to go. I really didn't. But I could go. I was now called "Sergeant." I have never had a feeling like that in my whole life, when I became a sergeant. I absolutely luxuriated in that for days on end.

Interviewer: When you were overseas, during World War II, you had the "T" grade also, didn't you? The tech grades?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah, I was a T5. But then I became a sergeant. I never again became a specialist.

Interviewer: You used to hear the saying, "Messing up like a T5 at an NCO meeting.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah, that's right. Absolutely. I remember that.

Interviewer: How many technical grades did they have at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: I quite frankly don't remember, because when I first came into the Army, they had a system called a "First and fifth" the "First and sixth," the "First and Seventh," which indicated areas of expertise, primarily in the administrative arena. Then we later went to the T4 and the T5. The philosophy there was that if you had an outstanding demolition man and you could award him a specialist rating, but he was supposed to be a specialist. Well, that suffered the degradation of wanting to promote this guy because he was a good guy, although not a demolition man. That just screwed that deal up pretty well.

Interviewer: Do you have anything you would like to add before we start talking about your tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, you know what's going to happen. After you have left, we're going to say to ourselves, "Gee, there's so many things I wish I had said that I didn't say."

Interviewer: Yeah.

SMA Van Autreve: Maybe, in retrospect, we can do that as we go along.

Interviewer: Oh sure.

SMA Van Autreve: If I think about I can throw it back in.

Interviewer: Yeah, at any time, if you want to add anything, please feel free to do so. When did you serve as Sergeant Major of the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: I served as Sergeant Major of the Army in 1973, '74, and '75. That sounds like three years but it was half of '73, all of '74, and half of '75.

Interviewer: Who was your Chief of Staff?

SMA Van Autreve: General Creighton Abrams.

Interviewer: Did he pass away after you were out of office?

SMA Van Autreve: No, during my tenure.

Interviewer: Tell me about the selection process. I think, earlier, we talked about the length of your tenure and how possibly had exceeded the time in grade and also the time in service requirement, and how General Abrams went ahead and selected you. Why don't you tell me about that.

SMA Van Autreve: This was a strange thing because when I was notified that I was going to be one of the final considerees for the position, I said, "No, I've had it. I had gone up twice. Each time I floated all the way back down again. At least here I am, I'm the USARL Sergeant Major. What's going to happen to me if I'm denied?" We had a Phil Cucural, who was an E9. He was in the legal department. He was my skiing friend. Now Phil Cucural weighed one hundred and twenty-five, one hundred a thirty-five pounds, soaking wet. In those days I was in pretty good shape. He came to my office and he said, "What's this I hear about the possibility you may turndown an opportunity to participate in the selection. I said, "You're right." I said, "You know, it's been a disappointment." I said, "And I'm an engineer. I'm just never going to get there." He said, "If you don't go, I will whip your 'A'." Now I look at this guy, whom I outweigh by about forty-five pounds. I am in far better condition, but he was so serious about it. I told him, "If you feel that sincerely about it, Phil, then I will go. I will go." At this time, my ETS (Established Time of Separation) is '74; this is around July of '73. So I don't have enough time, but I go anyway. Well, they had a board and I'm one of the final considerees, and then Abrams threw the board out. I said, "Well here we go. Three s strikes and you're out." But they reconvened another board.

Interviewer: Why did General Abrams throw the first board out?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, we heard all sorts of things. He felt he wanted representatives from other... I don't know what it was. We were not privy to what the rationale for that was. It just appeared in the Army Times; that's where we saw it. Nothing further was told. But again, I'm invited to go up and be one of the participants. Now I go up to the door to go in and see General Abrams, and I'm accompanied by General Zais -- Z-A-I-S -- who said to me, "We've looked over your records and you have an outstanding record." He said, "I personally would think that you would do an excellent job but you have never been a division sergeant major." I said, "General, how does an engineer become a division sergeant major?" I said, "I was proposed for the 1st Infantry Division when Joe Venerable died, but good God, that would have been unthinkable. I would never have survived that." He said, "Well, good luck." So I go in and now I've got this trepidation once again. I go in and see General Abrams. He only asked me one question. One question. He said, "If you were the Chief of Staff of the Army, what would you do?" I said, "Well, the restoration of the Noncommissioned Officers Corps to its rightful position. Give him the authority to act and if he can't do it and cut the mustard, get rid of him." He said, "That's all." I said, "Gees." The other guys were in there for five, eight, ten minutes, and I'm in there for about a minute and I come out. I received notice that I had been selected as the Sergeant Major of the Army, and they extend me for a period of eleven months. I violate the thirty years and I violate the age; two considerations. If that fair? No. But I hadn't been treated too fairly during the other two considerations, so I said, "The hell with it, I'll take the program." General Abrams evidently felt that I was a decent selection. Thank God that I had the opportunity to work with him, because he was such a... What a guy. I could extol his virtues for a long time and I would have a hell of a lot of people who would agree with me.

Interviewer: When you were selected, how many finalists did they

have? Do you remember?

SMA Van Autreve: Let's see, I had been up three times. There were either seven or five; one of the two.

Interviewer: Whenever you were selected, do you remember who else went up for that final interview?

SMA Van Autreve: Quite frankly, no. I'm trying to remember the circumstances. You'd think I would remember ever facet of that, but I was kind of disillusioned about going up there. You've always got these front-runners that are the super guys out of the divisions, FORSCOM (Forces Command) Headquarters. I really didn't give it that much attention. You're going to say, "Gee, that's kind of ridiculous. That's kind of dumb." I didn't have much faith in the opportunity. I was pretty much disillusioned; I didn't think I'd get it.

Interviewer: When you came down from Alaska to be interviewed at the Pentagon, what was the length of time between the day when you were interviewed and the day you were notified that you had been selected?

SMA Van Autreve: As I said, the first time, you know, it was thrown out. They came in for a second consideration and nothing was heard for about a month. The Captain who brought in all the classified documents for the Commanding General always stopped in my office. We would have coffee and we just talk. He was an avid fisherman, as I was. We would talk about hunting and fishing and skiing. Then one morning I was in my office and he comes in and he smiling. I said, "What are you so happy about?" "Ah," he said, "it's a great day." We discussed things back and forth. I still told him, "You know, you're really getting to be a pain in the rear end, because you keep smiling all the time." I said, "There's no reason in the world to be that happy." What I didn't know was, he was carrying a message in to the General. So about thirty, thirty-five minutes later, I get a call. "General Gettys wants to talk to you." So I walk in and the rooms full of people. He said, "Well Sergeant Major of the Army." I said, "Oh my God." I really

couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: What was Rita's reaction when she heard that?

SMA Van Autreve: I called Rita and what did I say to her? I said, "Would you still love me if I was Sergeant Major of the Army?"

Interviewer: You were the first Sergeant Major of the Army who was not from the combat arms.

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. I'm the first guy that went up three times.

Interviewer: Did you feel some pressure from some people because you were not from the combat arms?

SMA Van Autreve: I really felt no pressure. I really didn't. You may say this is egotism, but I felt that I was just as qualified as they were. As I told you before, you know, each of the times you went up, you've got the generals coming by, seeing these sergeants major they served with, and they come to me and they've got a blank expression because they think, "Who and the hell is guy?" And it gets a little tough. The time when we went up for General Westmoreland, and Copeland was chosen, and they talked about the fact that everybody had a Combat Infantry Badge. Incidentally, I was put in for the Combat Infantry Badge when we made the invasion of Africa, because I was the demolition man and flame thrower guy with 60th Infantry; I was part of the program. Of course, you get the Combat Infantry Badge by virtue of your MOS. But the thing that really go to me was, the correspondence that came back finally negating the fact that I should receive it said, "Personnel in transportation units are not entitled to the Combat Infantry Badge." So they must have given a really thorough perusal putting me in the Transportation Corps, when I was a combat engineer. But that statement was made when, you know, they looked around and saw everybody wearing Combat Infantry Badges, except me. I had to raise my hand and say, "Sir, I do not have one."

Interviewer: You have the Combat Infantry Badge and the Combat

Medical Badge, but you don't have the Combat Engineer Badge.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. But I was hoping, truly, that my becoming Sergeant Major of the Army would sort of democratize, if that's a word, the selection system and that ultimately there would be a realization that out in other branches of the service, there are some brilliant and dedicated and wonderful command sergeants major who deserve an opportunity to be considered. And I believe, to this day, we have not done that well. Had it not been for General Abrams, I would have never become the Sergeant Major of the Army. I think one of the things that most probably, although he never said this to me, he had been the Vice Chief of Staff during General Johnson's regime as the Chief of Staff, of course he browsed through the records, he checked the records and Van Autreve's name had appeared, and that evidently stayed with him until such time as he had the opportunity to have a Sergeant Major of the Army. I just say that as a thought. I'm not sure because he never addressed that fact.

Interviewer: What was the length of time of your tenure?

SMA Van Autreve: Two years. I'm often asked that question. "Why is it that everybody else is three years, etc., and you only two years. You didn't cut the mustard or anything thing to that effect." I have to remind them the fact that I was in violation of over thirty years and over age, and that General Abrams had extended me eleven months so I could have at least two years in that position.

Interviewer: At that time, by the regulation, the tenure was only two years, wasn't it?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, there was some thought to the fact that they should keep it at two years, but I do not subscribe to that. I think three years is an adequate tenure. I think four years is too much because after about three years, you start thinking that you're in total charge. I think that happens to anyone who is too long in any one place. But I think three years is adequate. You see, with two years, you know,

you've got to balance your field trips with staying in the office, to protect those things that you are trying to cause happen. If you stay out in the field too much, that will not transpire because of your absence. You've got to protect both ends. It's very difficult to see soldiers in the world in the two year period. You know, you've got to respect the guys. Like when we went to Korea. You've got to respect the fact that you've got to get up on those little mountain tops and talk to the eight, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five soldiers. You go over to Germany, when we had the 11th Cav, you've got to go to those little outposts out there where there are people who are the first die in case the East Germans would ever attack. And it's very difficult to do that. It's easy to go to Fort Hood, Texas; that's easy. My first visit was to the National Guard and Reserve in Des Moines, Iowa, because they were the first people to ask me. The Sergeant Major at Fort Hood was hurt because he thought I should go there because of the population of soldiers there. I said, "I've got to figure out some way to do this. I am doing this by virtue of those who ask first, that's where I go first." And it was very rewarding experience, I might add, to go visit the National Guard and Reserve, because I hadn't had anything to do with them for so long. I got a total exposure and it was a good start for me.

(End Tape OH 94.2-4, Side 1)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-4, Side 2)

Interviewer: Sergeant Major, you were mentioning some of the trips that you made. Basically, your trips were planned on a "first-come, first-served" basis, when you first started out.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Let me ask you about the ceremony when you were sworn-in as Sergeant Major of the Army. Did you have a large ceremony or a small ceremony? Tell me about the swearing-in ceremony.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I really had very few members of the family

in attendance. You know, my father had passed away and my mother was not well. Rita's mother had passed away. We had about seven or eight family members in attendance. This was really a new experience for me. I just don't know what it was going to be all about. You see, my attitude was, I've got to spend a month just trying to find where the latrines are located. Of course, we had the Secretary of the Army. The Chief of Staff was there. We had the Chief of Chaplains there. It was not a Fourth of July fanfare when I became Sergeant Major of the Army.

Interviewer: Who administered the oath?

SMA Van Autreve: I can't think of the general's name. He was a two-star general Chaplain of the Army.

Interviewer: Did you have a transition period with Sergeant Major of the Army Copeland?

SMA Van Autreve: No I did not. I guess we spoke together somewhat in the vicinity of twenty minutes.

Interviewer: I guess during that period of time, he didn't... I don't like to say give advice and recommendations, but did he maybe clue you in on some of the things that were going on with some of the programs?

SMA Van Autreve: Hope. You see, there again, we were poorly prepared. I would liked to have had more time speaking to the two people who were to be my mentors, guides, and assistants during the forth coming tenure. "How do I get to see the Chief of Staff? What steps do I go through? Where do I find out information about various things? Who do I best go to? Where is my best source of information?" But it was, once again, it's a feeling-out process and you've got to learn it. Of course, I was fortunate. I had a Sergeant Gelner who was absolutely outstanding. God blessed me with that one. He and I are still very, very good friends. He really took care of me.

Interviewer: At that time, did you have a civilian secretary?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes we did.

Interviewer: Was Raylene there then?

SMA Van Autreve: Raylene Scott was there, and she was another blessing. God, everybody loved Raylene.

Interviewer: If fact, Raylene left just before Sergeant Major of the Army Connelly got there and he said, Boy, from what I heard, I sure could have used her."

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, she was great. You see, but we only had two people and we managed to function very well. But the thing about if is, I had a philosophy that, you know, I finally found out that I had direct access to the Chief of Staff of the Army. But I did not feel it was my job to go see him about any problems. I did that with the Vice Chief of Staff. And I did not want to see him, because I felt that ninety per cent of the problems that I encountered in the field, ninety-five percent I should be able to take care of by going to action officers. We had a Colonel Geise, whom I worked with. He came up to see one day. He said, "You know something?" He said, "All you talk about is noncommissioned officers'" I said, "Well, that's right." I said, "We're going to get the Noncommissioned Officers Corps rolling and we're going to get this Army rolling because of the noncommissioned officers." He said, "I've got something to show you." So he came up, armed with about twenty 201 files. I went through them. Child molestation, five Article 15s, six Article 15s, courts martials. These were command sergeants major and sergeants major in the Army. I was really furious. He said, "I've given you twenty, but I can give you another twenty more, if you like." So I had facsimiles made, and I erased the name and any information that might elude to a specific individual, and I took them with me. I'd get up in front of a group of noncommissioned officers and I would read off some of the violations and some of the background on some of these senior people. Then I'd throw the 201s out in the audience and I'd Say, "It's your fault that you allow these people to survive." Well people used to think it was

pretty funny. They knew what was coming and they'd start ducking, because I'd throw them damn things out there and I'd really get hostile about the fact we tolerated those incompetent, those people who had perpetrated these deeds against children, wives, and other illegal things that they had done, and still survived the system and became an E9. It worked. The next thing that we did was, I brought along people from MILPERCEN (Military Personnel Center) with me and we setup microphones and we had a question and answer period. That went along very, very well, because the Sergeant Major of the Army, being the sole individual standing up on that stage, gets questions that he either forgets or the answer is not there. I'd take MILPERCEN people and they were some smart people, some really, really intelligent people, who could answer eighty-five of ninety percent of those questions. Then we guaranteed a follow-up if we did not have the answer at the time. That went along very well.

