

Aaron Martin

HY 341 Transcript

Interviewee: Michael Mendel

Q: So I guess we can start with your name and your childhood, maybe

Michael Mendel: My name is Michael Mendel, I was born September 28 1950, I was raised in a military family, my grandfather was a paratrooper during ww2, my father was a paratrooper in the Korean war he did a combat jump with the 187<sup>th</sup> Rakkasans in Korea came back was in the first class of special forces went back to korea to run agents, I pretty much followed that career path, I grew up I japan, Germany, a few places in the United States, and then I joined the military in 1968

Q: Okay, other than familial relations, what led you to service in the Army

Mendel: Family tradition

Q: Okay. What were some stark memories of your beginning service on the army I guess maybe starting with basic and then after that

Mendel: Well when I joined I was 17 and was too young to have a draft card so that was the first time I got in trouble. At the reception station you had to drop your draft card into a coffee can on your way into the bus and I didn't drop one and the sergeant there got very angry and thought I was trying to hide mine until they finally figured out I was only 17. I went to basic training at fort Benning Georgia, sandhill which is very infamous and then I went for AIT at Fitzsimons army general hospital for medical training and then after that I pulled out my contract and told the commander I had enlisted for airborne in Vietnam so then I went to Anniston Alabama which

was an AIT focused on jungle warfare and then between fort Benning and several other places I went to be an 11 fox, infantry operations and intelligence program which is a combination of intelligence operations ranger airborne and advanced jungle training and then I went to 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne first battalion 325 infantry and commanded LRP team 2

Q: What is LRP?

Mendel: Long range patrol then I went to Vietnam and my first assignment was with company d ranger 151<sup>st</sup> infantry I was what they call an RA which is a regular army sergeant but the company was a national guard company which the year before had volunteered en mass to go through airborne jungle training ranger school and some other specialty schools and went to Vietnam to work in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> corps under second field force and towards the end of their time they brought people like me in to take the place of their NCOs and to reform the company which was later flagged as delta company 75<sup>th</sup> rangers.

Q: Cool. This is awesome. I've wanted to have this conversation for a while on a personal level as well as for this assignment. How many tours to Vietnam did you do?

Mendel: I did 2 incomplete tours. I was hurt toward the end of my first one, and I came down with malaria so I came back to the united states and second day I was back I went to the hospital for a relapse I was there for two weeks then I was supposed to be there 30 days on convalescent leave things were crazy in the states so at the end of the first week I made friends with a young lady in the personal department in the hospital and got orders sending me back to Vietnam and that's when I went to delta company 7<sup>th</sup> rangers, um, and reconnaissance platoons and line units needed experienced NCO's so I was sent to a recon platoon first of the eighth cav, cavalry division

Q: Could you speak a little but more about LRP

Mendel: LRP units there was either a platoon or company formed from each separate brigade, each division, and then there was field force headquarters, so first and second corp were first field force which was Charlie rangers and third and fourth corp, which would be the southern half, were the delta rangers. At each level, so a brigade has a level out in front of it in which it is going to conduct operations when it needs information on who's out there and try to find out where they're moving, what they're doing perhaps capture documents or a prisoner or do recon we sometimes just call airstrikes. The 1st division has a larger front and then second field force, which I was in, covered all of third and fourth corp. so we would be more strategic recon, go deeper out and the main job of recon is not to be found, not to make contact, you might see patrols across the front and information from all of the patrols would come back and then the people in the rear can figure out this is what's out there this is generally where they're moving and they can set up whatever kind of operation they want to do to interdict. From time to time we would do what are called a prisoner snatches where you try to capture a paymaster. And the paymaster for VC or NVA generally was one guy who had a book and he had the names and ranks and length of service and paylevels for everybody in the units he was supporting. And they would just travel with two body guards. One in the front and one in the back. And if we could catch one of them then that was just a treasure trove.

Q: Right

Mendel: Sometimes it didn't work out, sometimes they would fire back and we'd get a body but we'd still get the information.

