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AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MARK MOORE

CONDUCTED BY: JOHN C. HENNEN, JR.

SUBJECT: WV VIETNAM VETERANS

DATE OF INTERVIEW: SEPTEMBER 25, 1984

TRANSCRIBED/TYPED BY: GINA KEHALI KATES

JH: Okay, we're back. So...seventy...you say seventy-six you finally left the Navy. But you're in the reserves now.

MM: Well, I quit.

JH: You're out all together now?

MM: Yes.

JH: So you came...you went right to college from Charleston?

MM: Yes, yes.

JH: What...you being in a family that had two sons in the service. What did...what sort of relationship did you think your serving in the Navy and your brother being in the service, did that affect your family? The relationship?

MM: Well, my mom was concerned. But see, my father went to Vietnam. That's the strange thing. The three of us were in then.

JH: Was your father in the military then?

MM: No, he went with the government, secret stuff. I don't know if I should probably talk about that. Because I don't know enough about anything...I don't know anything he did there. I have no idea.

JH: So he was just in government service?

MM: Yes, he was in Saigon.

JH: Was your brother there at the same time?

MM: No. He doesn't have very good eye sight. And he went through boot camp and advanced infantry training in Camp Lejune. And his unit went to Vietnam. But from

what I've heard, most of them were killed in an ambush there a couple of weeks after they got there. I mean, a lot of them. He was pretty upset, because all of his friends got killed, everybody that he'd gone through training with, they were all killed. Three days before he was supposed to go over there, they changed his M.O.S. [Military Occupational Skill] which is his job specialty, from infantry machine gunner to quartermaster. And poof! I mean, they were going, he was gone. They sent him to Twenty-nine Palms, California, in the middle of the desert. And I...I wish he could talk to you. The things that went on out there were just outrageous. [laughing] I mean, talk about a [inaudible]. I'd like to point out one thing, though. Okay, just for your records. Because I don't want to sound like a bleeding heart or anything, okay. I know a lot of people complain and things like this. [inaudible]....on my second tour of duty, I feel like (I had), they respected me as a person, you know. Plus, I was going to school. And I think I was beginning to feel better about myself. [But I had gotten, before I got out, I had...and this isn't bragging]. I'm just kind of giving you an idea about how the Navy changed. And I got two Chief of Naval Information merit awards, signed by the Chief of Naval Information himself, and three Letters of Commendation from two admirals and a captain, for my work. So I'm just...I mean, I had a real crazy time at the beginning, during that war period. But the second time I was in, I did really well, you know. And I...I don't know, I just wanted to kind of throw that in there, because it was different, you know, it was a whole different situation.

JH: Was there a generalbetter moral at that time, that time around? Or was that just you personally?

MM: Uh...well, it was almost like, it's funny. But I had re-enlisted and when you re-enlist, it's almost like you become part of the club. And then you're treated differently. Plus I was at a reserve activity. They're a whole lot more low-key. And I just happened to get lucky. I had two good commanding officers. And that makes a big difference. Because when you've only got six or seven guys stationed with one officer, that officer's attitude means everything, you know. He runs it and he...he can make or break your whole life.

JH: Did...tell me something about your training in applied arts, and your formal training and how you....what you're hoping to do with it.

MM: Okay. I was an English major and studied Shakespeare and all that stuff and got kind of tired of it. It was good, but I wasn't really getting anything out of it. And uh, I took an art class, which is required over there. (Either), you had to either take drawing or art appreciation, so I took drawing. And the funny thing is, the first day I was there, the first drawing I did, the teacher said, "Can I talk to you after class?" you know. Oh, sure, no problem. I ended up...like I said, this guy's, he's either very intuitive or he's psychic. They say he's a psychic, anyway.

JH: This professor?

MM: Yes. And he more or less started talking to me about how he'd been in the Army in World War II and all this, and he talked to me about being in the service. More or less he started off real slow, and was like, you know, "Just take it easy in there and try and be natural, don't worry about it, and maybe you might take other art classes as you go along." So I got to know him and the other guy over there. And eventually, I got my

degree in art. And....

JH: Was there ever any indication in high school or anything you

MM: No, they wouldn't let me take art in high school. They wouldn't let me. They made me take all academic classes.