Interviewer: MILPERCEN, was that organized just before your tenure or during your tenure? It used to be the OPO (Office of Personnel Operations), right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Down in the basement.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. During my tenure, MILPERCEN was moved over in the Hoffman Building.

Interviewer: That gave them a tremendous amount of room in which to operate, too.

SMA Van Autreve: Well not only that but, down in the basement that was that insidious thing, I think I referred to earlier, where the guy carried a list of seven sergeants major who were the turnarounds. You could be guaranteed that those people were just going to replace one another as they moved back and forth across the country.

Interviewer: Also, down in the basement, you had about eighteen inches between the desks, and all the file cabinets, and everything.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah.

Interviewer: What were the greatest challenges that you think faced you, as far as the Army is concerned, when you became the Sergeant Major of the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, that's a very difficult question to answer, because my primary thrust was the restoration of the Noncommissioned Officers Corps and perpetuation of the NCOES Program, because that was threatened by the Roth Amendment, where they were going to curtail TDY (temporary duty) funding. At one of the meetings that we had, on a Tuesday afternoon with General Moore, the DCSPER, one of the brigadier generals recommended that we reduce the TDY funding for the NCOES Program. We got into a rather heated discussion about that, because I knew that if they took the money away from us, we would never get it back. So the perpetuation of the NCOES Program, the very fact that it existed, EXISTED, we finally had a road map for noncommissioned officers to follow in order to better educate themselves and make the Army a better place to be, and make the Army better. Each one of the Sergeants Major of the Army feel just as exactly as I do about the NCOES Program and its worth and its validity. So that was a heartburn; the possibility of losing that. But General Moore assured us that we would not.

Interviewer: What were the major guidelines given to you by General Abrams.

SMA Van Autreve: (The sergeant major laughed after the question was asked.) It's odd you ask that, because I had been there about, oh, I guess three or four weeks and I'm getting a little disturbed because, you know, the General hadn't sent for me yet. The advice I had gotten was that, "The General will send for you when he wants to see you. Do not intrude." So I'm saying, "Gee!" Then, fortunately, I met the General when he was coming off of the escalator. He said, "Well how are you doing?" I said, "Well sir," I said, "I was hoping I would get an

opportunity to see you and I was told that I would have to wait until such time as you sent for me." He said, "What!" He said, "Come with me." So we went to his office. I was placed on an "Immediate Access" list. He wanted to know why it is that I hadn't come in, and I told him because that's the advice that I had been given. He said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "Well sir, I just don't like to disturb you, but the thing I want to know is, how am I doing?" Little did I know that there was a Major Arborgast, who followed me throughout my first seven weeks and listened to my presentations and, he was eye-balling me and transferring information back to the Chief of Staff and the Vice Chief about how I was doing. I did not know that. He said, "Just keep doing what you're doing." "Yes sir." But he was admirable. You know, you could almost tell when General Abrams was in the Pentagon. He just had that feeling of aura, that tremendous respect that everybody had for him. But he was no pansy. Let me tell you, he could be tough. One time we had a discussion. We were moving some of the missiles out of Alaska. The Colonel who was going to give the briefing came down and said, "Sergeant Major, would you mind attending the briefing because I want some kind of audience when I'm practicing to give that briefing in front of the MACOM (Major Army Command) Commanders?" I said, "Great." It's a good thing I did. So I'm listening to all of this, talking about all this movement of the equipment and how it's going to be done. We have the meeting. We've got four-stars and three-stars, and we're talking about that. They were talking about the movement of the equipment and how difficult it was going to be. He turned to me and said, "Sergeant Major, what do you think?" I said, "Well sir, we haven't discussed the people problem." Abrams hit that desk so hard. He said, "That's exactly, that's exactly the point. We spent hours talking about missiles, but we haven't spent five minutes talking about the people who are going to be displaced. Where are they going to go and how are they going to get there?" He said, "We're adjourning this

meeting and we will discuss it later, and we will include people." That's the kind of guy he was.

Interviewer: You also said that when he got upset, he turned and looked out of the window.

SMA Van Autreve: (After a lot of laughter) When he got upset with me. I had the occasion to be on TV. The guy who was interviewing me was an E4, who had been thrown out of the Army. He began picking on the Army and making some very disparaging remarks. Finally I took umbrage and I told him what I thought, forgetting that I was on TV. So when I came back, Abrams sent for me and he said, "Sergeant Major, take very few opportunities to appear on television." But he had turned around in his chair and was looking out the window; he said that over his shoulder. I said, "Yes sir." And out I went.

Interviewer: He also did that when you came back from Europe, when the General jumped you for not selecting his man. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: O-o-o-o-h. Yes indeed. I don't want to give the sergeant major's name. They wanted to propose his name as a contender for Sergeant Major of the Army. I was against it for several reasons. His PQS (Personnel Qualification Score) scores were not up to par, and a couple of reasons. I don't like to mention the guy's name, but I got in so much trouble over this one. General Blanchard, when I was over in Germany, jumped all over me. The intimation was, "Who do you think you are?" You know, "You're the Sergeant Major of the Army and I'm a three-star general." He later became the Commanding General of USAREUR. He really worked me over. So when I get back, I think I'm going through Alaska, and I get a call that I'm to see General Abrams "as soon as." Well, that's sets in a little trepidation, you know, that "as soon as" business. I get back and I ask my people, "Do you know anything what this is all about?" "No." Nobody knows. I talked to the DCSPER of the Army. "No, I don't know." So I go in and he's got his chair looking out the window. I thought, "Oh gee. Here we go." He

said, "You're telling a three-star general that he cannot submit his man to be considered for Sergeant Major of the Army?" I said, "I told him, sir, that we would not look upon it favorably because there are several indicators that he does not fill the bill, and that it's inappropriate for him to be considered." He said, "So you don't think he should be." I said, "No sir." I said, "It's not fair to the rest of the Army." I said, "We would be making an exception to policy if we considered him and did not consider some of the other sergeants major. The Sergeants Major Corps would not look very kindly upon that, because it's not the right thing to do." He said, "That's all." I left there, went home, put about five ice cubes in a glass, filled it with Jim Beam, and sat there saying, "I am done. This is it. I'm gone." I was really concerned about that one. But he never said a word to me, but the records never came in. They never came in.

Interviewer: Let me ask about your staff. You had Raylene Scott when you arrived. How long did Sergeant Major Copeland's appointed administrative assistant remain there until you replaced him?

SMA Van Autreve Gelner stayed with me until I left. Scott stayed with me until I left. I want to tell you, I could reemphasize this again and again and again, but they were absolutely wonderful people. Gelner had the facility, if he knew that I was really mad about something, and the fellow is coming in to see me about that very thing, he would tell the guy, "Look, I'll try to get it postponed until he cools down." He was really a manipulator. He knew me inside and out. He would wait until he was sure that I was cooled off before I made a decision, because sometimes, as angry as I would get, I would make a hasty decision. Gelner would wait until I felt better and he'd say, "Gee Sergeant Major, do you really think we ought to do that?" I was pretty hot headed and when you're hot headed, you make rash decisions. He was smart enough that he would just wait until I cooled down, then he would come in and talk about it. He was just an

outstanding man.

Interviewer: I heard a lot of good comments about Raylene Scott.

SMA Van Autreve: Raylene Scott was a doll. Was a doll. I don't care who came into the office, if it was a private, PFC, sergeant major, colonel, general, she was extremely the same; gracious to everyone. She was very gracious to everyone. She, too, understood my behavioral idiosyncracies. She loved Rita. Loved Rita. She would come over to the house and spend time with Rita. I was blessed. I was very fortunate.

Interviewer: So you operated with just Raylene and Gelner.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. And the action officers. You see, when I first assumed the position, I went to see General Putnam. And I'm talking with him and I ask a question. He picked up the phone and he spoke with someone else to get the answer. I asked him, "Sir, who did you talk to?" He said, "One of the action officers." So I go back to Gelner and I say, "Hey Gelner, from now on we're not going to talk to one of the generals. We're going to talk to these action officers. We have got to find out who the action officer is who's in charge of that." I would invite them when we had a discussion, to my office. Because this guy is in this little area where his desk is nudging another desk, and there are four or five people in this confined area. Telephones are ringing and you don't know which one to pickup and answer. But they would come into my office. We had the room, we had coffee, and we would relax. They were very gracious with me, to me, and for me, in helping me get established.

Interviewer: Most of those were majors, weren't they?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Yes they were. And you know, a major really isn't the highest rank in the world, when you talk about the Pentagon. Sometimes they are very unappreciated. But on Saturdays and Sundays, that's who you saw. Their cars are in the parking lot and they're working in the Pentagon. We had a terrible philosophy that the

time that, on Friday afternoon you would give this poor action officer an obligation to be delivered on Monday. So when is he going to do it? Saturday or Sunday. But they were very gracious with me, I'll tell you. And we had some senior noncommissioned officers, over in MILPERCEN, that were absolutely great. I mean, smart. They easily could have been an officer. They supported me, because we would include them on every discussion that we had.

Interviewer: Did you deal a lot with the Sergeants Major of DCSOPS (Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations) and DCSPER?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. Yes. We had a guy named "Hughes." I don't know if you remember him or not. He worked down in the DCSPER. He worked for Colonel Geise, who was the guy who brought me the 201s that were so discouraging.

Interviewer: While you were Sergeant Major of the Army, I know you received a lot of complaints from the field. Do you think that the majority of those complaints that came in could have been handled by the command, rather than being sent to your office?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, yes. That's true, but don't forget, during the period of time we're in, the second lieutenant was the guy the general listened to. The E, '2, '3, '4, were the soldiers the general listened to, so the noncommissioned officer had to feel his way back into the system, justifying the position of having the authority to do certain things. And the soldiers had been led to believe that they didn't have to talk to the noncommissioned officers. We had to reinforce and kind of reinvent the wheel, from the standpoint of the NCO Corps. I used to really discourage me. When I first started, I would go out to the motor pool, for example. I would gather everybody together and we would just have a discussion about anything. Two or three of the malcontents would take up all the time, pleading their cause. "Why was I not promoted?" "Why did they give me an Article 15?" You know, that goes on and on. I began to realize that I was not really getting the

message from the people I wanted to hear. So from then on, every place that I went, I may talk to groups, but I would always get the Soldiers of the Month, and the NCOs of the Month and of the Quarter, in a room, just me and them. At first they're apprehensive, but you take your jacket off and you put it over on a chair, and you sit down on the floor or someplace. Pretty soon they warmup. Then you really begin to find out what's going on. Based on that, you didn't take any action, but you sure had a discussion with the sergeant major about some of the things. Another thing we used to do was, when we'd get drivers, we would take them to breakfast. Now when a driver is assigned to the Sergeant Major of the Army, he's a pretty sharp individual, whether male or female. And you found out a lot about what was going on. First they sat very stiff and was afraid to eat. Pretty soon they're eating and talking, and you could find out a great deal. We've got a lot of redirect still, in the Army, about taking care of soldiers. But we don't have as much true application of care as we should have in the Army. Our inprocessing today is good. I'm not too sure about out processing. We have a tendency to view that as a loss, so why worry about him anymore. That was brought to mind in Alaska. My clerk said, "Hey Sergeant Major, look at this." Here's this kid with his big duffle bag, dragging it on the sidewalk. I said, "Hey Ken, go get him." So he brings the kid over. The kid has about another half mile to go to get to the clearing center. I said, "Why are you doing this?" He said, "You know, I turned in my car." He's married. He's left to himself. He's the guy that's got to get his stuff down to the out processing center. Well that fired us up, so we then had a meeting of all the first sergeants and sergeants major in Alaska on out processing as well as inprocessing. Because out processing is worst. You turn-in your car. It's twenty below zero, thirty below zero, how does your wife get to the commissary in the last couple of days that she's there? Where does she stay? Can she go to the movies? Can you go to the movies? Can you do anything? Se we got

that squared away. But I don't think that out processing, the care and out processing is as prevalent as inprocessing.

Interviewer: About how many complaint letters do you think you got in a week? Or in a month?

SMA Van Autreve: When we first came in, there were a profusion of those who thought the Sergeant Major of the Army would assist them, contrary to the wishes of the sergeant major, or the first sergeant, or of an Article 15 imposed. But they soon found out that, you know, "I refer you to a sergeant major who can contact me and let me know what the outcome is." We had to do that because, boy, once they find out that you're another outlet, then you get a profusion of complaints about non-promotions, about non-selections, about "I'm being mistreated." You know, the whole proforma.

Interviewer: Was Gelner able to handle most of those or channel them to the right action officers?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Now one of the heartburns that I had was that we would get a person who had been recommended by the battalion commander, the brigade commander, and the division commander that this man be eliminated from the service. Then it would come in to DCSPER and here we would have an E7 overriding a two-star general. There were recommendations by a battalion commander, a brigade commander, and a division commander, and this E7 would override it. We had to go down there and threaten them with the possibility of becoming a mortar man in the infantry. Because they just don't understand what's going on out there. When you get all those people concurring that this guy should be eliminated from the service, why should an E6 or an E7 contest the validity of that? I can call the sergeant major down there and find out, within a matter of minutes, because he's going to tell me the truth about what's going on. There's not a problem with that. We did too much of that in those days. That was a permissive era. That was a permissive era.

Interviewer: When you became Sergeant Major of the Army, they no longer had a formal rater or a formal EER (Enlisted Evaluation Report) for you. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: I can tell you my problems with EERs.

Interviewer: The reason I mentioned that, when Sergeant Major of the Army Copeland was in office, they had a colonel who wanted to formally rate him. Finally, working through the Chief of Staff, they decided they would not have a formal rating of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

SMA Van Autreve: I never saw any rating of me. Never any rating of me. I signed no piece of paper that indicated such. I signed no indication of a counseling statement. I saw none of that. I don't have the vaguest idea.

Interviewer: They made the decision when Sergeant Major Copeland was there not to do it, and evidently they just continued that on during your tenure. How often did you meet with General Abrams? Either officially or unofficially.

SMA Van Autreve: Unofficially we met, as Rita was telling you earlier, he loved Tennessee Erie Ford. He loved his music. I'd go over on a Sunday morning, not very often, and we would discuss the future of the Army. The last time I had the opportunity to do that he was talking about the fact that... Now he was in the declining stages of health. He made the statement, "We're going to beat this. We're going to beat this." To give you an idea how sentimental I get about the guy. I get very emotional when we talk about General Abrams. But he's with Major Reimer at that time, now General Reimer, and he's going down the stairs and Rita is coming up. They're just by the escalators. Rita said, "Good morning, general. How are you?" He didn't answer. She came in and said to me, "Well, the General must not be feeling too well." He was very gracious. Every place we ever went, General Abrams always went to meet Rita and talk with Rita. So I didn't say anything

about it, and nobody said anything to me. That night we get a telephone call. He's talking to Rita. It was on the red phone; the hotline. He's talking to Rita, apologizing because he hadn't said hello. He said, "Rita, I just felt too bad. I was just too sick."