Q: This will be kind of transitional from speaking about that to back stateside, um, what is your familiarity with war time policies things that were handled that were handled stateside, that's kind of generic.

Mendel: The politics of the time did not matter to us. We had a job to do, and that's all we cared about.

Q: Yes sir

Mendel: And we just fought for each other. We were small five-man teams. We didn't have time to worry about anything. So the politics back home was something that was somebody else's business we just had to do our job.

Q: Not even in the back of your mind?

Mendel: Never.

Q: That makes sense. This might be one of those ones might... we'll see... if you want to talk about it we can talk about it. But um, your combat wound experience. What was that like? If you want to talk about it

Mendel: In a ranger company um it had a full compliment. Commander executive officer, operations people, you had cooks, mechanics, vehicles, medics, we had platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, none of them went to the field. Like I said, we were small, five-man teams. We were authorized six, but generally never had more than five. So we did receive advanced lifesaver training, generally on a mission if you were on a recon mission the worst thing that could happen was a snake bite, bad mosquito leeches things like that might have to scare off larger wildlife, but when you have contact um, you can get pieces of wood from explosions,

shrapnel, a bullet graze, um, I know of nobody who was wounded like that and got a purple heart um it was kind of a macho thing, unless you got a wound that would require medivac to a hospital and stay,

Q: I see, okay, so in our pre-interview you said that was a unit thing, is that the unit thing

Mendel: I know other units who were the same way. I have a friend who was project delta and they were the same way. Um, generally, well I managed to duck, um, I did get shrapnel in my neck, I got some in my back, um, I've got a knife slash, but those were small, we took care of those in the field, uh my gunner sewed up a little hole in my neck, with fishing line and we just continued on. At the time we didn't think much of it and really haven't since. Its just something that happened. We did have a few people who got seriously hurt and they did get medivaced. We had one that had to go all the way back to japan, for treatment, and then eventually came back to the unit. That would be the equivalent of getting hurt in the middle east and then going to walter reed or somewhere like that. But no, you always had things happen. They were minor

Q: That just blows my mind because that is not the way things are handled now

Mendel: No

Q: This one is a little broad and it might need some elaboration, but it kind of fits with that last one um, what memories do you look back upon from your time in Vietnam as potential life lessons, or do you feel like there were life lessons to be learned?

Mendel: Well, uh, in our training, as we call training in the military its basically leadership training, um, for me, when I first went to Vietnam I was still only 18. Um, I was a sergeant and so I had ideas you know, my grandfather and father shared things about their combat, and leadership, but I had not been able to put them to use. So I guess my first lesson was in patience

because when I flew into Vietnam we were herded into lines and as we walked off the airplane into the depot hanger there was another line parallel to us that was going back on to the plane. And of course you imagine, you know, they were saying things like “well, life is gonna suck for you but glad we’re gone.”

Q: Yeah, Bryan (my older brother) said the same thing when he got to Iraq.

Mendel: Yeah. I was picked up by a jeep that had our unit crest on the front of it, and it was just the driver and I and I was taken out to our compound which was way out in the middle of nowhere. We passed other bases which were for larger units and I was told I had a lot of school house knowledge, they acknowledged the training I had with a LRP team with 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne, so I got a bit of practical experience, um, but it wasn’t until after my third mission because anybody can be a candidate to be a patrol leader, you have to go with an established team three missions and at the end of the three missions everybody on that team votes. And if they all say okay then you’re accepted. If one person objects, you get orders to go to another unit. During those three missions, uh, we were at one point we had lost the surprise, so we had to run and gun out of there, we had two or three possible pickup sites. We took fire on the first two and on the third we finally got out on a chopper, and there were some other things that happened, but at the end of the third one we landed on the pickup zone, excuse me, we were picked up and as we landed on the helipad back at the company, uh, we went right into the ops room and the commander asked each of the people “how’d he do” and I got an okay. And that’s when it dawned on me that during those three missions the team leader led because he gave very few instructions because the team was so imbued with the standard operating procedures and they knew how each would move in any given scenario and I realized that I was not going to have to teach them I was going to have to learn them. And then as I got new people to replace old people on the team I