JH: That's right, you said you were on advanced placement.

MM: And that's a drag, yeah, because they don't consider art important.

JH: Yeah, right.

MM: You know? I realize now how important it is. There's some real problems in our educational system, you know. And of course, learning what I have, I realize, the only way I'm going to change that, is if I'm a teacher myself, and how.... Like right now, I'm assisting in printmaking and painting. I love it. I love it.

JH: When did you get started in printmaking?

MM: Uhm, (JH: While you were in Charleston?) no, actually I.... That's funny that you should ask that, because I didn't do much printmaking in Charleston. And since I've been here, I've been in, let's see, let me think.... I've been in quite a few shows since I've been here. Parkersburg...Tri-State...okay, yes, since I've been here, I've been in three major exhibitions at the Huntington Galleries. Plus, and they were prints. And...

JH: That's just in a year.

MM: Yes. Plus one is on exhibition now throughout the state. It's in a show called "New Art from West Virginia". And it's a piece that was in the 280 Exhibition, which is about eleven states wide. I mean, it's a pretty big show. And those are all new prints. That's kind of weird, because everything else I've been doing is painting. But you

know, it's...I think, I think...the thing is, in the art world, painting seems to have more respect. I talked to Mr. Cornfeld [Mike Cornfeld, chairman of Art at Marshall University] about this the other day. And no matter what you do with printmaking, there's still it's almost a minor art compared to painting. And painting's really tough. There's a lot...you just about have to know everything that's happened before, almost from cave man to last year. You have to keep up and you have to know.... Because if you want to be good or you want to make an impact yourself, you have to know what everybody's done before you. And then you can decide, you can take the good or the bad and you know.... So that's what I do.

JH: How would you, or would you, categorize yourself, as far as style goes? I mean, this is all pretty big territory for me.....

MM: Sure. Uh..it's just a...let's see, well, definitely contemporary. Nothing like, no figurative, no landscapes, none of that kind of stuff. Now, that shows up in my prints. But in my teams, there are some artists, to name those, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, uh....Jasper Johns. And what they did a lot was stencil letters and actual photographs cut out, silk screen images, bigbig, big bold things, big brush strokes of paint, which goes back to the abstract expressionists of the '50s. But these guys were in the '60s and early '70s. And it's, I get my influences from them. Like Larry Rivers is, he would paint the Marlboro pack or he'd paint a Camel cigarette pack or the Dutch Masters, and he'd put them in a real contemporary setting. You know....I like the whole idea. It's almost...that was called Pop art, you know. Now, I don't know what they call it. I have a hard time with that because people aren't familiar with that as painting.

They don't understand.

JH: Is Rauschenberg still around?

MM: Yes, he does a lot of photography now. He showed up, I was looking in the American Photography magazine about two months ago. And I noticed they had a layout of his photographs. So he lives in Florida on an island. I haven't seen any recent paintings on him.

JH: He must be up around sixty by now.

MM: Yes, late '50s or something like that. But he was a Navy veteran. That was pretty interesting.

JH: [inaudible].

MM: Yeah, I know. See, he may not have known about it then. I found it real interesting that I had to go through a whole bunch of stuff to finally get to a point where I can say, "Oh, maybe this is what I want to be," you know. [I'd say in one instance I had a job once]. I worked construction a bunch of times. And I found that a lot of these construction crews up around northern Virginia were either bikers or ex-cons or this kind of thing, you know. And I knew I was out of place, but the money was a hundred bucks a week clear. And I had to do something. I don't like sitting around on my butt _____ making some money. And they had their way of dealing with people. Like one day it was raining really hard. And they let everybody off from work, except me and this other guy, who was an Army veteran. (JH: Pay you for half a day?) No, we were laborers. We were dirt. So, you know, you may have done that yourself. (JH: Several times) You know.... So we went in and this Army guy, he was an Army veteran, but

he'd been honorably discharged with drugs-he's a medic-and I felt bad about it. Because basically, I felt he was a good guy. He had just gotten in with the wrong people. You know, I'm sure he'll have to deal with that for the rest of his life, you know. But they took me and this guy and put us out in this field of just mud. I mean, just thick mud, pouring rain, and it was just turning November, there was a cold wind blowing across. And they were building townhouses and they weren't doing a very good job at that, either. But they gave us a cup with a hole in the bottom, a 7-11 paper cup that the bottom was ripping out of, right, a metal bucket with two holes in the bottom, and they said, "You two go out there, empty the puddles out of the field and dump them into the street, and do that until we tell you to stop. [laughter] So I was a real....