Interviewer: That cancer really hit him hard.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. Yep. But that's the kind of gentleman that he was. And his wife was just the same. You know, here's the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, on Halloween, with his wife, dressed up as a witch, in typical Halloween fashion, dispensing candy to kids. He's got this kettle out there, with all the smoke coming out of the kettle, and he's giving candy to all the kids. You tell me the Chief of Staff of the Army that does that sort of things.

Interviewer: How did you report the results of your trips to General Abrams? Was it formal or informal?

SMA Van Autreve: Very rarely did I, unless I found that it was prevalent throughout a command. As I said to you earlier, ninety percent of the time I could go to the action officers and we could get it squared away. Or I could go back to the sergeant major, as we did in Japan when I found Japan in such a horrible state. We got Sergeant Major Spelasee and informed him of what I had found. He hopped a plane over there and it was taken care of. So I informed the Chief of Staff. An action officer could very well take care of most cases. I did have one or two occasions when I had to go see General Kerwin. He had a red pen, which was devastation. But very rarely did I do that, because that's a horrible thing to do to somebody. "I'm going to see the Chief of Staff," or "I'm going to see the Vice Chief of Staff." That's not the intent of the Sergeant Major of the Army. The intent of the Sergeant Major of the Army is to support existing programs and provide input that may affect the possibility of additional programs. His idea is not to go run to the Chief of Staff every time he finds a problem. Our object is to go out there and attempt to cure the problem; take care

of it. Then stay with it because you're then better educated in the future problems may occur that are similar.

Interviewer: At that time, what was General Dutch Kerwin's position?

SMA Van Autreve: Vice Chief of Staff.

Interviewer: Did General Abrams ever ask you, directly, to get information for him, such as "I've heard certain rumors about such-and-such a place and I'd like you to check it out on your next visit, or did he go through his staff?

SMA Van Autreve: No, I would generally hear it from Colonel Livsey, later he became a general. He would come over, with his cigar, and he would tell me that the General was a little concerned about this or about that.

Interviewer: Was Colonel Livsey Secretary of the General Staff?

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you spell his name?

SMA Van Autreve: L-I-V-S-E-Y. He later became a four-star general. I'll tell you one thing, General Abrams surrounded himself by some outstanding people. Outstanding people. He had a major working for him who is now a four-star general. They were just outstanding people. Boy, they were fantastic. They were just great.

Interviewer: How often would the General come over, just walk into your office and talk? Did you have much of that?

SMA Van Autreve: No, not very much, because General Abrams had a waiting list. I would go over and talk to Colonel Livsey and I've never gone over to his office when there weren't three-stars or two-stars waiting for an entry. There was only one time when I kind of violated the chain of command. We had a sergeant major that was an advisor to the National Guard who had been retained. He was vastly overweight and had a series of problems, and I wanted him out of the Army. Now he had been in three times. Tip O'Neal had intervened on his behalf. Now Tip

O'Neal carried a lot of weight, so they kept the guy. So finally I got so mad, because the Secretary of the Army allowed him for another extension. Boy, I was really mad and I went to the Secretary of the Army's office. I wish I could think of this colonel's name; he too later became a four-star general. I said, "I want to see the Secretary of the Army." Now that was clearly what I should not have done, because I should have gone to the Chief of Staff of the Army. I didn't. So he placated me and told me to simmer down. He said he would talk to the Secretary of the Army and that they would look at this. He said, "You realize, of course, that Tip O'Neal is directly involved in this. In fact, he's a relative of Tip O'Neal." I really fighting a lot of hostility. But we did get a written assurance that that was the last time he would be extended, and that they would not extend him again. I was surprised that General Abrams did not just jump all over my case for having gone down there, because I should not have done it.

Interviewer: So basically, General Abrams let you do your job and if you needed to see him, you saw him. If not, he just left you alone to do your job.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. I'd go see Colonel Livsey every once in a while and ask him, "How am I doing?"

Interviewer: As long as General Abrams didn't call you and turn his chair toward the window.

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. He did that to me two or three times.

Interviewer: What were some of the major developments or initiatives during your tenure, and what role did you play in their implementation? I think one of them was, the mandatory reclassification system came up.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes, but don't forget. The Sergeant Major of the Army does not do anything. He supports command policy. He contributes information about the command policy. But some people have

got the idea that HE makes things happen. He can help make things happen, but the Chief of Staff runs the Army.

Interviewer: But the Sergeant Major of the Army helps make things operate a heck of a lot better, because he's the one that's a spokesman for the Chief, out there letting them know, "This is why we're doing it."

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. That was exactly what I would do. I would espouse the cause, as promulgated by the Chief of Staff of the Army. People that were violating those precepts, those were the people I was concerned with. I knew only too well who the Chief of Staff of the Army was. I knew that I was one of those who was supposed to support, contribute, and provide input about the status of the enlisted force, and that's what I did. You know, the thing I did on the 201, I did on my own, but I knew that General Abrams had a concern with renovating the Noncommissioned Officers Corps. So I felt perfectly at ease doing what I did.

Interviewer: You were also the one that took the beats upon the head and shoulders about Army policy.

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. That's right. I'll tell you, the first couple of times that I went out to the field, it was horrible. I would have a theater and I would deliver a presentation on some very controversial issue; EPMS (Enlisted Personnel Management System) or whatever it might be. Then I would have a question and answer. I finally go to the point where I said, "I don't want to hear one person here ask me why he is not promoted in spite of his supposed qualifications. I don't want to hear that, because I hear it too much. I don't want you to tell me that you can't get a transfer someplace. I don't want you to tell me that you're a sergeant major down at Fort Benning and your wife has a pig farm, and if you leave and get transferred somewhere else, who is going to help her take care of the pig farm?" I said, "I'm not interested in your damn pig farm and I'm

not interested in the welfare, and I don't want you writing the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Secretary of the Army, and everybody else. I'm telling you, don't talk to me about those things, because they're not going to happen." I had that occasion. That occasion did happen to me. Finally I called this guy and I said, "You're gone. You're gone." Because he kept writing letters trying to get a delay in staying, and it was because he had a pig farm. We had some of the weirdest rationale and reasons for not having to be transferred, from the homesteaders, particularly, because we had that severe problem at Benning, at Bragg, at Belvoir, at the Artillery Center, Alaska. We had those home homesteaders who had been there, with their balling and their pleas for consideration because of some of the screwiest reasons.

(End Tape OH 94.2-4, Side 2)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-5, Side 1)

Interviewer: Sergeant Major, we'll proceed with our discussion of your tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army. How often did you receive Department of Defense briefings, and what type of information did you receive during those briefings?

SMA Van Autreve: We generally were in attendance with some general or something, but we received full information. However, after a period of time, I began to realize that I was better off going to briefings from the action officers. I went to MILPERCEN, and no longer had officers give me briefings. I would get it from the senior noncommissioned officer, for two reasons. First, because they were more candid and frank with me; they're not trying to create an impression. Secondly, they were "hands-on" and really knew more about the day-to-day problems that were incurred. But they appreciated the fact that I did that. I included them in the program.

Interviewer: Also, the target for that briefing was probably a little different when it was given to you than when it was given to the Chief of Staff, as far as what information was important.

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SMA Van Autreve: That's right. My concern was the impact on the enlisted personnel. The Chief of Staff was concerned with the impact on the entire Army.

Interviewer: We talked a little earlier about the large mandatory reclassification that the Army had. At that time it was shortly after Vietnam. We were really trying to downsize our Army and reshape the Army. As Sergeant Major of the Army, you were in a better position to better appreciate the Armywide effect of this reclassification. I guess you could say that you took some hits, out in the field, because, as Sergeant Major of the Army, they kind of felt that it was all your fault. Tell me about some of the feelings out in the field concerning the reclassification.

SMA Van Autreve: You know, we had a very difficult time telling people, and still do, that if you want to escalate in promotion, you most probably have to get out of that favorable MOS, because we're going to dispense with the MOS, or the ability to go beyond E7 just isn't prevalent. You've got to go to another MOS. They just don't like to leave and cut that umbilical cord with the comfort zone. Yes, we had a lot of problems. Boy, I used to get hit on the head. "I'm a 71 Lima (71L) and you want me to go 11 Bravo (11B)."

(The interview was temporally interrupted by a telephone call.)

Interviewer: We had a break just a moment ago. Sergeant Major, do you want to continue talking about the mandatory reclassification? You were saying how people didn't want to leave their comfort zone.

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. It's very hard to tell a person who has been in some particular MOS for ten, twelve, fourteen years, and he's in that comfort zone, and all of a sudden we tell him, "Hey, you're going to have to move. You're going to have to get into another MOS that alien to you." Well, none of us like to leave the comfort zone. But if we had a true appreciation for the potentiality of a promotion, or getting somewhere in the Army, or being retained in the Army, you've

got to make that move. It's no different than outside in civilian life. But that was a hard one to explain. I just absolutely was an emotional problem, and one hard to rationalize.

Interviewer: Tell me about your involvement in the "Qualitative Management Program," which was the QMP. Did you receive a lot of flack because of your feelings over that QMP?

SMA Van Autreve: I think that I stated, earlier on, that every time that I had any kind of a briefing to an audience in an auditorium, anywhere of a number of places, theaters, that invariably, I would receive questions about "Why am I being QMPed?" And I received a tremendous amount of correspondence from wives, who would extol the virtues of their husbands as being the greatest person who has ever lived. Upon an investigation, we would find the husband had not told the wife about his career, and about his misgivings, and about some of the things that he has done. So she laboring under the assumption that he's a "straight arrow," when in reality, he's not. So that provides a dilemma. Who wants to tell the wife that her husband has been guilty of any one of a number of things. You don't want to do that. It may cause a divorce or, God, murder. You don't know. That was a very difficult one to circumvent. But we would finally get the sergeant major to talk to the soldier and say, "Hey, you had better let your wife know what is going on." But yes, many, many times we received correspondence and questions about, "Why me?"

Interviewer: What do you think the major within the Army was during your tenure?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, as I had said to you before, the reincarnation of the Noncommissioned Officers Corps. That was a major problem. To get off of this business of the E1s, '2s, '3s having their councils, and the second lieutenants having their councils. Over a period of time, the NCOs said, "Why should I bother doing anything, because I don't have a voice in making any decisions." A reaffirmation

of the fact that, "Hey man, you've got to get on the stick if you want to last, because the Noncommissioned Officers Corps is going to get back into its rightful place. But it's up to you whether you're going to be a part of that program." I guess that made me feel real good; the retention of the NCOES Program. It's ongoing capability made me feel good. The Sergeants Major Academy, I'm extremely proud of that. We, at first, got a lot of flack from senior officers about the curriculum. Oddly enough, there were those who would come to me and tell me what a great thing it was, and then I would hear, through the grapevine, that they disliked it intensely. So General Haines, who I regard as "The Godfather of the Academy," had some very tough going when he first started out to initiate a program whereby senior NCOs could attend that Academy.

Interviewer: Talking about the NCO Corps and how we finally turned it around. What do you think was the key to turning the Corps around and making it a responsible Corps once again?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I would hope that I had just a little part in that, because that's all I talked about and to. Primarily, not all, but sometimes I would talk to others. I told you I would talk to the Soldiers of the Month and the Soldiers of the Year, and that sort of thing. But every place that we went, it was NCO, NCO, NCO, and we threw out these 201s, like I told you, and let them know what we had in the Corps. Now that's somebody's fault. The NCO has to police his own Corps. You've got to have the moral courage to counsel and to call it like it is. Moral courage, to me, is much more demanding than physical courage, because we have a tremendous amount of people, even to this day, who are not appropriately counseling people and issuing false counseling statements. I firmly believe that. You see, no Sergeant Major of the Army can say that he really DID anything. He can say that he contributed to an accomplishment. That he can say. But to have someone say, "Well I did this," you had better eliminate that "I", now.

Interviewer: Beside the poor showing within the NCO Corps, which was one major problem, what about problems in the areas of training, or equipment, or maintaining the force and far as recruiting and retention? Were there any problems in those areas?

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. We had a tremendous disparity in training. We had the evolvement of this program whereby, as I told you early on that we had done, when you're on the KD range, you've got some sort of a training program for those people not firing. You utilize all of your time, not just part of your time. That was excellent. TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) came out with some very fine training programs. We began to have a concerted effort on training. "This unit formally trained well." "This unit trained poorly." "This unit didn't train, period." But not we set a demand on the units. We got the dictates about how we were supposed to do it.

Interviewer: What about equipment problems? Did you have very many of those, Armywide?

SMA Van Autreve: Well we have had equipment problems. As I told you, early on when we started to get ready for the invasion of Africa, we had the 37mm anti-tank gun. Now the Germans, as of 1938, had already been at war, and we should have gotten a clear cut indication of the proficiency of their weapons. We had the M5 anti-tank mine, which was worthless. The 2.36 rocker launcher was worthless. We didn't learn a lesson, because in 1950, we again used that same weapon to arm those people who went into Korea, from Japan. They cite the example of this gung ho lieutenant who fired twenty-three rounds out of a 2.36 rocket launcher, with negative results. Today, you know, we're talking about high tech equipment. I don't think we concentrate enough on sustaining the soldier with high tech equipment. I realize that a lot of it has been done, but not the point and place, because that's where a man loses his life or takes out an enemy, as opposed to himself. I don't think we've made the progress. Do you know what we're doing? If we have an

engineer unit reaching a mine field, and an infantry unit has got to go through to capture the enemy or gain information--it has to be a silent approach--we're still using the "probing system." The probing system that I had to use in 1942. I would think that there would be some other way. We've got flails and we've got all kinds of mechanized equipment which can immediately demolish a mine field. But generally, mine fields are covered by fire, and that's a little difficult, and when it's a stealth approach, you'd like to get through there just a little faster. Particularly if those mines are booby trapped.

Interviewer: Did the congressional committees, on Capitol Hill, ever ask you to come over and testify?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. Yes. I used to appear on radio programs and TV programs. I would go over when the Old Man went on "The Hill." We had a Colonel Skip... I can't think of the last name, out of the Legislative Office who used to go with me over to "The Hill" to meet and talk with congressmen, in a very informal environment. I wish I could think of his last name. But he was the guy who used to cart me about and introduce me to people, and let me have an opportunity to talk to them.