developed standard operating procedures and everything from right upper pocket you carried your folded map and your compass, your right lower leg pocket you carried one prepared meal in case you had to bug out, where you carried your flare gun, where you walked, who went right, who went left, Australian peels to back out of a fire fight, how you immediately lay out claymores I mean there were just hundreds of little things and I was responsible for making sure we did those right. But I also learned that leadership is not telling people what to do, leadership is exemplified by I get a warning order saying this is your target this is what we want you to do so I go back to the four guys and I tell Tom Delaney the RTO give him a briefing on where were going and what were going to do so he can go cut antennas and get resistors so he can set his radio up to communicate from the different areas we might be in. My machine gunner would get his gun ready, my indigenous scout of course would prepare himself, and then my slack man would figure out how much he wanted to carry. And then the radio operator also carried our malaria medicine so our quinine and dapson and he would be responsible at dawn every day from giving out the daily pill and if we were over five days giving out the weekly pill. Um, so they would go do that prep and I would work with our operations officer and if we had other people from other intel agencies who would have specific intel requirements we would work out how we do that. Maybe we carry a special camera or a small recorder we could tap into a line if we could find one um my scout of course would record it but he would also listen he could do contemporaneous translations in case it might lead us to go somewhere else and then after that we would practice our immediate action drills we had a little firing range out there uh we would do live fire. I'm sure you've seen in the movies where you're walking along and encounter fire everyone steps off to the left and right, the guy in front shoots a magazine then turns and runs to the straight back and takes a position then the next guy and the next guy so you can keep the bad

guys heads down and get out of there we practiced how to set up near and close ambushes, we did practice, we had moves for if you took a prisoner you know how you could put him down quickly, if we were trying to snatch somebody on a trail we had a special way to set up um if we found a bunker complex you know we figured the different, planned for different contingencies if we were discovered we would set up a patrol base not far away and count bunkers and if it was NVA there were usually people there so you had to be careful, if it was VC they usually had one or two people guarding it because they came in after dark and get their weapons to go do what VC did and then during the day drop that stuff and go be farmers. And we prepared blocks of C4 with actuators and ignitors and everybody carried them in their left pocket if we needed to blow something up or if we found a bunker with mortar rounds or RPG's. So at least if we got in there and there was nobody there we can leave some damage, so all those things were standard operating procedures

Q: So all of those things were standard operating procedures, overseas, in a hostile environment like that. That just blows my mind. Blows my mind is an understatement. you mentioned the VC would do what they do at night and then during the day they would be a farmer. To go off of that what is your familiarity with VC operations. what, well that would be another question, so we'll start with v c operations. What do you remember about how they conducted operations?

Mendel: Well the Vietcong being an irregular Force they, let me see, The North Vietnamese army, they had uniforms they had, they operated using the Russian or the Warsaw Pact standard operating procedures which is given any unit you've got three battalions say well two battalions



will be forward and one battalion will be back and the center of the triangle will be there artillery for the unit so whether it's company Battalion regiment or division they all set up that way and they taught all of their proxies the same maneuvers So the North Vietnamese Army set up that way the Vietcong on the other hand we're a little bit different because there are in a regular Force typically of the area we worked in for instance the I think it was a 256 rear Service Group was the nomenclature of this battalion Sized organization you think rear Service Group clerks jerks spoons well actually their job was to come into South Vietnam into an area wear a full regular army unit was going to come in on its part and attack so they would actually come all all the way down and they at points along the Route of march a full unit was going to take where they would cash weapons ammunition medical supplies food water anything that they could need that they were marching down from wherever their origin was and then when I got into the area where the full unit was going to attack they would actually hide RPGs with rockets extra ammunition water so that the unit they were supporting as they came down they didn't need to carry as much and they have these resupply points so what made these people so dangerous is they didn't operate as a regular unit and when they move you can watch a couple guys with a water buffalo in a cart behind it I could be a taxi driver with a bunch of stuff hidden in the back and they would infiltrate the equipment and certain areas they let people to guard it so our reconnaissance my go out 40 fifty or a hundred kilometers because upper Intel they have said well we know that the first are the 276 North Vietnamese Army infantry regiment they're planning an attack to come down hit this area we might have Ranger teams all the way around there looking you know for evidence like that and if we could find that if we could find a cash we could see what's hidden there give us an idea of how many people might be coming down what kind of a unit is it going to be a pure sapper unit for is it going to be an infantry unit and you can generally tell if you find