JH: [inaudible]

MM: I couldn't believe it. No way would I...I looked at him and we looked at each other and it was like, this is either we keep our jobs or we quit, you know. So I went out with him for awhile and I felt for him, because he had to do it. He had to have that job. He was in a situation where he couldn't do anything else. And he stayed out there and I stayed out there with him more out of caring about him. I was out there until 11:30 in the morning and I finally told him, I said, I'm past the point of mental thought on this. I know this is absolutely ridiculous. But I said, "No, I'm not into physical pain," and I said, "I'm so cold and I just, I'm quitting. I don't need some guy who just spent ten years in some prison telling me to do this." I said, "I've had it." So I just walked off the job. And he looked and said, "You're fired." [laughing] I looked at him and said, "Hey, bye, I'll see you Friday." Went and got my twenty bucks or whatever they gave. But that was a real

sign to me that, that was a sign. And there was another sign I got. When I was in Washington, I kept feeling like I should be somewhere else. You know how you get these almost, at least I would, consider it a sign? And one night I got beat up by seven guys and was, I was really hurt...bad. I mean, I saw the guys.... I was at a party at a suburban house, a real nice place. Everybody was in the basement. And I go up the stairs, I look around and I smell gas, you know. And I looked at somebody taking a bottle of red wine and spraying it right across the living room wall. I mean, we're talking expensive couches and it was covered. And I thought, "Oh, man, something's going on." I see a guy walk out the front door with a Martin guitar, the D18 or whatever they are, they're like \$600. I walked up to him and said, "Hey, what are you doing?" Plus he had my hat. I had a Panama hat. "What are you doing?" And I walked out, and they were just setting me up...anybody...they didn't care who. I just happened to be there. And [inaudible]...hit me over the head, got me on the ground and just started kicking me like you wouldn't believe. I realized I was getting hurt bad, you know. And I was getting kicked so much in the groin and face and head and stomach and everywhere else. Finally I got up, and I hit this guy so hard that he went flying and hit his head on a tree and knocked him out. Then I hit the next guy and knocked him out. I mean, they were just boom! and they were out. I ran across...I got up and ran across the street and there's people staring out their doors or looking at me through Venetian blinds. They wouldn't open the door. I was bleeding like all over the place, you know. They wouldn't help me. So the next thing I remember is the cops were...I was caught up in a barbed wire fence. And they were getting me out of it, and I don't know. I must have

been just knocked just totally out of it, you know. Because they, I thought they were after me. Well, to make a long story short, a couple of weeks later I felt better. I was sick for a couple of weeks, had a concussion and all this kind of stuff. But I realized it was time to get out of it, you know. It's time to move along and do something, this is a bad time. Strangely enough, the guy that had done that was arrested about, well, he was arrested a week after he beat me up. He killed seven women in two weeks. He was a murderer. And the guys that were with him were his cronies.

JH: This is re-enforcement of negative images I have of the D.C. area.

MM: Oh, really bad.

JH: A lot of people, when I was in Charleston several years, a lot of people around there are from D.C.

MM: Oh, I hate it, I hate it.

JH: [inaudible]....of course, they're making \$70,000.

MM: Yeah, but what are they sacrificing for that?

JH: I know it. I couldn't hack it. That's one reason I left [inaudible]....the pace down there was so outrageous and D.C. is _____.

MM: I...I go back once in awhile to visit my brother and my father's back in Korea now. But I don't...I just...I just hate that area. I just don't know what it is. I just hate it. It's just, you know.....

JH: Well, you got, you got any shows coming up?

MM: Yes, I've got, well, my graduate exhibition's in April. I'm working on that right now. And I've got a couple of pieces in the gallery right now, the Huntington Galleries.