Interviewer: He was your legislative liaison?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: Whenever the word came out that you were going to go over to do some testifying, I guess the legislative liaison, plus the public affairs people, and everyone else, got shook up and were ready to help you.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh contraire. Oh contraire. In fact, when we did a television shot with the other senior NCOs of the other services. No pre-briefing. Whenever we went over and I would talk to a congressman, in that informal environment, I would just discuss the Army agenda, the Army purpose, and that sort of thing. No, I did not go down to Public Affairs. I most probably felt I didn't have anything

important enough to say anyway.

Interviewer: What about any appearances before the Senate Armed Services Committee?

SMA Van Autreve: Only individual. Those were later. You know, as I said to you before, things became increasingly better with each succeeding Sergeant Major of the Army. We're now to the point and place where the Sergeant Major of the Army does participate in a great many of those opportunities to speak before committees.

Interviewer: So you really didn't have an opportunity to get that involved.

SMA Van Autreve: No.

Interviewer: What about your relationship with members of the Armed Service Committee?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, I got along with guys like Powers, Sonny Montgomery, Strom Thurmond. There were a lot of those people that I got to know, and know quite well.

Interviewer: Was L. Mendel Rivers still living then?

SMA Van Autreve: No. No. God bless old Mendel though. He got me out of twenty-one dollars a month. He got me some more money and some more recognition from the standpoint of pay.

Interviewer: How was your interaction with the senior enlisted personnel of the other branches of the service?

SMA Van Autreve: Excellent. Primarily, the Air Force, and to a lesser degree, the Navy and the Marines. We got along very, very well. We would occasionally have social gatherings, social interaction. I would always invite the sister services to any kind of affair we had, you know, with the higher level. I got along very, very well with them.

Interviewer: Who was President of the United States during your tenure?

SMA Van Autreve: Nixon and Ford.

Interviewer: Did you ever get invited over to the White House?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. One of the primary times we were invited, of course, was when the Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded. The senior NCO of the service stood directly behind the chair of the recipient. And I must say, that wives played a very important role there, because they gather about thirty minutes prior to the arrival of the President of the United States. There's your wife, standing there talking to Pat Nixon, talking to the wife of the Secretary of the Army, talking to the wife of the Secretary of Defense, wives of secretaries of other services whose people are receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor. So your wife, in a period of thirty or forty-five minutes, has an exchange of personality with other women of other services, some of whom have high stature. And there is an impression drawn. I used to say to myself, "Rita, for thirty minutes, has a far more demanding job than I have." Because when they walk away they'll talk about the wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army, be it good or be it not. So that was tremendous. We had the honor of being with President Ford at the Blair House when the Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded to the deceased's family. The families were there. He spent time with them. He was almost to the point of crying as he was talking about the award recipients and about the families. But he stayed. Now this is the day that Vice President Ford became President of the United States. On that day, and yet he was there. He stopped long enough to talk to Rita and to talk to me. He spoke to us about ten or fifteen minutes. I always had the utmost respect for that man, that first of all, he truly felt the emotion of the occasion when he was making the awards, and secondly, that he would pause ten or fifteen minutes to talk to us upon that very demanding day.

Interviewer: And he knew what lay ahead later that day.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah.

Interviewer: When you went over to the White House, did you ever go over for things such as prayer breakfast or something other than

a Medal of Honor presentation?

SMA Van Autreve: We had been to many, many prayer breakfasts, but no, we were not ever to a prayer breakfast at the White House.

Interviewer: I know some of the other Sergeants Major of the Army have gone to the White House for some activities, other than Medal of Honor presentations.

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think that that has been enhanced as time goes by.

Interviewer: Approximately what percentage of the time did you spend in your Pentagon office?

SMA Van Autreve: It's very difficult for to give you a true indication, but I would say that maybe fifteen percent of my time.

Interviewer: The rest was on the road.

SMA Van Autreve: On the road. As I said to you earlier on, you have to spend some time in your office. Every Saturday and Sunday, when I came out of the field, I'm spending six to eight hours responding to inquiries, writing letters of appreciation to those who were benefactors during my trip. It's time demanding, so you've got to spend some time in that office. I didn't ask my two people to write those letters. I wrote them myself and I signed those letters. I felt I was justified in staying there and perhaps I should have stayed there a little bit more. But you always feel so guilty when you get a letter from some sergeant major requesting that you visit a unit that's got a hundred, a hundred and fifty, or two hundred people, as opposed to visiting a full fledged division. Even when you go visit a division, they tell you the numbers of people and you can't possibly get around to all of the units. You know, that's very difficult for you to do. You can amass all of the noncommissioned officers in a theater, or theaters, and get to them.

Interviewer: How did you keep the Chief of Staff informed what was going on in the Army, from your perspective? Did you do that through the staff officers so he eventually found out exactly what you

perception was of what was going on in the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: If I thought it was important enough for him, I would tell Colonel Livesy who, in turn, would get it to the Chief. But quite frankly, the majority of problems were problems that the Chief of Staff of the Army need not be burdened with. He's just got too many damn problems running an army. My job was to do something about it. I found that working with the action officers was just a tremendous help. I could go over and see Brown, over at MILPERCEN. I could see Hughes down in DCSPER. I had access to people who could make things happen. I felt that was my job, to get it done without resorting to having to go to the Chief or Vice Chief. The Chief of Staff of the Army, and the Vice Chief, they've got some halacious jobs.

Interviewer: When you were traveling, were you in contact with your office every day?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Did they call you or did you call them? How did you communicate?

SMA Van Autreve: I would call them because it was very difficult for them to get in touch with me. A lot of times if the troops were in the field, I would go out in the field and stay in the field. So the difficulty would be inherent for them to get in touch with me, because I'm not available. I would call or Gelner would call, because Gelner was with me all the time.

Interviewer: That's what I was going to ask you. Did you always take Gelner with you?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Yes. He was invaluable because he was a listening post. I would be talking to the troops and he would be on the outskirts, catching all of the remarks that were made. And after I finished speaking, there was a tendency for people to group together and discuss the Sergeant Major of the Army, and his shortcomings. He would pick all of that up, and that night we would get together and compare

notes.

Interviewer: So while you were on the road, Raylene was doing all of the work in the office.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: When planning your travel, how did you decide where you were going to go; when you were going to go; and how often you were going to go?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, there are certain areas that are very comfortable to go to and very nice to go to. You've got to watch yourself so that you do not go to those too often, as opposed to those places that... White Sands is not the greatest place in the world. Going out to the field in White Sands, out were the troops are doing the firing, it's sand, but there's no beach. I think you have to get to the places that are more miserable and talk to soldiers there, because then they feel as though someone has an interest in their welfare. You go to Fort Hood or Fort Sill, there's a tremendous organization of ACS and all other help activities that go on that can take care of the soldier. But those are not prevalent in a lot of our small posts. I try to balance the equation. I tried desperately to get to those places what were uncomfortable.

Interviewer: How often did Rita travel with you?

SMA Van Autreve: Rita would travel with me, but not overseas. Just in the States. As you know, Rita and I have been talking out at the Sergeants Major Academy. She is an invaluable aide; the wife of a Sergeant Major of the Army. Because, when she goes to speak to wives, wives will tell you like it is. We're in Alaska. Rita's driving from Anchorage back to post. Here's this kid, wearing a short-sleeved shirt. The temperature is about ten below zero. Rita picks him up. He's a soldier. She takes him on post and she's talking with him. She said, "Why don't you have a coat?" He said, "Well, they will not allow us to wear our pile jacket." Rita said, "Why not?" "Well, the Colonel just

said we wouldn't wear them. It was government issued and it was not to be worn." She said, "Do you get along with anybody else?" And he was talking. He said, "The Sergeant Major of USARAL talked to us the other day, and he was mean as hell." He said, "I'll tell you what, he's a mean SOB." So she drops him off down at his company and she said, "Oh, by the way, I'm going to talk to that guy and I'm going to tell him what you said." He said, "How do you know him?" She said, "I'm his wife." The kid almost fainted. But kids began to be allowed to wear parkas when they went home, because a lot of those kids were hitch hiking to get home. They don't have a car. Rent prices were pretty high. I had just not noticed that. You know, Rita picked this kid up and I find out that all of these kids are going home, dressed in little jackets. Someone would say, "Why don't they buy one?" Well, hell, because most probably they couldn't afford one. So that turned out well. Our kids were wearing their parkas home.

Interviewer: Sometimes we do things in the Army and some other people say, "Boy, that's stupid."

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. That's exactly right. You see, we have the comfort of being able to purchase the necessities of life, as we go about during off duty hours. Some of these kids can't do that. They can't do that. Now he wants to be with his wife. Economically, there's a derivation of assets. He goes down and he's finding a hard time paying the utility bills and paying for the apartment that he's living in, and the necessities. He's hitch hiking. His wife has to walk to go to the grocery store. They suffer some privation and we sometimes forget about it. We forget what it was like when we were privates.

Interviewer: Rita was actually an extension of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, wasn't she?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh she was. She was. She just did a great job.

Interviewer: When she went out on the trips, did she do very much

speaking?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. She's an excellent speaker, by the way. She's very, very sincere. What she does, she often tells them what it was like in her early days. It develops an appreciation for her, because they suddenly realize that this woman, who is the wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army, was not always the wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army. He has not always been that. That helps to break down the barriers of refusal to communicate.

Interviewer: She was also able to visit most of the wives' activities and get that feedback and help you in that area too. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, they were having a problem at Fort Hood with the Officers Wives Club. The Sergeant Major's wife called Rita and asked her if she would come up. She didn't want me to come, but she wanted Rita to come and help settle that problem that was occurring between the retired wives and the active duty wives. Rita helped placate that. It didn't entirely resolve the problem, but helped reduce the friction that existed.

Interviewer: When General Abrams was Chief of Staff of the Staff of the Army, he decided that the Sergeant Major of the Army should be married. I guess it has been policy ever since. Why do you think that requirement is so important?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I'll tell you what. It was important to me, Van Autreve, because of the role that she played. Because what she did, every time there was interaction with wives, wives began to develop an appreciation for the fact that Van Autreve was a human being, and that he does have concern and care. Rita was able to display very, very well the fact that she too cares. Bill Bainbridge's wife is just excellent. Outstanding. She did an excellent job. I don't know too much about the wives of the other Sergeants Major of the Army, but I had known Hazel for a long time. And yes, I do believe, as you said, they're an extension of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

Interviewer: It's also important that they be authorized to travel with the husband also. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: When Sergeant Major Dunaway was Sergeant Major of the Army, they finally got where they would pay for the wife's travel, because before that, he paid for the travel out of his pocket. Then the Comptroller of the Army approved the travel for his wife.

SMA Van Autreve: It's gotten easier as time has gone by. Every time we wanted Rita to go, we had to go to the Secretary of the Army; each and every time. So I guess some of that is predicated on the attitude and feeling of the Secretary of the Army.

Interviewer: Who was Secretary of the Army at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: Bo Calloway, when I first came on board. And I think the next guy was Alexander.

Interviewer: Was it Clifford Alexander?

SMA Van Autreve: It was Alexander. I don't remember his first name.

Interviewer: What about Secretary Calloway's relationship with you?

SMA Van Autreve: Very, very friendly. In fact, when I left he wrote me one of the nicest letters I have ever received.

Interviewer: About how often did you meet with him, or have an occasion to meet with the Secretary?

SMA Van Autreve: Only one time did I go, and that's the time that I told you about, when Colonel Dykes, who later became a three or four-star general, was the one that had me have a cup of coffee and simmered me down, because we had that extension of this guy who was a relative of Tip O'Neal, and who I thought was absolutely worthless. We didn't want him extended any more. He had been extended, what, two or three times. Of course, you're fighting a hell of a political problem, because it was Tip O'Neal's relative, but the guy should not have stayed in the Army.

But I did receive an assurance that he would not be extended again.

Interviewer: How many trips did you make to Europe during your tenure?

SMA Van Autreve: It's very difficult for me to say because I really didn't keep track. But I must tell you, going to Europe is a very exhausting experience. You see, the Sergeant Major of the Army gets a sergeant major in the morning, who's his escort. So he has to start out with breakfast early on. Now this sergeant major takes him through every possible, conceivable, place he can take him and showing him everything he possibly can. The day terminates and they may have some sort of activity; a dinner, or people sitting down, or he may have a formal affair to go to. He gets to bed about eleven, eleven-thirty. The next morning, a brand new sergeant major, full of exuberance, takes over and thoroughly exhausts the Sergeant Major. This goes on day-after-day, for seven days; a week. I was over there for two days. I had strep throat. I had an ear ache. I had, oh God, I had a cold. I'm in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, speaking to the AUSA (Association of the United States Army) and I have to hold on because I'm about ready to collapse. I've got a temperature of a hundred and three. Ah, they just run you to death.

Interviewer: Plus, your body hasn't overcome the jet lag?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, you've got to try desperately to be as enthusiastic at four o'clock in the afternoon as you are at seven o'clock in the morning, because these kids can feel that if you're not. When you get some place, like when you go out with the cav, out on those outposts, you're tired, but so is that kid. It hard to maintain your enthusiasm, day-after-day-after-day, and try to indicate to them that you appreciate what they're doing.

Interviewer: Do you recall what the major problem was that faced the troops in Europe, at that time?

SMA Van Autreve: Well we had a tremendous problem with drugs.

The thing that kind of bothered me, although this was an unanticipated visit on my part to the 97th General Hospital. We went up and we talked to those people who were incarcerated because of drug use. I came out of there with a fixed feeling, because if you had a fellow in your unit who was in the 97th, and you was his company commander, you were required to go visit him, periodically. Now that may be a fifty or seventy-five mile round trip for you, so that's a day lost. Now that a day lost, taking away from the people who is more deserving of your time. Then you balance that against the fact, "Is this guy going to come out of there clean and be a productive member of your society, or is he going to fall into recidivism and go back to where he was?" It kind of a difficult thing to come to resolution on.

Interviewer: As you traveled about Europe, and started comparing the Europe that you knew as a platoon sergeant and first sergeant, what changes had you observed, as far as the American troops were concerned? Facility wise, activity wise, quarters, etc.