a cash and it's got 500 uniforms well it's probably a battalion and then the different, all the material one of our jobs would be to locate that sometimes don't fool with it at all just photographic count it and we can exfiltrate any information to the other team Maybe 10 km to the West 10 to the east so you can generally identify The front they're going to attack sometimes you get discovered and it becomes a fight but you want to get out of there as fast as you can If you can take him alive if you do if you can't there were times where we would just take them and bury them cuz you don't want the bad guys to find out

Q: Exactly you see that's kind of the problem I have because people draw this people draw this connection between VC operations and more reconnaissance oriented Army operations and hearing you go through your standard operating procedures and knowing how practiced you guys were on it and how close you stuck to the proposed United States Army operating procedures and regulations even and hearing that VC soldiers would come in as say a water buffalo herder and conduct this high of a level of operations I don't know that seems crazy. What exposure did you have to I guess it would be South Vietnamese forces?

Mendel: very limited very limited from time to time I'm struggling to even remember exactly when there might have been two maybe three occasions when we had a South Vietnamese intelligence people come to brief us with that information on that area but most of the time our information came down from much higher levels since we work for 3 \* most of our information either came from strategic reconnaissance like a Special Forces Group which was even farther out aerial reconnaissance sensor reconnaissance things like that from time to time we would have

a representative from the CIA come in they had information from contacts sometimes there would be a very targeted operation high-value Target they I would say we have some information they're moving from this grid coordinate to this grid coordinate dead He's generally moving on trails so they would salt the route with teams generally a ranger square is 10 km by 10 km anything inside of there if it's not your team it's fair game so if you know that this guy is going to be moving making a 50 or 60 kilometer movement every eight or nine kilometers you might have a team setting up an ambush you know and a couple walking around just as an early warning we just didn't do much with the South Vietnamese Army

Q: And that would be the differentiation between Say being alert Ranger and being a Green Beret in Vietnam well that would be one differentiation would be that level of exposure because that's not as I've learned that's not what you guys did you didn't cooperate with the locals you were purely reconnaissance

Mendel: now we did from time to time we had to South Korean staff sergeants who came down to do exchange training with us we had some of the Thai Army let's see Thai South Korean we had one Australian at different times came in We trained Cambodian Rangers I guess they called them but that's about the most that I can remember we're just too small of a unit

Q: right and that's not what you guys did. One of the books we had to read for class was called The Things They Carried and it was a work describing basically what the average infantry Soldier would have carried and I know this is one of those conversations we've had in the past where you basically told me your entire load out we went over that a few seconds ago but if you

can go over it in detail what your Loadout would have looked like and what purpose everything served

Mendel: well you can have those pictures and you'll see in one of those

Q: sweet thank you I'll bring one of those to class

Mendel: if you compare what we carried to what the average line Soldier carried back then much different and if you compare it to what the soldier carries today hugely different so on a team once you been there a couple weeks nobody wore underwear socks stuff like that because you get crotch rot and you'll get all kinds of skin diseases if you got wet if you were clothes you had on the quicker you dried we carried each person individually either had a headband a flop hat nobody wore a beret in the field can keep you warm get soaking wet it was just for show obviously our camouflage for the Exposed Skin and usually we just took off our shirts and camouflaged each other from the top of the head all the way to Mid chest and then your arms up to your shoulders and so on every person carried a map every person carried a compass everybody carried a spare battery for the radio every person carried 220 rounds for the machine gun Every person carried well the where a load-bearing equipment was set up I can describe my mine. Along my upper suspenders I had a survival knife hanging down I had a first aid pouch I had a knot cord so you could tie a knot for every kilometer for Pace count I carried a white phosphorus grenade on the upper left I carried a white phosphorus Grenade on the strap to

my rucksack like I said on our shirts you know the upper right-hand pocket was map and compass upper left-hand pocket was personal but we carried nothing that could identify us

Q: no dog tags or anything?