There's a couple other shows coming up. I don't know if I'm getting is them or not. I'm trying to expand my horizons now. I've been in about eight shows in the last two years, and I'm trying to go a bit more national. I'm trying to pick up on where shows are in other places. It's...it's like an evolutionary process, you know, you go through. I'll learn, you know, how to do it. You've got to see slides and [inaudible]...and it's all that kind of stuff. But....

JH: Are you pretty satisfied with the department here?

MM: Some things yes, some things no. You know.... I mean, one thing to me that's totally ridiculous, is the fact that a graduate student has, has to work in a place where he's constantly being threatened being kicked out. And we did get kicked out of our room.

JH: In this building?

MM: Yes, this building's full of rooms. And they are so...it's like trying to get blood out of a turnip. I mean, it's a real pain in the ass.

JH: What do you mean? They're saying that somebody else needs the room?

MM: Yes! We had a perfect studio down here, and somebody with federal money came in, this Autism Clinic and boom! we're out of there.

JH: Is that what's in there now?

MM: Yes, they took over that. And they've taken over...well, look what they're doing out here. They're taking over this whole floor. And I don't begrudge them that. But what I begrudge is somewhere in the administration they're just saying "Screw the graduate art students." They don't care. You know...they're saying, "Well, we're building you a

new building." But that's six years from now.

JH: Not for you. That's for the next bunch.

MM: Yeah! And I'm here, this is my one time shot at my master's degree. Right now I'm working at home. I...I...you know, that's creating a problem with the chairman. She says, "No, I want you here." "I can't work here," you know. I've got a little corner I'm stuck in, and the guy I'm in there with is a real jerk anyway. And we've been having...we got in an argument this morning. We're always fighting, you know. And I said, "I'm not working with him. You're crazy." But there's no room, you know. I even, the last year I even considered leaving here just because of that. I mean, when I worked in Charleston....

JH: Well, that's a pretty big reason. [laughter]

MM: It is. Most...every other university (JH: [inaudible]) Yeah. I've talked to people and I've read and most universities in this country, the graduate student gets his own space. Because they realize that it's such a crucial point, you're finding out what you want to do, you're experimenting. You need a support group in the art center, and you need to have somebody, at least one person, that you can talk to about your work, and they'll know, and you know they're going to give you good criticism back, whether it's good or bad. At least you can value that and work with it. And I find, I don't know, here, I run into a lot of headiness and that type of thing, that make it real difficult to work that way. And I've been told that it's not, that's it like that everywhere. But I know that it isn't. Because when I was in Charleston, I had a friend, and he and I worked together all the time. We silk screened tee-shirts. He would silk screen each canvas

and do like Rolling Stones and this kind of stuff. And we got along great. I mean, you know, he's up in Boston now, unfortunately. But he moved up there to get into more, said there's nothing here for him. He said, "What are you going to Marshall for?" And I said, "I don't know, it's all right, but I can't say it's great. It's all right."

JH: Do you get GI benefits here?

MM: Oh, yes. Yes, three forty-two a month. I worked, I'll tell you something I've been griping about. I tell you definitely is that damn work-study program they talk about. They treat you like dirt. I hate that! I hated it. Every minute I was there, they treated me like scum.

JH: Is that where you were last year when you got here?

MM: Well, what I did, they told me at the VA, they said, "Oh, well, you want to work for us? You can do work-study and come down here and we'll adjust it to your schedule," and all this kind of stuff. It sounded really good and I thought, yeah, you know. We got there, and the people there treat you like scum. They absolutely do. I couldn't believe it. And it wasn't just me, because my friend that I moved here with, Mike, he...you know, he, both of us just went, "You've been treated like scum, too?" It was like really ludicrous. They treated you like shit! I quit. Finally, a guy yelled at me one day, and I told him, I said, "You don't yell at me." I said, "I'm out of here, I quit. I don't need you yelling at me. You've got to sit at that desk for the rest of your life. Don't take that out on me, you know, just because I'm going somewhere, I'm doing something. I don't need you giving me your judgment calls." And he was a Navy vet. We talked at first. Seemed like he'd be all right, you know. But they give you the most menial thing to do,

you know, and you..... Have you ever been on a job...really, man, where you go in there and you sit down for one minute, they tell you to get up? You're not working hard enough. I mean, I went into the mail room....