SMA Van Autreve: First of all, let me tell you that before I make that statement, I believe that the problems we had in the 54th Engineers when I was First Sergeant of A Company, did not exist primarily because we had been together for a period of two, two-and-a-half, three years. I could fall out the company and walk out there and I knew whether there was something wrong, because we had been together so long. We had that bonding that's created by virtue of a long association. The later years in Europe, you did not have as much of that bonding. You were not together as long. I firmly believe that we promoted a lot of people who should not have been promoted. I was visiting with an artillery unit. It's about five-thirty and I said, "Well, we're going over and get a sandwich." The artillery sergeant major told me, "You cross the parade ground after five-thirty." "Why not?" "You're not permitted. The soldiers don't want it." Now this is the same sergeant major who, when I visited, his area was a pig sty. I

found one clean area in the whole business, and that was an E5. I ask him. I said, "How do you do this? This place looks like a pig sty and your place looks so neat." He pulled out a bunk adapter and he said, "I run this room." It sounds like, "Hey, that kind of authoritarian," but my God, he had a clean area, and most probably had well trained people, as opposed to the Sergeant Major. We had a lot of people who were terrified of soldiers; afraid of soldiers.

Interviewer: Tell me about your trips to the Far East. Did you go to Okinawa, Japan, or Korea?

SMA Van Autreve: I went to Formosa, Japan, and Korea. Formosa, I need not have gone because it was such a luxury place to go to. There were no hardships there. They didn't need me. I had plenty of time on the golf course and on the beach. Korea. I enjoyed the trip to Korea because we helicoptered up to those places where there were ten, fifteen, twenty soldiers in total isolation in some area, up on some mountain top; signal people who were up there. You enjoy going up there because you're a strange face, and they don't get very many. You up there indicating that you're really concerned and you're trying to help them in some way or another. At the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) I was particularly appreciative of those kids because, you know, they're the first to go. They had the attitude, "Let them come, we're ready."

Interviewer: What kind of reception did you receive from the younger troops when you came. Did they want to come up and shake your hand and talk with you?

SMA Van Autreve: They are a little reticent at first. Now in the old days, the bums, the complainers, oh man, they wanted immediate access. They would come rushing up. But later in life, the kids were a little more reticent about coming up and approaching. You had to force the issue. You had to go to them. They would stand on the outskirts and you'd be talking to the sergeants major and the first sergeants. They would be out there, just standing still. When you go

up to them, you know, and clap a kid on the back, or ask, "How are you doing?", or any kind of simple conversation or discussion, pretty soon you've got them going. They kind of appreciate the fact that the Sergeant Major of the Army said hello.

Interviewer: Did you find that they were willing to talk about their jobs and tell you how well they could do their jobs, etc?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, on the DMZ and in a lot of places in Korea, I found some soldiers that really had PMA -- Positive Mental Attitude -- about what they were doing and who they were. I enjoyed my trip to Korea. I really did.

Interviewer: The 2nd Infantry Division, up North near the DMZ, is probably one of the few units still left in the Army that really has a, I guess you'd say, "a life or death mission," because you never know if or when the North Koreans are going to come across that line.

SMA Van Autreve: I was there again, about four years ago. Five years ago I was working for the Department of the Army on voting registration. That was one of the places that we visited. We went up to the DMZ again, because it leaves you with a tremendous feeling about the worth of the American soldier. You really feel proud about the kids.

Interviewer: How often did you get a chance to travel with the Chief of Staff?

SMA Van Autreve: Very seldom did I travel with the Chief. But let me tell you about one occasion. We were going down to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and we were coming in on a helicopter. The group is there; the entourage. You know, the colonels, and the generals, and the lieutenant colonels. They're all gathered about. And the Sergeant Major is there with a young soldier. It's cold. It is cold. I walk over to the Sergeant Major and he says, "I would like to introduce you to the Soldier of the Year." We land about eight-thirty in the morning and this kid has been there since five o'clock in the morning. Another one of these tremendous communication factors where you notify the

Sergeant Major of this kid that he has got to be there at eight o'clock. So the Sergeant Major tell the First Sergeant to tell him to be there at seven o'clock. The First Sergeant tells the Platoon Sergeant to tell him to be there at six o'clock. The squad leader tell him to be there at five o'clock. You know, this poor kid is blue. I went to General Abrams and said, "Sir, could I introduce you to the Soldier of the Year?" He said, "Absolutely. Absolutely." He just walked away from everybody else, came over, shook this kids hand, patted him on the back, and talked to him. He didn't just do that and walk away, he talked to him for about a minute. See, that's the value of the thing. People can come up and just shake your hand and "zip." He looks this kid in the eye and he talks to him about a minute. "How are you doing? Are you married?", and that sort of thing. This kid felt like somebody had just given him an Oscar, just because of that. It sort of justified the fact that he had been out there since five o'clock in the morning because of this screw-up communication system we too often have.

Interviewer: You were also telling me about one trip you made to where you were taught humility by one of the recruits.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yeah. That was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. John Spooler was the Sergeant Major out there. The troops were out in the field and they had this series of stations that you go by. You know, there's an M16 that's got to be assembled. Here's a guy with a wound and you've got to treat the wound. Here's a gas attack. You go through all these and you're going as fast as you possible can. It's raining and I'm wearing a poncho. So I go through this whole system. When I end up, I'm muddy, filthy, wet. I get there about lunch time. They have these planks between the trees, and all of these recruits were getting ready to eat. Now they've got drill sergeants. They called them "The Hat," in those days. So I told everybody, I said, "I'm going over and eat at one of these tables, and I want to go alone. I don't want anybody else..."

(End Tape OH 94.2-5, Side 1)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-5, Side 2)

Interviewer: When the tape ended you were telling about going over to eat with the recruits and you said you wanted to be alone with them. Go ahead and continue telling about that visit.

SMA Van Autreve: I said that I didn't want anybody to go with me. So I go over to the table. This one kid had a brassard on to indicate that he's an acting corporal. So we're eating and talking; just a general discussion. And here comes an E6; The Hat. So this kid, the acting jack, he punches me and says, "Put your fork down." I said, "Why?" He said, "You don't eat when The Hat comes. Is that clear?" I said, "Yes sir." There's some consternation there, because The Hat sees me and doesn't know what to do. I just nodded my head a little bit, and he walks on by. This kid said, "I want to tell you something right now, and you listen to me. You see these stripes. I'm an acting corporal, and when I tell you to put your fork down, you put it down NOW! Is that clear?" I said, "Yes sir." So after we had eaten, I left there. You know, telling that kid I was the Sergeant Major of the Army wouldn't have effected him a bit, because to him, the supreme being was the drill sergeant. I told John. I said, "Well, there's no egotism in this body today, because I have just been put in my place about who's important in the United States Army."

Interviewer: When you were traveling, did you travel on a combination of military air and commercial air?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: You had standing blanket travel orders. Is that correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: I think you said you visited Formosa. Right?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What was the purpose of that visit?

SMA Van Autreve: It was just part of the itinerary. The CINCPAC (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific) Sergeant Major, Sergeant Major Graham, had introduced me to the itinerary that he wanted me to take, and Formosa was included in the deal. But I'll tell you quite frankly, anybody that lived that plush didn't need a visit from anybody. I enjoyed Japan. The soldiers in Japan, there were not that many, but they lived well. They lived very well in Japan. Oh contraire to the living conditions in Korea. The only problem with Korea was the black market problem.

Interviewer: Did you get a chance to go to Greece, Italy, or Turkey?

SMA Van Autreve: No I did not. No. I'm only there two years and I did a heck of a lot of traveling, but gee, there's so many places. And today, there are so many more places where we have soldiers. Kidd is doing a hell of a job. He's really traveling a great deal. He does a good job. He's an excellent, excellent Sergeant Major of the Army.

Interviewer: Tell me about the working relationship between you and General Abrams?

SMA Van Autreve: Well that's hard to define. I think I've already eluded to the fact that they were very favorable conditions. I only had my rear end chewed-out about three times. I thought that was a pretty good average, and that was because I overloaded my mouth. But I had so much respect for him. I enjoyed every day that I served General Creighton Abrams.

Interviewer: It was a big shock when we found out that he had cancer.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. I was in Fort Benjamin Harrison when Major Reimer called to let me know that he had passed away.

Interviewer: Who replaced General Abrams?

SMA Van Autreve: General Weyand.

Interviewer: He replace General Abrams right near the end of your tenure. Correct?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What was his position before he became Chief of Staff?

SMA Van Autreve: He was in the Vice Chief position at that time.

Interviewer: Let me ask you to reflect back on your military career. You were in basic training when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: What were the reactions of your fellow recruits and the people around you?

SMA Van Autreve: Idiotically enough, we cheered. We were all of the opinion, "Hey, we're going to wipe them out in a period of three or four weeks. There's no problem." But when your twenty, twenty-one years old, you believe all that you hear. We were not aware, on the 7th of December, of the consequences of the Pearl Harbor attack. We didn't realize how far reaching it was. We thought it was going to be a snap. Everybody wanted to go, immediately, to get it over with. Unfortunately, such was not the case. It did not last for three or four weeks.

Interviewer: When you came back in the Army, in 1948, when your friend talked you into coming back in the Army, how had the Army changed from the Army that you left in 1945?

SMA Van Autreve: Let me tell you, the Army in 1945 was a damn good army. Primarily because, I would assume, of the fact we had been accustomed to discipline, and there were not that many infractions of the rules and the regulations. In 1948, we had some problems because, I personally believe, we took too many officers who decided to stay in the Army and converted them into first sergeants and platoon sergeants. That caused a tremendous morale problem. As I said to you earlier, some of those people did a great job. Some of those people did a horrible job. The problem was that some of those people became super authoritarian. You know, you've got a button unbuttoned, they cut the

button off. These little jerky things like that. I told you about policing cigarette butts in about two or three inches of water. Standing formation in the rain and just keeping us out there, until the ex-captain decides that "Well I guess I ought to stroll out there and see what the troops are doing." I was happy as hell to get out of there and get to a unit.

Interviewer: Whenever the Army had its RIF (Reduction in Force), those officers who lost their commissions, or were about to lose to lose their commissions, were given the option to become noncommissioned officers. When those former officers became NCO, they occupied NCO slots. What long range effect did that have on the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think that the perception that some people were not doing a good job became readily apparent. Instead of an officer reverting to an E7 position, he began to be reverting to an E5 position. We found, as time went by, that became the case. So then he was no longer a threat. Then he really had to get strack in order for him to survive, because he's got a couple of worthwhile E4s out there who want to be E5s too, and E6s and E7s.

Interviewer: What do you think was the most difficult decision you had to make as a command sergeant major?

SMA Van Autreve: That's a very, very difficult question.

Interviewer: Did you ever have to take some strong disciplinary action, particular against a senior NCO, and it was a difficult decision to make?

SMA Van Autreve: I frankly did not have a problem with that. I had a very, very, very good friend. A very good friend who had a DWI. He came to me and wanted some degree of amelioration because of our friendship. He got none. I was with myself. I was not one who felt that friendship should overcome what is right or wrong, and I'm serious. That's a statement that they will say, "Oh that's hog wash. Bull." But it's the truth. He was a very good friend of mine. That caused the

secession of friendship.

Interviewer: What about when you were Sergeant Major of the Army? Were there any difficult decisions you had to make?

SMA Van Autreve: I made some decision that I maybe did not particularly care for. But when you say difficult. No, I can't remember anything that was difficult for me to make. I really can't.

Interviewer: During the time you were Sergeant Major of the Army, what did you find the most frustrating that you had to deal with?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, you get the Sergeants Major of the MACOMs in for your annual meeting. Each of them was supposed to come prepared to offer recommendations as to what can be done to improve the Army. And what I had done is, I had read all of the preceding remarks made at these and I had attended three or four of them myself, as Sergeant Major of Alaska, to find the re-invention of the wheel. When I talk about re-invention of the wheel, the heartburn that I had years ago, and that I still have, is the reluctance to get the best qualified person into our school system. Number one. And the failure on the part of senior NCOs to make sure that the person that goes to a school, whether it be the Sergeants Major Academy or any other school, is qualified to go to that school. There was my frustration; the same problems. And now, even now, when I get a profile on classes and when I visit the schools throughout the United States, I still find that there's a problem with people coming in, overweight, not qualified, with an apathetic attitude. And I just cannot believe it. So I still have that same frustration, although I'm retired.

Interviewer: While you were Sergeant Major of the Army, the Sergeants Major Academy was just like a little infant child, just learning to crawl. Who did you find were the biggest supporters of that Academy, and who were the biggest opponents of that Academy?

SMA Van Autreve: You could not have survived without the support of the Chief of Staff of the Army. General Haines, as you know, was the

Godfather. And those who were reluctant about supporting the Academy, when they found that General Abrams supported the Academy, their reluctance suddenly became dormant. So what we're saying is, the Chief of Staff continued to support it and that's what made it viable; the product.

Interviewer: Did you hear any "bad mouthing?"

SMA Van Autreve: Oh sure. Oh sure. You know, why have a curriculum about geopolitics and about any one of a number of these subjects that are sacrosanct and should only be at the War College. There was this feeling that we were overeducating the Noncommissioned Officers Corps. But I think we have definitely proved that by further educating the noncommissioned officer, he becomes a more valuable commodity in running units, and battalions, the S3s, the first sergeants, the sergeants major. Now he's beginning to get an idea what it's all about. He didn't do like me. I had to make my own road map to where to go and how to get there. He's got one furnished.

Interviewer: You have seen the Sergeants Major Academy from the beginning. We are not in Class 43. Give me your assessment of the changes over the years, and how you think the Academy has benefitted the NCO Corps and the Army.

SMA Van Autreve: Well I don't think there's any doubt that anyone would argue about the fact, because officers who were recalcitrant about supporting it originally, now support it because they found out it's true value in providing a pretty well educated and rounded-out noncommissioned officer for the Army. The thing I really like about the Academy is the fact that they are willing to change the curriculum. They do today what they did yesterday, and that's really heart warming to me. Because every time I go I talk to Sergeant Major Strahan. He and I sit down and talk. He tells me about what changes are being made. There's always an implementation of something new, when I go down there, and that's forward thinking as opposed to backward thinking.

Interviewer: While we're talking about the Academy, the Army also has the First Sergeant Course, which is under the control of the Sergeants Major Academy, and I guess you could say it's part of the Academy. How valuable do you think the First Sergeant Course is to the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: I wish I had had the opportunity to go; number one. And number two, I firmly believe that peacetime is an environment wherein you can maximize training for everything you possibly can. There ought to be as much progress and as much exposure to any type of training. And I say to you once more, to risk repetition, I would like very much to have had the opportunity to go to first Sergeant course when I became First Sergeant of Headquarters Company.