Mendel: Yes, we carried dog tags. there was some missions that we carried no dog tags but most of them I did have dog tags on the lower right-hand pocket of the uniform was one LRP ration dehydrated meal you could put water in it let it soak and then you can eat it well that one was already prepared in there so that if we had to dump our rucksacks and run you could have one meal to eat I had a small pouch on the back which carried some different odds and ends first aid equipment on my rucksack put on my load-bearing equipment I had 4 ammo pouches on the front the two immediately in front each carried for grenades and then next to each I carried five magazines then I had a bandolier each bandolier had 7 pouches each pouch came with 2 10-round stripper clips but we just filled magazines and put them back in there so that way we had 24 magazines we did not wear protective vests we did not wear body armor we did not have helmets I don't even think I ever saw a helmet Vietnam in our unit we all carried Swiss seats there's a lot of ways to get extracted now if the helicopter land you got the Spy rig which is a very well-developed strap device where you can attach a vehicle to it for us if the chopper couldn't land they dropped what they called a McGuire rig which a sergeant in the 5th group developed basically it was a duffel bag With 200 feet of rope and a 10-pound weight at the end and it would be tied to the floor in the chopper and they would drop it down and there would be a couple carabiners attached to it but we would have to do is take our 16-foot Swiss seat and it's

just a piece of rope and you tied around your waist tie knot in the front put it between your legs come back back here and tie it and you got to snap link they dropped the McGuire they just snap onto it and you're hanging by this rope and you're hoping this Chopper go straight up and doesn't drag you through the trees the first place he can find where he's not taking fire he lands then we unhook and get in the chopper and get out of there eventually the stable rig where you load-bearing equipment suspenders were all sewn together and they had straps and you just throw them back and if you had to get extracted then they had a more developed heavy lifting cargo strap With connections spaced so that you could connect above your head and then you hold each other's hand like this so that when the Choppers flying you're not spinning around and there were others there was the Fulton rig which is a big helium balloon that would go up a couple hundred feet and a C-130 with a fork in the nose what's natural and you wore a suit we had to be familiarized but we never actually employed it that was rarely used

Q: that last one you mentioned, fun fact, it was actually in the Dark Knight I don't know if you've ever seen The Dark Knight It came out in like 2012, but they use that that's the nearest thing I can use to mentally picture is from that movie

Mendel: well if you watch the movie The Green Berets they capture that Vietnamese colonel and I put them in the suit and that's the Fulton rig

Q: so you said your Loadout would have been different than the standard line Soldier this is just a closed-off that last part was it basically just curious much ammunition as possible?

Mendel: yeah, we had, everybody carried at least one Claymore so that you could set up an ambush or you're just setting up for paw patrol base for a couple hours of rest every claim or we took every claim or comes in a two pocket bag the Claymores in one and then the other one is your wire and your blasting cap and your actuator will we cut the wire down so that you're actually only 21 ft behind the Claymore instead of 50 feet and we carry the Claymore with the blasting cap in it and with the wire just wrapped around it so that I would designate we're setting up here which would be a hand signal for the Claymores to go out So while the radio operators can the center key with scoop out a hole I put the radio in there just in case we took fire that would protect the radio operator so my Scout would go out one way my Gunner is setting up fields of Fire by slack man and I would go out in three directions and literally crawl out and all you had to do was fold the legs out Push the Claymore in the ground and then get back to the actuators the key being the Claymore is curved so there's a forward blast that throws out the ball bearings but every explosion has a forward and reverse Force so it's curved like this and this Force this Force comes back into a point and that's how you make Chargers to blow holes and stuff that point is the focus of the explosion will that 16 ft set for outside of 16ft it won't affect you and there was a demonstration from time to time in the United States where when you went to a station where they're training you about the Claymore sometimes they had this guy he would get down behind the Claymore within the arc here and put your plugs in and cover his ears and somebody would blow the Claymore and now it shook him up but it didn't damage him because the focus of the Claymore is right there.