JH: Well, fortunately, no, seems like everybody I know has had work like that. But I've been lucky enough to at least [inaudible]....in that kind of environment.

MM: I'd never...I couldn't believe it. It was like... "This isn't break time." I said, "I've been standing at the mail sorter for two hours. I just want to sit down for a minute." "No, you can't. My boss will come in here and he'll get mad." I said, "You've got to be crazy. Where are the people....you're a veteran. You should understand this. We're the reason this exists. And I'm not looking for a free ride, because I told you, I'm not a sloucher. But I'm also not a slave." Now, on the other hand, I've had really good dental service from the VA hospital here. Absolutely excellent, excellent. Courtesy, professionalism, just...really good service. But, you know.....

JH: How would you say your...this is a broad question...how would you say being in the service particularly at that time, has affected your out-, your overall outlook here?

MM: [laughing]

JH: There seems to be a questioning of illegitimate authority. I don't know if that's a function being in the military at a critical time, or.... [inaudible]

MM: Could you explain [inaudible]....

JH: Well, just like the guy you just explained to me in the VA, the guy sitting there. Obviously cringing about his job, taking it out on everybody.....

MM: Yes, I really believe that, too. Mmmmh. Well.....

JH: I mean, you want to stay in that field [inaudible]

MM: [inaudible] I'm just kidding. I would say my first...this is neat, because a lot of these questions I've discussed with various people and they've all talked about it. But when I got to the ship, I'd been, my background basically is a strict Catholic school, where if you didn't do what they said, they'd beat the Hell out of you, so, you know..... My dad was strict, my mother was insane sometimes, crazy, you know. But I...you know, I figured that was all part of growing up. So I got to the Navy and I was trying to be good about it, and I wanted to be good. I wanted to do the right thing. I wanted to follow the rules and stuff. And I got to quarters my first day on the ship. The first day was a real trip. I went around and [phone ringing in background].... Oh, yeah, my first day at quarters this guy, his name was Easy and he was a real crazy person from New Jersey. He held my hand down-we were supposed to salute-he held my hand down and everybody else saluted. And the division officer kind of looked back and noticed I didn't. They didn't say anything about it. I said, "Why'd you do that?" He said, "You'll learn." One thing after another, and eventually...I mean, he was so crazy. He'd go over to the chief and he'd get down on his knees and he'd like pray and he'd go like, "Chief, please, let me go home," you know, "Chief, please, let me go home." And the chief would go, "Get back in your seat!" And he's going, "I can't take it." He's rolling around on the floor. And uh, one day he's doing it and he rips the chief's sleeve right off his shirt. The chief just says, "I'm out of here. I can't deal with you people." You know..... And these were all career guys here we're dealing with, mental patients. One of my things was, I mean, when I think back on it....

JH: You're proud of yourself!

MM: I'd put on a gas mask and a helmet and a broom and I'd go running in [make a motorized sound]. And the chief would go, "Get him out of here!" Because it was like just everybody was trying to out-crazy everybody else. And another thing, we'd sit at the end of the big counter in the office. And the chief sat way down at the end, but he made kicking noises, slowly. He'd get up and start to yell and he'd be out the door. And we'd be, I did that to him for almost a year. It was great. [laughing] I mean, it was just like everybody was crazy. Just one guy that did mess with him all the time, would just sit there with an orange and unwrap his orange, kind of smile, you know. I said, "Craig, you think you could type up this report?" "Sure man, I can do it." But I said, "Can you do it today?" "I'll try." I'm going, "Oh, my God. I don't believe this." But I don't think I even realized the effect it had on me, until the new guys started showing up and I was the guy that was left. They thought I was insane. But uh, yeah, I would say that definitely had an impression on me. I think it made me realize that the people in authority, so to speak, are just people, you know..... And plus, they just kept changing the rules, every day they'd come up with some new regulation, you know. Like one thing that used to just drive us nuts, is they would, you know how an ID card might have your name and it might say J.M. Douglas. One day that's the instruction. Type all the ID cards with J.M. Douglas. Then three days later they'll change it and no, we want it James M. Douglas. So a destroyer will pull in that's been out on patrol for three days and come back and they'll say, you'll have to do all their ID cards again, because it's J.M. and not James." So we'd have 200 guys lined up in our photo lab and

in our office, doing all these ID cards and then multiply that by five or six destroyers a week...or every two weeks. Ah, you know, just that constant, constant harassment.