Interviewer: How do you think the role of the Sergeant Major of the Army has changed over the years?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think, and we're very proud of the fact, that it has broadened immeasurably from the first guy to the incumbent. There's more latitude for him to be involved. There's more exposure from him in the arena of the Senate and participating in speaking out in front of the House of Representatives. I think we've broadened the acceptability of the Sergeant Major of the Army, and we've broadened the respect of the position of the Sergeant Major of the Army, among not only the military but among the civilians as well.

Interviewer: Do you think that the attitude of senior NCOs has possibly changed over the years, number one, because of the Sergeants Major Academy, and number two, the importance of the position of the Sergeant Major of the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Let me address this because I feel very firmly about it. We have a reluctance on the part of some sergeants major to accept the role of the Sergeant Major of the Army. There are some who have said we should stop the Command Sergeant Major Program at the brigade level. Well, you know, that's stabbing yourself in the foot,

because you have the opportunity with the Sergeant Major of the Army to make your voice heard at those levels that you just don't have any accessibility to. You know, the Sergeant Major of the Army is talking to the Chief of Staff of the Army. He's talking to the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. He's talking to the DCSPER. He's talking to FORSCOM (Forces Command) and TRADOC generals. God, he's got access to the power. He can promulgate and provide input on noncommissioned officer programs, and promotions, and any one of a number of things, because he has that accessibility. Brigade sergeants major don't have that kind of accessibility. I think whenever we demean the possibility of trying. "Hey, I don't approve of it. I'd like to see it eliminated," you're crazy. Either that, or you're so jealous about not having been chosen or considered that you want it to go away because you're not involved, or affected, or going to be a Sergeant Major of the Army.

Interviewer: Since your tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army, what has been your relationship with your successors?

SMA Van Autreve: Very good. We get together once a year. The Sergeant Major of the Army has been kind enough each year to have us together. We have an opportunity to sit with the MACOM Sergeants Major because there's a realization, I guess, that many of the things that they talk about, we have been through. Maybe we talk too much some times. We go to those things and we provide too much input and we fail to realize we're no longer an active part of the Army, but nonetheless we have the opportunity to forewarn or talk about things that we have seen and the problems that we witnessed and encountered, and pass it on to the MACOMs. So we're treated very, very, very well.

Interviewer: So you have an opportunity to go to the Major Command Command Sergeants Major conference each year?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: How has the conference changed over the years, from the time of your tenure to the present day?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, when we first started this thing out, we had the Chief of Staff come in, and we had the Secretary of the Army come in, and that's a great way to start it off. But then we began to have all officers conducting our briefings. We now have senior noncommissioned officers who give the majority of the instruction and the dissemination of information. I think that that's the more positive indication of the worth of the noncommissioned officer.

Interviewer: Would you assess the effectiveness of the Family Policy and the Family Support System that the Army has now, and why it's so important.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh. Oh. First of all, it just makes sense that when you have such a tremendous percentage of your population who are married, they become part of the United States Army. If you do not satisfy the family, the husband or the wife is going to leave the Army. We just have to realize that we have taken this young wife out of Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, brought her into a new element. There she had all of the comfort of having her family, relatives, friends. Suddenly she's introduced into an area where she doesn't know anyone. She's got to have recourse to something like the ACS. She's got to realize there is a PX that is much like the store, the K-Mart, back in her hometown. She's got to be made aware of those facts. There's got to be an appreciation for her as an individual. Sometimes it's difficult to get the women to participate, because their husbands don't let them know what is going on. But wives are absolutely important. And I'll tell you, it's pretty darn nice to come home at the end of the day, or after three days or four days in the field, and have a wife waiting for you, and have your kids there. That's pretty nice. And they've got to be recognized as a permanent part of this Army.

Interviewer: During Desert Storm, we had a problem that surfaced. Without many people really realizing it, until it hit them like being hit between the eyes with a 2x4, with complete units being deployed,

leaving behind a large population of dependents, there wasn't an effective system worked out to provide such a large number of dependents with the assistance they needed. I'm sure you're aware of, that going to the conferences. How do you think the Army can improve its Family Policy and its Family Support System?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, in fact we've got to take the learning from that particular arena. But I think we're making a whole lot of progress. I think there's been geometric progress in the family arena. You know, it was an unheard of thing, throughout my military career, to have wives go to a three-day seminar, such as they do at the Sergeants Major Academy. Here, Rita and I addressed a group, by courtesy of the Fifth Army, who brought wives in from the Fifth Army area, and who spent three days on being made aware of the necessity for caring for one another. I think we've made progress. And we're going to learn from what happened with Desert Storm. But we've got to get the senior NCO wives who attend these conferences, to make sure, that when they go home they disseminate the information. And that they, in turn, have meetings with these wives and make them feel part of the program.

Interviewer: As we take a look at the Army, over the years, how do you feel the quality of the soldier has changed over the years?

SMA Van Autreve: Well the true quality of a soldier is not determined in a peacetime environment. It is determined in a combat environment. At the risk of having fifteen hundred axes wielded in my direction, I'm saying to you that a hundred days war does not prove that you have better quality soldiers than the soldier who participated in World War II, some of whom were overseas for two-and-a-half or three years. Because then you get accustomed to body lice, filth, dirt, hunger, failure to shower. If we get another one of those, then you're going to truly determine the worth of the soldier. I am impressed with the fact that the soldier is better educated. I'm impressed with the fact he had undergone the NCOES Program, which makes him a better

soldier, which was not afforded us as an opportunity when I was growing up in the Army. I think that we are doing much better. Disciplinary problems are down. Let's see what happens in the next year or so, as we have the draw-down, because we're on a roller coaster in the military. We have our ups and downs. We're now on the down cycle or we're down grading. If we have another conflict of any sort, we're going to start up the roller coaster and start the induction of people. Are they going to be as willing to come in? Are we going to get the same type of quality? I don't know.

Interviewer: What affect do you think the transition to an all-volunteer force has had on the quality of the soldier?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I'm kind of glad you asked that, because I do have comments about that. We're not ever going to get a draft. The draft passed, in 1939, by one vote. By one vote. Now that was in a disciplined area. That was in an area where there was a feeling and a positive attitude toward the military. That's when we were more conservative, but it passed by one vote. There is no possibility in the world that we will re-institute the draft. The lawyer doesn't want his son to go. The doctor doesn't want his son to go. I recently addressed a group of Rotarians. I talked about body bags. I related the fact that if you don't give us the necessary money for training, and if you don't support our soldiers, economically, the net result will be an increase in body bags. He got to have, as in Desert Storm, the proper equipment and the proper training. And when I got to the question and answer period, a guy said, "How could you cure all of this? How could you make it better? How could you make people more involved?" I said, "Very easy. Re-institute the draft." And if you wanted to hear silence, you could hear it there, because I could perceive that they immediately thought to themselves, "Hey, what he's saying is, there's a possibility that my son or daughter might go." But you're not going to get it. You're not going to get it.

Interviewer: How has the changing demography of the United States affected the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, you know, it strained some of the areas where we used to get, what we considered to be, the best soldiers. We used to be able to say that if he's from Louisiana, if he was from Mississippi, he was a good soldier. If he was a farm boy out of Missouri, he was a good soldier. I don't think you can say that anymore. I just think that you're going to have a good and bad mix coming from anywhere and everywhere, because we're not brought up under the same traditions and same discipline that we were in the old days.

Interviewer: What affect do you think the increasing number of women in the military is going to have on the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think that it's great. I am entirely opposed to utilization of women in combat roles. As an example. I'm Sergeant Major of the Army, I'm going to visit, down in Sixth Army, the WACs. An E4 WAC is my guide. I reach over and I open the door for her. I thought, "What the hell did I do that for? I'm the Sergeant Major of the Army, she's a corporal." But see, that's our attitude toward women. Now it's bad enough in combat for me to see a soldier get killed. When I saw Jawarski get killed, that hurt. But then when I think, also of the fact I might see a woman, a female soldier, laying there with her legs blown off, would I feel the same degree, same attitude? I think that I would be more subjected to horror, at seeing that sort of a deal. The Israelis tried it and found it was not a proper thing to do, because soldiers worried more about women than they did about themselves. On the other side of the coin, however, in Russia there was not that problem. But when you looked at some of the Russian female soldier I saw, I can understand why.

Interviewer: It's how society looks at the female.

SMA Van Autreve: That's exactly right. We're prone to open doors for ladies. We're prone to be more considerate of them. I think they

play an important part in our Army. Their more ambidextrous than men. They do better at long periods of time in front of computers, and that sort of thing. There's a Sergeant Major Broxie over here at the Academy, at Fort Sam Houston, female, black, and just as outstanding a noncommissioned officer as you ever want to meet. She should be in a higher position, in my estimation. She could do most of that, but she will admit to the fact that she doesn't want to be in combat. There was a survey conducted and eighty-five percent of the females, who were in the survey, said "No," they did not want to be in combat. Now I realize we've got a few "gung ho's" that would like that, but they haven't been there. They haven't been there. And we've not been in a prolonged wartime environment that would necessitate doing without baths, or limited water available for bathing, or violation of hygienic measures, or the fear of seeing a female killed. We just haven't been subjected to that.

Interviewer: I guess that you would agree that one of the biggest problems they would encounter is maintaining proper hygiene.

SMA Van Autreve: That's a severe problem. And what are you going to do, you're in combat. Are you going to have a "His" and "Her" latrine?

Interviewer: How has the role of the women in the Army changed over the years?

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I appreciate women in the Army; I really do. But I think, even to this day, there's a certain amount of discrimination toward the female soldier. There are those who are gung ho, and there are those what come into the Army because it's economic subsistence. They can do better in the Army than they could as a clerk. If they've got a limited education, they can most probably do much better than anything else that they may be doing, economically. But there's some that are excellent. Women soldiers are like male soldiers, some are good and some are bad.

Interviewer: How have the soldiers' reasons for enlisting or reenlisting changed over the years?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, I think in the old days there was more dedication, and I kind of attribute that though, to the fact they were together longer. And as such, it was a more familiar environment. It was like your hometown. You got to know one another. You got to know one another's eccentricities. You got to know one another from the standpoint of sharing social affairs. You shared the work, you shared the dirt, you shared the rain. And if you were to get along enough, why you became a family. There was that bonding that we talked about. That's more difficult when you rotate people so often, as we did out of 'Nam and as we did out of Korea.

Interviewer: What change in attitude of the soldiers have you observed over the years?

SMA Van Autreve: When I first came into the Army we had no discipline problems. We had problems of no kind. Then we come into the arena of 1965, on. We began to have severe discipline problems. There was no respect. You'd go to the jail in Long Binh and you'd find the prisoners dressed worst than anybody else in the world. There's no discipline in the prison. Those were very difficult times. I think we're back on track. We started that, perhaps, in 1975, '76. '77, gradually coming back into our own with the restoration of the noncommissioned officer as a viable part of the Army. And we're having an introduction of a better quality of people. We don't have McNamara's 100,000 to worry about. We're just introducing better people into the Army.

Interviewer: Compare the readiness of today's Reserve Components with the time you were in the Ohio National Guard.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh my God, the progress had been astronomical. As I said to you earlier, when I was in the National Guard we had no Regular Army officers. We had no educational institutions for

noncommissioned officers; I'm not too sure what they had for officers. When you went out for field training, it was not really field training. But they're really moving. They are moving. We've got them attending the Sergeants Major Academy. We've got them taking extension courses out of the Sergeants Major Academy. They're educated. And let me tell you, there are a hell of a lot of those guys who are very patriotic. You know, I was down in San Francisco talking to the Guard, and some of those people travel long distances. The Sergeant Major travels four hundred miles to make his meetings. Four hundred miles. They've got a battalion commander who flies from Phoenix, Arizona to Eureka, California. We've got guys who fly from Seattle, Washington to Anchorage, Alaska, because it's a Special Forces unit and they want to belong to it. Now that's tough. That's tough. There are a lot of people that do that. The patriotism is there. It's unfair of anyone to demand, with only thirty-nine days of training a year, that they correspond to the Regular Army. We may in engineer units where their day-to-day business is operating scrapers or bulldozers. We may in the electronics field. We may in the medical field because those people, that's their day-to-day. But when we start talking about artillery and armor, it's hard for those people, in thirty-nine day, to assimilate the type of training you get from the Regular Army guy.

Interviewer: It took the Army a long time to realize that we've given them a mission but we hadn't given them the proper resources and training.

SMA Van Autreve: Absolutely. Absolutely. And they still feel just a little bit concerned about their role.

Interviewer: You went out to the National Training Center during Desert Storm, when General Vono called-up the former Sergeants Major of the Army and sent you out to Fort Irwin, California. After you had that chance to look at the National Training Center, give me your impression of it and tell me about your trip out there.

SMA Van Autreve: Impressive. Absolutely impressive. It gets better every time. We went out, you know, and it's in the summertime. My host is a command sergeant major and he takes me over. He said, "We're going to have to get you some more clothes." So here comes the parka. Here comes the winter underwear, and all this sort of thing. I said, "Hey friend, it's summer." Well, three o'clock the next morning, in that humvee, with the windshield down, I thought I was back in Alaska. It was tough. But it's a superior training program and the professionalism exuded by the supporting elements and everything else that is going on is excellent. The people who are involved try hard. They try hard. I saw a colonel cry because of a failure on the part of one of his units. Gee, I was impressed. I could have stayed there for a week. I thought it was great. It's one of the best things we've ever had, and that's on both sides. That's from the standpoint of the trainer and the trainee.

Interviewer: Another plus we have there, we're starting to send Reserve Component units out there.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. In fact, the last maneuver there was the Mississippi National Guard, I believe, that was undergoing training. Yes. This most closely resembles a combat situation that I have ever seen.

Interviewer: How do you think our methods of training have changed since our involvement in South Vietnam? Do you think we've focused our training toward realism?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. Absolutely. We've just cited an example; Fort Irwin. Yes, we've certainly introduced a heck of a lot more realism. And the other thing is, we're not truly intuned to the philosophy that a better educated noncommissioned officer is, in the end run, a better noncommissioned officer, and it makes for a better Army. I'm just impressed with the educational opportunities that's afforded the guy and the gal in the Army today.

Interviewer: What do you think was the biggest training problem we had during the Vietnam War era?

SMA Van Autreve: I think the people were not prepared to find out that the enemy was everywhere. It was not like World War II when you knew "They're the enemy." You know, the enemy is the guy who's working in the mess hall down at the 588th. When you lifted so many trays, this device went off. This guy, who had been working there two years, but that device in there and killed some soldiers. Those are the guys who sneak in and blow-up a couple of helicopters. They're rampart; they're everywhere. The kids are just as devastating as the adults. And women are just as devastating as men.