Q: yeah, right there at that 16-foot mark

Mendel: we never tried that

Q: Right. going back to your memories just overall both of your tours. other than your first memories in the Army per se what were some of your more memorable experiences?

Mendel: pretty much everything I did in both Ranger companies I mean they were highs and lows there were a couple times when we had to run and hide but I was the leader the entire time I was in Vietnam and I never had a man killed. I never had, none of us were never injured in such a manner that required care outside of our company my last three months well my last two months I went out to the field with a reconnaissance platoon with first of the 8th Cav 1st Cavalry division add that was with that unit that was the only time I ever saw anybody killed or seriously wounded I went in at 3 on April 30th 1970 I went in with a resupply the unit was so undisciplined I just stood off to the side because the first sergeant told me he wanted me to observe for a couple of weeks and they were getting the platoon leader and the platoon Sergeant out of there it was a line unit that hadn't had contact in six months so I said okay so when I went in I went off to the side and I watched soldiers just tossing radio batteries ammunition grenades anything they didn't want to carry because it was too heavy toss it Into the Woods other things boxes from their rations And all that they just lit on fire and when they filed out of their end of the jungle I watch how they moved and I was pretty nervous and so I drag last position and one of the young Sergeant John pageant immediately took me under his wing and said look let me show you how we do things and by 4:30 that afternoon their platoon leader had led them



following almost following a trail up to the top of a ridge instead of stopping doing a listening sending a Cloverleaf to Recon the area and find out what was going on and see what was on or over the ridge he just went ahead and went right up close to the ridge and they all set up a rest overnight position he then directed pageant to go back down the trail bad just come up and set up an automatic ambush so that if anybody came up they would trip it it would blow and we would have a warning well he came back and said look I got two other guys here you want to come and see how we do this so I said sure well he went back down but you didn't walk down the trail thank God he paralleled it but when he got down to a certain location he said I'm going to go put this on a trail stepped onto the trail instead of stopping and listening at which time he was shot twice through the neck fell back onto my body the other two people who were with us door behind me they immediately dropped behind a tree because the first two rounds hit pageant in the neck he fell onto me and then the rest of that magazine just cover the whole rest of the area I couldn't get the others to move I yelled to get some support from the machine gun up above us and got no response I waited until that rifle quit firing I figured he's changing mags and I can move around but turns out unfortunately there were four people and by the time it was all over with I had managed to go out to the left and go downhill and I came around behind there were three people laying there shooting up I managed to shoot them the fourth one was dead by then and then I came back up and I sound of course pageants dead and I sent the other two up the hill to tell them it's over with but I need some help with the body and they ran up the hill put the platoon Sergeant you out I can't come down we're taking too much fire I said they're all dead there is no fire will he wouldn't come down so I carried pageants body up to the top of the hill and the platoon leader was already on the radio calling for Medevac so they got his body out but we stayed down in there from April 30th through May 6th until they finally extracted us and

