Veterans Oral History Project

October 15, 2017 - Ohio History Center, Columbus, Ohio

Interviewee: Peter Mansoor, former United States Army Officer, current associate History Professor at The Ohio State University

Interviewer: Cameron Wood, Oral History Coordinator at the Ohio History Connection

CW = Cameron Wood, PM = Peter Mansoor

**CW:** Today is July 7th, 2016. I am Cameron Wood here at the Ohio History Connection. I am speaking with Dr. Peter Mansoor about his military experience.

Dr. Mansoor can you please say and spell your name for us?

**PM:** Peter Mansoor. M-A-N-S-O-O-R.

**CW:** Thank you.

When and where were you born?

**PM:** I was born February 28th, 1960 in New Ulm, Minnesota.

**CW:** Can you describe your childhood a little bit?

**PM:** New Ulm is an interesting place. I think at the time it was 10,000 Germans and one Arabic family. That would have been us.

My dad was an immigrant from Palestine and he met my mom in high school there in New Ulm. They married, he went off into the Air Force for a stint during the Korean War, and served in Geoje, in Japan.

**1:00**

They came back to New Ulm, eventually had five kids. I was the last, the youngest of five. An older sister and then three brothers, all older than me, lived in New Ulm for six years, and have fond memories of the place, the snow. Of course as a kid that's all good, you don't have to shovel it, building snow forts and sledding and so forth.

We moved to Sacramento, California when I was six, in 1966. That's where I was raised. I love Sacramento, it's a wonderful place. It has grown incredibly since I was there. I think when we got there it was still a cow town, kind of like Columbus back then. It's had the commensurate amount of growth that Columbus has had. In fact the cities are very similar in certain ways. Both state capitals **2:00**and both not he major cities in their state.

I had a wonderful childhood, playing football. I was a very serious student. We didn't have a lot of money in my family so when my mom went to the library, she was a school teacher. When she went to the library to check out books for her kids I always volunteered to come along and naturally gravitated to the history section. Finally to the military history section, so I started my second career early on there.

Unfortunately, along the way, around 1973 or so, my parents got divorced.Although I don't remember a lot of hardship, because my mom took are of us, she was a single school teacher raising five kids. That's a tough haul.

When I was considering where I would go to college, because I knew that's what I**3:00**wanted to do and I had the grades to get in just about anywhere, having someone pay for it was a top consideration. The academies were on my radar screen, but I was a pretty patriotic kid. I watched too many John Wayne movies when I was young so I always thought that it was the obligation of ever citizen to serve in some way. I thought going to the academy and then serving five years in the military would be my way to do that, and get my college paid for at the same time.

I never thought I'd make it a career, and here I am with a 26 year military career behind me now. It was the right decision for me and obviously worked out.

**CW:** Beyond your father, did your family have a lot of military service in their background?

**PM:** There's a lot of military service but I'm the first professional, if you **4:00**will. I'm the first long service professional. My uncles both served in the Philippines as draftees, my dad of course. On my wife's side there's a slew of military service. My mom got remarried, so my step-dad actually was a long serving and Navy career NCO. He retired as a Senior Chief Petty Officer, a plank holder on the Ranger, which means he was on the ships inaugural cruise. He was off Yankee station for a couple tours in Vietnam. He had a big impact on me when I was in high school as well. I'm really the first one in the family to make it a career and stay with it as long as I did.

**CW:** Do you feel like you were ... West Point is a pretty serious school. Do you**5:00**feel like you were prepared when you got there for what you were going to find?

**PM:** I was prepared scholastically. Obviously I graduated first in my class,although I had to ramp it up and part of that was the fact that I just applied myself and worked so hard. When I flew to West Point in 1978 it was the first time I had been east of the Mississippi River, and often when we had time off or weekends off where you could get leave at West Point, I didn't really have anywhere to go. I stayed and studied and made sure ... To me, it sounds like I'm a huge nerd, but to me a good Saturday night was finding a cubicle in the library and doing some research for a paper or whatnot.

**6:00**

It wasn't all work, I did some trips to New York City and other places. I had a cousin and aunt and uncle who lived in Silver Spring, Maryland. I'd go down and visit them for Thanksgiving, and Washington's birthday, but I worked really hard. I earned what I got there.

On the other hand, I wasn't really ready for the discipline aspect, the military discipline. That was really a culture shock, especially the first summer I was there. It was called Beast Barracks, New Cadet training. I had some tough moments the first couple weeks, the first three weeks I would say. I cried myself to sleep a few times, and decided I would grit my teeth and do what they wanted me to do, and get through it. I did that as well. I didn't do too bad on that account. In the end I ended up as a Senior, as a Battalion Commander. I did **7:00**all right.

**CW:** What do you think was the hardest thing to adjust to going into that military mode?

**PM:** I was homesick early on. That's part of that first three weeks of being away. I had never really been away from home. Then having people yell at you. There was a lot of good examples of leadership, but there were a lot of bad examples of leadership too. I was just not use to that. My football coaches were all very supportive, I'd always pretty much been in a supportive atmosphere with teachers and so forth. To have people who were yelling at you like they hated you, that was a shock to me. I had to get use to it. It actually was useful, in a really odd sense, in that later in my career I would come upon those sorts of **8:00**people and they'd try to treat me like that even. They were superiors and I was able to just shrug it off because I had been through it before.

**CW:** What was your favorite class? You probably had a lot of them, being interested in the military history.