Interviewer: That's another thing. The American people hold women and children in high regard and they can't realize how the orientals look at women and children. In a wartime environment, to them, women and children are just another expendable commodity that can be used to obtain their goals.

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think our problem is, the women in the United States fail to realize that this woman in Vietnam, or this child in Vietnam, can be serving you a Coke with shredded glass in it. They can shoot you the minute you turn your back. Because they just don't understand that. If, in retaliation, the soldier kills a woman who shot at him, the press of course takes an advantage of the opportunity and maligns the soldier for having shot a female. The people don't understand that this gal shot at him. You know, they're really tough about that. I think the adversity of the Vietnam War was the fact that we constantly rotated personnel; our constant rotation of personnel. You've heard me use "bonding" so many times. The Germans found it very effective. If they had a tank crew and there was not a bonding indication, then whichever one individual who did not contribute, was gone, because that was the fix; getting people to fight and die for one another.

(End Tape OH 94.2-5, Side 2)

(Begin Tape OH 94.2-6, Side 1)

Interviewer: We were talking about various problems in Vietnam and training in Vietnam. As you look back at the war in Vietnam, what do you think was the Army's biggest shortcoming during that war?

SMA Van Autreve: The failure to continue a war. I cite the example of the 11th ACR (Armored Cavalry Regiment). They were not permitted to penetrate the rubber plantations. They were not able to effectively maintain a hot pursuit into Cambodia. These are all frustration points that really irritated the troops. After a while there's frustration that sits in. I thought that was one of the really disparaging that happened about the Vietnam Conflict.

Interviewer: How has the Army's leadership training changed over the years?

SMA Van Autreve: I think that in the old days we received our training in leadership from role models and mentors. I'm not implying by that that there were a great many of them. I was fortunate enough to have one when I went through my basic training at Fort Belvoir, but I found very few from then on whom I would consider a mentor. As to whether or not a person is a mentor, that's up to me; that's judgmental on my part. I determine if he's a mentor. I determine if he's a role model and I want to be like him. I'm not sure that we have enough of those. Today we don't have as effective a role model/mentoring system. People think that you are a mentor by virtue of your rank. I don't believe that's true. You're a mentor by virtue of your acceptance by your subordinates. However, we are trying to make up for the deficiency in the positions of role models by having our NCOES Program. We're embracing leadership as part of the curriculum.

Interviewer: Do you think that our young soldiers today, and I'm talking about the '80s and '90, have better role models to look up to that the soldiers did during the Vietnam War?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh my God yes! Oh yes. You know, as I told you. How can you have a first sergeant as a role model when the major part of your first sergeant corps is back at the hooch. There's no visibility out where the dirt is, and where the sweat is, and where the pain is. As I remarked earlier, the people began to get the idea that the senior noncommissioned officer in the unit was an E7, because that's who they saw and who they were familiar with. I want to say, emphatically, that I don't want to imply that was across the board. There were a hell of a lot of those people who did a great job. But unfortunately, one is too many not to do what is right.

Interviewer: I wonder why, back then, our NCO Corps got into that way of doing things; taking the easy way out.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, you know, when you're only there for a year... I have a feeling that many of our commanders fail to realize that the command sergeants major works for them and they have all the authority in the world to tell them that they don't like what they are doing. When a sergeant major reports into a brigade or battalion, the battalion commander should have a sit-down and discussion about what the role of the sergeant major is. But there's not a whole lot of that being done. Here's how a lot of our officers consider a sergeant major. "I have a sergeant major." "That's MY Sergeant Major." It's like driving a new Cadillac. "I have a Cadillac, but I don't know how to drive it." I don't know where I'm supposed to go or how to get there, but I have a Cadillac." "Well, now I have a sergeant major. That means, boy, I really am in hog heaven, because that's an accessory that defines me as being something special." Too many of them do not have a definition of the role of the sergeant major when they meet.

Interviewer: When we look at the Noncommissioned Officers Education System, when the Army finally got smart and developed a structured system whereby every enlisted person at each level knows what the requirements are for training in order to get promoted, and also

knows what training they will receive at a certain level, what effect do you think that structured education system has had on the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: I think education is a great and wonderful thing. I regret the fact that it was so difficult for me to get it. The opportunities were not available to me, or to a hell of a lot of other noncommissioned officers, as they are today. The only umbrage I take with the educational system is that we've got some sergeants major out there who are sending people to attend courses who should not be attending. That's the one thing I have against the system. I don't think we should ease-up on the requirement to attend the courses. We should not ease-up on the academic standards that are set. We should make them just tight enough so that we separate the non-caring from the caring.

Interviewer: Just before you became a first sergeant, you were a platoon sergeant and you attended the NCO Academy. When you compare that academy to the academies when you were Sergeant Major of the Army, how had the NCO academy training changed?

SMA Van Autreve: We were just not afforded the versatility. One of the prime requisites, of course, to be recognized was the fact that your bed was so well made that you could bounce a half-dollar off of it an inch or two inches, and that the latrines were clean. But I must say, the Constab was a major development over other academies. There was a reluctance to have an academy because of the money required. The curriculum of the Academy was primarily spent on, maybe some close order drill; on dress right, dress; etc. But the Constab was the first major step forward in offering a diversified curriculum to the extent that it offered one. As I told you, it was a little difficult for me, as an engineer, to suddenly come aware of armor tactics. The thrust there was primarily armor. Armor tactics and some of the other areas were difficult for me to assimilate because they had nothing to do with engineering. But it broadened my scope.

Interviewer: What had changed in basic combat training from the time that you took basic training through your tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: I don't think basic training has been a problem. I think the problem is when the young man or young woman leaves basic training. And he may then go through AIT. But then he's assigned to a unit and that's when the degradation of that training that he has already received becomes sometimes apparent. Apparent only when you have an incompetent noncommissioned officer who becomes their platoon sergeant. And they look, in retrospect, over what they have been trained in. You know, they say, "Sir." They're polite. They're concerned. They're aggressive. They're willing to go eight hours a day. And suddenly, they have an apathetic NCO. We tend to destroy all that has been learned if we have an inappropriate noncommissioned officer in charge.

Interviewer: We were also talking about the changes in the roles of the noncommissioned officers. One of the biggest changes was in the role of the junior NCO, the corporal and the sergeant. Would you comment on the change of his importance and his authority during World War II verses today?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh. Oh. That's one thing I must say. But, of course, in time of war the noncommissioned officer always becomes a more important individual and has more authority. In peacetime we find a degradation of that. Suddenly, sometimes, we find a major adopting the role of the first sergeant. When I was a buck sergeant, in Africa and Sicily, there were so many times when I, as a squad leader with my squad, would take off and report to the 3rd Battalion, and then I had to provide the wherewithal for our substance. I had to provide the leadership. I had to get the gasoline. I had to get my truck maintained. I had to report to the Colonel to find out where the shoe mines were, or any kind of mines to be destroyed. There was no officers;

just a buck sergeant and his squad. There were a whole lot of other people just like that. The squad leader is a very important person in time of war. He makes some tremendous decisions. I would hope, not having been in Desert Storm, that the squad leaders and the platoon sergeants did as well and had the same degree of independence in making decisions.

Interviewer: What do you think the relationship between a command sergeant major and junior officer should be?

SMA Van Autreve: This is the one thing that used to really tick me off, when we get some command sergeant major who belittles a second lieutenant. Anybody that does that is a dumb bell. You and I both know of one command sergeant major, in particular, who abused the privilege of the fact that he worked for a four-star, and would degrade junior officers. Well, let me just tell you, those junior officers become colonels and generals, and they never forget the fact that there has been that demeaning of their position. Our job is to help a second lieutenant, or a first lieutenant, anyway that we can to make him a more functional officer. There's nothing wrong with a platoon sergeant advising a second lieutenant, as long as he does it discretely and he does it properly. How many senior officers have you heard who were said that some one noncommissioned officer played an important part in their life. Well that's the way it should be. It should be. When you hear a general speak with respect of a former platoon sergeant or a former first sergeant, we have an indication they were a good platoon sergeant or a good first sergeant. But if there's anything that really get you, I was in the Pentagon and I had this bird colonel tell me, "I don't like sergeant majors." Because, when he was a second lieutenant, he had a "jerk" who treated him like he was worst than a private, and he never forgot it. That's not our station in life. We are "non"commissioned officers, not commissioned officers.

Interviewer: I think the most impressive and moving talk I've

ever hear was when General Bradley spoke to class at the Sergeants Major Academy. First of all, he apologized for not being able to stand up and talk to us. He told us exactly what he thought of the noncommissioned officer, and he really laid it on the line how important the noncommissioned officers are. He talked about some of the NCOs who were special to him. When he finished, I don't think there was a dry eye in the place. You had a chance to meet General Bradley, didn't you?

SMA Van Autreve: Yes I did. In fact, I had lunch with him just a short time before he passed away.

Interviewer: And his mind was just as sharp as always.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes.

Interviewer: During the Vietnam War, what affect do you think the American news media had on the American people, the American government, and the American military forces in Vietnam?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I would like to draw a comparison. In World War II, we were regarded as heroes. Everything was positive. The press was positive. My picture appeared in the Delphus Hardware, in my little town of Delphus, Ohio, wearing my black uniform; the black apparel we used when we made the invasion of Africa. Everything was so, so positive. We came back after the war was over, and you get the key to the city. You came back from Vietnam, you get the key to the John. The media had to cause this adverse attitude, on the part of the public, because there was nothing else. God, they tried to rip the ribbons off of my chest--off of my uniform--in the subway when I was going to see Rita, in New York, who was taking care of her dying mother. They spit on my blouse. Here we were, these four guys attacking me in the subway train, and nobody in that car got up to help me. Nobody. Nobody. I didn't do anything to them, why this antagonism toward me? Sergeant Skylock wrote a little book about his attitude and feelings when he came home, about how he was treated. I believe there was a silent, silent, silent majority who helped and believed in what we were doing, and

believed in soldiers offering their lives up in support of whatever they were told to do, but they were too silent.

Interviewer: Do you think the news media actually wrote our foreign policy in Vietnam, by default?

SMA Van Autreve: Well I think so. Everything that our people did against someone else, and anything that they even thought might be an atrocity, suddenly became a blown-up atrocity. At no other time did we have somebody like Fonda, going to North Vietnam espousing their cause. At no time did we have so many people who were in favor of North Vietnam and who spoke out against the programs and problems. The news media really treated us horribly. I don't remember reading any article positively in our favor. I don't remember. There may have been, but I don't remember.

Interviewer: It was amazing, the difference in the live coverage of Desert Storm, and the attitude that they had in Vietnam.

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. We had a temporary resurrection of patriotism. I said "temporary."

Interviewer: It's going down hill right now.

SMA Van Autreve: This is the only place that you will still see a yellow ribbon. My wife refuses to take it down. It's tattered and torn, but it's still there. It will stay there, because we've got people in Macedonia, and we've got people in other parts of the world. We've had soldiers killed in Somalia. Rita says, "It will stay there." That flag flies out there, twenty-four hours a day, and it has been there for fifteen years. Not the same flag, we've changed it. At one time, when you came into Hollywood Park, you saw a hundred-fifty, two hundred flags. Where did they go?

Interviewer: It get to the point where, if it's not a special holiday, they don't want to be bothered.

SMA Van Autreve: Yeah. They don't even want to be bothered then.

Interviewer: I have a couple more opinion questions here. Many of

the Vietnam era NCOs, retired and active, believe that some of our Vietnam veterans used the military as an excuse for their lack of employment, and other problems, when most of their problems are their own fault. What do you think about that?

SMA Van Autreve: You know, I would not address that subject from that standpoint. I do feel that the camaraderie that exists between most Vietnam veterans exists, primarily, because of the poor attitude of the American people toward the Vietnam vet, and the treatment that they have been received and accorded, and I think they draw strength from one another. Now some people can talk that and some people can't. I was repulsed, at first, by what happened to me on the subway train, but then I said, "Ah, the hell with it. I'm going to continue to do what I'm doing." But some people can't. A lot of those Vietnam veterans draw strength from one another. I think what you have to do is go to the Vietnam monument and be there a couple of times, and see what happens. There's a little hugging, and that sort of thing. Now some of the people are resting on their laurels and using Vietnam as a rationale for their still wearing parts of the uniform, and that sort of thing. But there are a whole lot of them that are drawing strength from one another because of the adverse treatment they received when they came back home.

Interviewer: The intent of that question was to address veterans, like that guy that used being in Vietnam and being a Vietnam veteran as an excuse for every bad thing that happened to him.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh Yeah. Oh Absolutely. You know, you're going to have a percentage of those. Oh absolutely. But the fact that it is so noticeable, is the fact it is a comparatively large group that belong to the veterans segment, not that belong to what you're saying, and they have that visibility, because they're always there at the Vietnam memorial.

Interviewer: Since we in the opinion area, there's another question I want to ask you, which addresses the length of tenure for the

Sergeant Major of the Army. I don't know if we adequately covered it or not, previously. I think you said you thought that two years was too short, three was about right, and four was too long.

SMA Van Autreve: I think that three years is a comfortable measure of time.

Interviewer: Do you think a person in that job, say after three years, starts to get... I don't know if the word "cocky" should come into play. I've seen changes in attitudes of the Sergeants Major of the Army, during the later part of my career, near the end of their tenure. They seem to behave a little differently.

SMA Van Autreve: Well I agree with that. Listen. I'm going to tell you. The Sergeant Major of the Army, that length of service takes a toll. Pretty soon you're getting short in your answers. You're not responding like you should. You're not participating as much. It's because you're tired. You know, you're wearing out. God, I had two years and it was really tough. But I would liked to have had three years. But I don't think I would have gone beyond three years. First of all, you need to provide an opportunity for some fresh blood to come in. Three years is a long time, and very physically demanding, if you do your job and do it as well as you should. And your right. I know I'm just as guilty as anyone else. When I was Sergeant Major of the 317th, I was there maybe a little bit too long, because I started getting a little autocratic and a little more demanding. I was ticked-off a little more easily. You know, I was a little more short-tempered, because I was beginning to believe it was my battalion. A lot of people are like that, and a lot of people are not. But I was one of those who was. If I had gone three years, I most probably would have survived that well. But I don't think I could have gone to four.

Interviewer: Over the years, many of the senior NCOs have criticized the Army's "up or out" policy. What do you think of that policy?

SMA Van Autreve: A story. I'm First Sergeant of A Company, and at that time we had DROs (Dining Room Orderlies) and we had German KPs. I had a young E4, most lovingly character you ever saw in your life, but the best DRO in the world. He ran that kitchen. It was clean. It was absolutely fascinating. He kept the German KPs in line. He did a great job for us. Then we came out with the requirement that you have at least three nineties on your score. Do you remember that?