when pageant was killed we had one person got shot by a sniper under his arm another one got shot in his leg then we had to go up a trail into a base camp there was a 30 caliber machine gun I took him out there were seven people wounded 1 dead in the beginning and then on the last day Mickey Don Pierson I have been walking Point almost all day and then went back so that I can have a rest then I put him on point and he walked straight up into a bunker was hit by a claymore and everybody was just hiding they didn't know who was up there so I went around up to the left and it turned out to be a three bunker complex there was only one person there and the guy was firing a machine gun they also had detonated the Claymore so he wanted to fight so I shot him it was just I came back and the medic by that time was up ahead of the trail trying to put compresses on Pierson and there were so many holes in him everyone was passing up there, presses so I was helping him do that we put them in a Stokes litter and he died on the way up to the chopper Templeton was ordered to proceed to a little spur and we were extracted after that and of all my memories of combat in Vietnam that week is probably the one that Still Remains the most Vivid I was and am still angry with the whole thing and in fact after the body was taken out when pageant was killed three of the members of the platoon sat with me on the edge of our little Perimeter there and I was so mad I was shaking and at one point I took my pistol and just walked across to the platoon leader my intention was to kill him there was always one person awake during the night I didn't sleep or anything but at that point I think the Battalion Commander realized that the platoon was dysfunctional

Q: in shambles really

Mendel: yeah, yeah

Mendel: and as a matter of fact the extraction of that Platoon I found out 13 years later I was in the Infantry officer basic course and we had a class in air mobile operations and it was conducted by Lieutenant Colonel who had been an army Aviator and when they handed out the topographical map of the area we had to plan an extraction to get the platoon out of there I recognized right away that was the actual extraction point that had been used for us all those years earlier and they broke us up into little groups of five + 10 to each come up with a method of extraction so I just put in what we actually did so when I did my presentation I was chosen to speak for the group The lieutenant colonel who was running that class put me aside why, how did you develop that plan I said basically that's where we got extracted on May 6th 1970 and that's how we got out so I said if that works at probably ought to be a viable option turned out he was a captain then and he was one of the pilot to extracted us.

Q: Wow

Mendel: So go figure

Q: all that because of indiscipline?

Mendel: poor leadership and lack of discipline, yes

Q: well that answers my last question right there which was significant operations that you can recall.

Significant operations?

Q: Well that last one definitely would have qualified. in the grand scheme of things one of the things well what we've learned in class so far, it's not just the history of the Vietnam War but the history of Vietnam it's sometimes suggested that there really wasn't a purpose for America to have a presence in Vietnam. if you were to be given your opportunity had a microphone in front of a large audience of people who may have that perception what kind of argument would you propose, and would you propose an argument that there actually was or may have been a purpose for us being there.

Mendel: there is no argument. I've always been a student of History even as a young child and all throughout my life any student of History who text more than a cursory glance at events of the world going back to pre-World War II back to Karl Marx forward what have no choice but to agree from the time communism was born which was the same style of Communism that was in the Soviet Union which would later become the Warsaw Pact and mao tsetung The Chinese Communists from the time of his long march and Chaing Kai Shek his group fleeing to Formosa it is very obvious and very easy to see how Communism spread even the most brutal regime the

Nazi regime in the waning days of the war the leaders did the best they could to ensure that they either died or were captured fighting Allied Forces rather than Then the Russians and there's much documented history of how the Russians are brutal.

Q: the gulag archipelago

Mendel: always. Always so when the French we're generally the colonizers of what we call Cochinchina and China which loosely termed would be what we now call Vietnam the Vietnamese the Cambodians the Laotians that general area There was internal conflict between the laosians Cambodians and Vietnamese because they're different ethnicities but they each had their own regimes yes the Japanese came in and captured the area but they let the front stay there and run it under Japanese supervision and in 53 and 54 when the Foreign Legion was doing the last gasp fighting against Ho Chi Minh's people we had to come in to buttress the South Vietnamese regime unfortunately under French leadership corrupt politicians set after set after set running Vietnam and the French pretty much had a laissez-faire attitude on their plantations the rubber plantations to grow their crop and do what they were doing they were archetypical colonists we had to get in there and in fact when the actual transition from the French to Americans took place it was actually handed over the French were represented by a captain in the French CIA and a lieutenant colonel intelligence officer from the United States we had advisors there as early as 1955 okay and it just grew the issue is the Vietnamese well in the Korean War the Chinese and the Russians both supported the North Koreans that war ended in 52 during that time Ho Chi Minh whose life had been saved by OSS Detachment 101 during World War II they got them drugs to combat as disease he had already been organizing the Viet Minh so somebody had to fight the spread there but we also had the chain the Vietnamese government will that somebody