JH: So when [inaudible]...water out of a mud puddle.....

MM: [chuckling] I do it. Well, I got to a point once to where I almost got discharged. Because I thought, I was reacting to the initial first year and it was insane, it was crazy. And finally this guy came up to the education office, you know, the XO wants to see you, the Chief wants to see you, you're in trouble, they can't take you any more. And my main thing probably all up during that year was why is it so crazy here? What's going on? This is not the Navy. This is, you know, and they said, "Yes, it is." And I said, "This is insane. This is a crazy place. This is crazy here. Everybody's insane. You're driving me nuts. I'm not going to play. I'm out of here." "No, you're not," blah, blah, blah. So finally they said, "Okay, rather than see you make a really bad mistake and really screw up, we're sending you to the care center on base for six months." And that was the creamiest job.... Okay, the Care Center is Counseling and Rehabilitation Unit, which at the time, was serving a double purpose. It was for drug guys. It was like a big old World War II barracks. And on the top floor was, on the left half, was the drug area, where they had all the nice, little "Today is the first day of the rest of your life" posters. And these guys who supposedly knew, "Hey, I know what it's all about." And they were Navy lifers who were trying to tell these poor guys who were having all these problems, how to run their lives. And then on the other side was what they called Upward Seminars, which was race relations.....

END OF SIDE 1 - BEGIN SIDE 2

MM: . . .these crazy guys were trying to get something in the Navy called Human Goals established. Which is basically human rights. And I think a lot of that came out of the war. A lot of the...[inaudible]....they came up with some type of affirmative action plan, which I understand the Navy was the first to do it. And then private industry, as the years went by, later were required to have this same thing in industry. But it was basically where whites, blacks, Hispanics, Indians, said, hey, we've got to live together. Because they'd even had trouble with them, from what I understand, in combat areas, where they would fight each other instead of.... But I didn't see that, so I don't know. So I worked with them for six months. And that was great. I mean, they had all been in Vietnam. Most of those guys were, all of them, every staff member in the office were Vietnam veterans. And they just...they had, from what they said, they had a blast over there. Just had a ball. They were a real insane bunch of people. But they were kind of [inaudible]..... A lot of them were like, I would say the majority of them were like [inaudible]...between the ages of 35 and 45, were like E-6 career, you know, had a whole chest full of medals, and just sort of, you know, didn't let the bullshit bother them. They just sort of went their own way. But they did, they set that up. They set up the race relations and the human goals and all that. And there actually....

JH: I didn't' realize the Navy got that underway.

MM: Yes, sure. And they had fights in there sometimes. And things got hot when people got hit and [laughing]..... But I loved being over there. I was over there for six months and then back to the ship again.

JH: Where do you see yourself going with this, with your art? I know you mentioned

about teaching.

MM: Yes, I got an offer to teach over at the University of Charleston next year, if I'm out. They're losing a younger staff member and they said they'd hire me if I wanted the job. But I may not do it. I may go on into another....

JH: It's nice to know you've got that waiting on you, though.

MM: Yeah, I know. I would love it, because I would teach painting, and drawing and art history there. It should be real nice. If not, I'll go on to another school somewhere. I've still got another year and a half of the GI Bill left, or two years, almost. I...I'm planning on doing it the rest of my life. I'll teach, but I want to grow myself. Because I figure it's all just a growing process anyway. And art to me, is the best way to get at it.

JH: Do you have a family?

MM: Ah, my mother died last year, and my brother and father in Washington and I have a sister, I don't know where she is. She's kind of strange. We adopted her in Scotland and she's, she's always been kind of different. No wife or kids, never married. Came close a couple of times. [laughing] I have a girlfriend that's got a couple of kids, and that, I'm learning.

JH: It's close enough.

MM: I'm learning. It's...it's different.

END OF INTERVIEW