Interviewer: Uh huh.

SMA Van Autreve: Well he couldn't make three nineties. Now I really screwed-up. I wanted to keep this kid so bad. First, he's the sole support of his mother. He was doing a great job for me. A job a lot of people didn't want. So I get Mac, out of the supply room, and I put this kid's name tag on Mac's jacket, and I send him down to take the test. Well I'm not too bright, because I sent Mac down, and Mac had a college education. Instead of just getting a passing score, he got a high score. It was so high that the Fifth Corps sent one of the IG representatives down to take a look at it and find out what happened. Well, the truth came out and I was ordered to go to the Fifth Corps and explain all of this. Fortunately, Colonel C. Craig Cannon went with me. As I told you, he had the influence of having been Eisenhower's aide and everything, so that contributed to the diminishing of the anger of the IG. But I told him what I wanted to do. I told him the truth. So he just gave me a adverse verbal response and told me that was not the way to do it, and perhaps this guy should go. He said, "What do you think?" Don't you think it was a mistake on your part?" I said, "My only mistake was that I sent somebody down there that was too smart. I should have sent somebody else." So I had to lose that kid. I had to let him go. Now isn't there in the Army, even these days, some kid like the kid who burnt human waste? Isn't there a kid like the bulldozer operator that that's all he wants to be? Isn't there a place for somebody who, if you make him an E6 or an E7, you violate the Peter's Principle and

you destroy him? You put him in a leadership role that he doesn't want and can't handle, but he's an excellent technician. I think there should be some thought given to that. That's Van Autreve's opinion. Now you're going to hear a lot of wailing and crying about that.

Interviewer: I'll tell you, I've finally met somebody that has the exact same opinion that I have, because I've seen us lose too many good guys because of that.

SMA Van Autreve: The other thing we need to do, if we have that condition and we have an E5 that wants to be an E5 and he wants to be a bulldozer operator, he needs to be appraised of the fact that, "Hey your promotion capabilities are limited. Now are you and your wife going to be satisfied with that? Is she going to say to you one day, 'Why aren't you an E6 or why aren't you an E7?' That may provide you a personal problem." He should be made aware of that. But I think that he should have an opportunity to survive.

Interviewer: At the same time, we shouldn't just forget him. We should still give him some exposure to some leadership.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh yes. Oh absolutely. Absolutely. Don't stifle him and condemn him to just sitting on the seat of the bulldozer. But you see, every Tuesday and Thursday morning I take my garbage out here. A truck comes along, with two young men--very, very nice young men--because I go out to see them. I tip them every once in a while because, God bless them, they take my garbage away. Now they make a fairly decent living. We need them desperately. Are we going to promote them to vice presidents of garbage gobblers. You know, there's a need from a cross-section of people.

Interviewer: In contrast to the present day Army, what do you see as the future of our Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Well that's predicated on whether or not we're going to offer economic support for training and equipment, and an army that has a necessary size to cope with eccentricities beyond our present

expectations. We don't down-size the Army, based on today. We've got to look forward enough to realize that there's a potentiality of danger out there ten years away, twenty years away, and for us to suddenly wake up one morning and have an attack made because Saddam Hussein has resurrected his Air Force and Army to the extent that he's formidable foe, we're not going to have the time. We may not have the equipment. We may not have adequate personnel and adequate training. We spend so much with the Dallas Cowboys. But if they lose, the consequences are not nearly as great as if we lose; the Army. Because we suffer, first of all, the loss of life that someone's has got to be accountable for. And secondly, we may lose the ultimate conflict.

Interviewer: In today's world, you can't lose even one.

SMA Van Autreve: Dallas can lose this year and come back next year. They get another chance. We don't get that. When that airplane goes down because it's too old or is not as technologically advanced, if it goes down, somebody dies. He don't get another chance. That tank crew. If it's not the up-to-date version of what's acceptable, and the people aren't adequately trained, you don't only lose a tank--you can replace that--but you can't lose that tank crew and replace it. It just not possible. So some wives, sisters, brothers, they're going to suffer the consequence for a long time.

Interviewer: Now that the cold war is apparently over, and we are down-sizing, what changes do you foresee in the global mission of the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: First of all, the German Army is also reducing. That's another fear that I have, because they're very professional. But from a global standpoint, you know, we've got this character old Vladimir, over in Russia. Some people are going to say, "This guy is a nut." But I thought they called Hitler "a nut." He's seems to be getting more popular.

Interviewer: Don't you think there's a lot of radicals in the

Russia government that agree with him? He wants to re-establish the borders.

SMA Van Autreve: Oh absolutely. That's one of the things that It's almost a parallel of what Hitler did in order to resurrect that feeling among the German people. Saddam Hussein is not going to go away. Iran now has two hundred combat aircraft, increasing to three hundred. China. We don't know what the story is with China. We don't know some young upstart somewhere who is going to come in with a nuclear weapon capability and institute a "first strike." There are problems.

Interviewer: North Korea is another threat.

SMA Van Autreve: North Korea. If they have it, we have to be concerned about the proliferation to other nations, the have nots, of nuclear weapon technology. Yes we do. We have problems.

Interviewer: Do you think that the down-sizing of the Army, if not done properly, could result in, what General Myer used to call, "a hollow army?"

SMA Van Autreve: Yes. That's a fear I think General Sullivan eluded to just a short time ago; the possibility of that happening. If you don't train me, and I'm in your army, and I'm patriotic--I feel very strongly about the United States of America and I'm willing to go fight --you've got to provide me with the appropriate weaponry and training, and with the appropriate support. You know, somebody still has to shed tears over the fact that they sent--when the twenty-eight soldiers were killed in Somalia--they sent those replacement in with humvees as opposed to tanks. That's absolutely idiotic, and the parents of those people ought to rise up in rebellion and raise hell, because what a stupid thing to do; to send in humvees. You could punch holes through it with a .22 rifle.

Interviewer: Some feel that recruiting and retention of soldiers may become difficult if our Army continues to change in the way that it has, during our down-sizing. When the soldier starts looking at the

reduction of the size of the Army, he's going to begin to question whether it is going to be wise to stay in the military. Do you agree with that?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh absolutely. There's a lot of apprehension out there. I'm talking about those who are very, very outstanding and in a high demand area, who really don't have to worry, but they have a worry. Because they just don't know which direction we're going. They don't know if we're going to have an impending reduction in force. They don't know how far we are going to go. Every place that I go, I talk to people. They are very apprehensive. You know, some kids are in here for thirteen, fourteen years, and they want to stay in the Army. They have devoted themselves, mentally, to the fact they're going to have twenty years of medical support and they're going to get their monthly paycheck. Then all of a sudden, that may be disrupted. You better believe that a lot of people... And when we ship these kids back home, if we do not do it right, and the recruiters tries to come to that town, they're going to find the schools once again are closed, and the people in the town refuse to accept them. Because that kid from that hometown goes back and bad-mouths the Army, that's going to be hard for a recruiter to overcome.

Interviewer: How important do you think it is that a noncommissioned officer have a sense of humor?

SMA Van Autreve: That's a very good question you asked. I'll tell you why. I'm the Sergeant Major of the Army and I'm speaking up at Fort Hood. When I finish, you know, people come up afterward and they congratulate you on your speech, because they feel that's the right thing to do. It's not truly an appreciation indication. It's an indication of, "Hey, you're the Sergeant Major of the Army and I'm a sergeant major, it's okay." Well this one E5 came up and he asked, "Can I talk to you, Sergeant Major?" I said, "Why sure. Why not?" He said, "Gee, that was a good speech. But you never smile. You never

smile." So I thought about that. When I got back to Washington, I listened to my tapes. Everything was of very, very serious, serious note. So I began interjecting humor. I began rifling through speeches for humorous notes and everything. I started to get more applause and more appreciation, although, perhaps they remembered the jokes more than they did the context of the message that I had intended to promulgate. Yes, I firmly believe that an NCO, having been told so by a spec. five, has got to have some humor.

Interviewer: Sometimes I think we have problems with people taking themselves and everybody else too seriously.

SMA Van Autreve: That's right. And I was guilty of that. I was such a serious guy. They used to call me "No nonsense Van Autreve." But because of that E5, I did get a little bit better.

Interviewer: What affect do you think the "gay in the military" issue will have on the Army?

SMA Van Autreve: Oh, I don't think it's going to have too much of an affect. I think we blew that out of proportion. We've had some homosexuals in the Army. We've had lesbians in the Army. But they kept to themselves. They didn't go around wildly kissing one another or holding hands, or all that sort of thing. They kept to themselves. I'm Catholic, but I don't tell everybody I'm a Catholic. If you're Jewish, you don't tell everybody you're Jewish. You keep it to yourself and you practice your faith. But if you were to go around hitting everybody and saying, "I'm a Catholic. Why aren't you a Catholic?", and you get bombastic about it, then you're going to buildup a resentment. Until such time as the homosexuals overtly kiss, hug, and do that sort of thing, we're not going to have a problem. We've had them, you know, ever since. I think people overacted to the issue.

(There was a brief pause in the interview.)

Interviewer: We had a short pause while we reviewed the questionnaire. I asked the Sergeant Major if he had any final comments.

Sergeant Major, you said you did have a final comment. Go ahead and make your comment.

SMA Van Autreve: There's a major irritant with me. As you go through the Army, you hear officers and senior noncommissioned officers extolling their virtue of truly caring for noncommissioned officers. Take care of the sojer. S-O-J-E-R. Take care of the sojer. Take care of the sojer. You hear the rhetoric all of the time. But you don't actually see too much practical application of that care. As a furtherance of that, here I hear this guy talking about caring for soldiers. He's gets his retirement papers and then he doesn't give a damn whether the soldier exists or not. He fails to support the Army. He fails to get involved in anything. The only time you hear from him is when his check doesn't come in on the proper day at the end of the month. I really have a heartburn about that. I think that we, as retirees, have an obligation to continue to support this Army. We have an obligation to continue to revere the Flag. Yes, I'm conservative. Yes, I'm patriotic. Yes, I love America. But I had to come from another country in order to really and truly appreciate what this is all about. I get real angry when I see, here's a sergeant major who wants to do right and he invites the retirees to come to a social event-- dining-in or dining-out--and he gets two or three people to respond. I think that's shameful. We need to support the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Sergeant Major of the Army. That is our obligation. That doesn't cease when we get a piece of paper that says "retired." It should say "retarded." I feel very, very strongly about that.

Interviewer: Let me say two words to you. American soldier.

SMA Van Autreve: Well, I am still an American soldier. I really am. I don't like the word "retired." It's like "retread," or "redo." I have not been redone. I'm not a retread. I'm still an American soldier.

Interviewer: When you think of the two words "American soldier,"

from 1940 to today, what do those two words mean?

SMA Van Autreve: It means the continuance of our way of life. It really does, because that's the kid who: had to go to Desert Storm; who had to go to World War II; who had to go to Korea; who had to go to Vietnam. And whether you, the American public, liked it or not, he did try to do the best he could, but you didn't treat him too well when he came back from Vietnam. You did not treat the American soldier, who was sent there, you did not treat him as well as he should have been treated.

Interviewer: Do you think "he's changed a lot, but he hasn't changed at all," as one guy said?

SMA Van Autreve: I don't think he has changed that much. I really don't. I started with soldiers in 1938, with the National Guard. I've got a total of thirty-four, thirty-five years with them. They're still out there. They're still willing to do the job. We talk about shortcomings, but there's shortcomings in families and every way of life. But thank God the United States of America has got them, because they're no different. They're still going over there with a possibility of being killed. You found no problem getting soldiers, National Guardsmen and Reservists, to go to Desert Storm. You didn't find anybody who said, "I won't go."

Interviewer: As you look back over more than thirty years, just give me a quick summation of your feelings and your thoughts about your military career.

SMA Van Autreve: As God is my judge, if I had it to do over again, I wouldn't change it.

Interviewer: It's the best life a man can have.

SMA Van Autreve: It was for me and it was for my family. And I just don't think we appreciate enough the over 400,000 World War II, the 45,000 in Korea, the 15,000 in Vietnam, those in Somalia. We don't appreciate the fact that they gave their lives, not for themselves, but

they gave it for the rest of America.

Interviewer: I'll tell you, the last two days have been extremely enjoyable for me, with the hospitality of you and Rita. I have thoroughly enjoyed it. I think more than anything else, for you to allow me to kinda put on the old uniform and stroll with you down...

SMA Van Autreve: Memory lane.

Interviewer: ...memory lane and find out what our Army is. It's so great to relive those memories. We don't have a chance to do that very often, because there's not too many people that want to sit down and hear us talk. On behalf of General Nelson, up at the Center of Military History, as well as Dr. Dray, Major Kelly, and all of the folks at the Center for Military History, I would like to express their appreciation for your cooperation. I also want to thank you, on behalf of the Sergeants Major Academy and our outstanding Commandant Colonel Van Horn and...

SMA Van Autreve: And please, by all means, if you get to see him, please give he and his lovely lady my very, very best, to and including the Sergeant Major and his wife. They're super people.

Interviewer: Sergeant Major Strahan, I was going to mention him. Both he and the Colonel as two fantastic individuals and they support this program, and that is so great too. We're fortunate to have the people from the Center of Military History and the Sergeants Major Academy behind this very important program. Also for Mr. Arms, the Director of the NCO Museum, on behalf of Larry, I want to thank you for being a part of this special program. And finally, on behalf of the NCO Corps, I would like to say thank you for the more than thirty years of outstanding service and dedication that you have given our Country, that you have given the Army, and that you have given the NCO Corps. And in that important position as Sergeant Major of the Army, you HAVE made a difference. You may not realize it. Sometimes that result doesn't show up until years down the road. Once again I want to thank you, on behalf

of myself and the NCO Corps for your outstanding contributions.

SMA Van Autreve: Well that's the great privilege of my life. That's the ultimate. But I'm glad you got to see my American flag, flying at night with the light on it.

Interviewer: Yes.

SMA Van Autreve: Because it's there every day. Every day.

Interviewer: I know you have some business to do this afternoon. So what I'm going to do is go over this. I'll make arrangement with you tomorrow and we'll take a look at photographs you may have, and letters, etc. Before I shutdown, I'm going to definitely take a video of the pictures of Rita, yourself, and your two lovely daughters. Once again I want to thank you for your outstanding hospitality and wish you the best of luck.

SMA Van Autreve: Well it's been a pleasure seeing you again. And this has been delightful.

End of Interview.