else's business but fighting the Communists we had advisors who we're training their infantry we had advisors training their Air Force their Marines their Navy the Rangers all of that 2 protect the country to slow the onslaught to teach you know hopefully they could take over and fight their own War but there were problems that were throughout the Vietnamese military but I will tell you that the average Vietnamese Soldier fought hard Vietnamese Rangers had a terrific reputation Vietnamese Special Forces ehh, not so much lldb which is look long duck Bing that was their special forces kind of the slang term was little lazy dumb bastards but I mean the Vietnamese I worked with one of the free country and I fought hard so yes even back as a young 18 year old sergeant preparing to go to Vietnam you know I had to learn about the history to culture the politics it was just part of it did I fight for that no I thought because I was a soldier and I was told we needed to go protect okay what did the United States need to be there yes yes and if you look at the politics just of those three countries in Vietnam Cambodia and Laos they were run by Warlords and the Communists are some of the greatest experts in psychological operations intelligence counterintelligence they suborned the will of the people the things they did and still do 2 take over places or to suborn them into the Socialist way of life today all you have to do is you've got Ho Chi Minh you know Venezuela is a victim keyboard Che Guevara t-shirts he easily killed 149 people by hand and it took a Special Forces Unit in South America to take him out but what's the result in Cuba it's horrible economy the Socialist role model is everyone has the same benefits and gets the same except the people at the top have it all in every instance I know the domino theory was a term used you know if Vietnam Falls the others will fall we won the soldier on the ground won his War politics ultimately cost us to withdraw the Communists took over the entire country but one of the first things they did was they wanted to have us have relations with them we have companies there now yes it's a socialist country but

it's not pure add they do Embrace capitalism to a certain degree so maybe the years we spent there have you not gone there it would have fallen and it would have been a hard dedicated socialist country so all the time they had to fight from the time that each side learn about the other side maybe that's why the Vietnamese and it's taken since April 1975 to get to where they are today it's a softer form of capitalism of communism so should we have been there I think yes I have served in Berlin when the wall was up my particular job required me to travel around East Berlin around Germany and I got to see things I had been to Yugoslavia under Marshal Tito josip Broz I saw how communism work there it just there's no doubt in my mind that we needed to be there and so you can say you know from 1970 When I last left Vietnam up to this day so you know almost 50 years I've had the benefit of hindsight to read history and study it and I put all that together and you asked me do you think we should have been there absolutely history has borne out the fact that we should have been there were some political decision is made that affected some of the things that we did or didn't do on the ground and the politics back in the States the political machinations back here in the United States in our operations on the ground our ability to conduct the operations on the ground the way we really need to conduct them it was disjointed there was a lot of micromanaging over here so where we were was the Rangers reconnaissance Special Forces seals yes we did get missions from different levels of control but more often than not we knew our area and we conducted missions and sometimes you know they were we'll go ahead and do it and seek forgiveness rather than permission because we know our area we knew where things went and I would never have survived mentally or physically in a regular line infantry unit it's just I wouldn't have made it we knew more about the people we observe more about the culture even though we work in isolation we could read sign on a trail we didn't eat anything but Vietnamese food for 24 hours before we went out to the field he didn't

smoke cigarettes you didn't use bug spray to keep the flies away is it cannot be smelled We buried uniform and Equipment under the dirt so it couldn't be smelled in the next day it smelled like the jungle and that's how we lived so you can't help in the midst of all this and I had a Vietnamese Scout who had been a Vietcong senior Sergeant who defected which is a whole other story that I won't get into but we had to learn we had to do that and our irregular Warfare unit still do that to this day and I think we have a better feel for history and what was going on in a given time and I think we can probably say here's what the future will hold if we continue this way but having the benefit of being out here almost 50 years later I can honestly say I think we did the right thing.