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Transcript of National Archives History Office
Oral History Interview
Subject: Bryan McGraw
Interviewer: Erik Moshe
Date: 9/13/2017

MR. ERIK MOSHE: Hi Bryan, thanks for taking the time to do this interview. Where were you at the time you enlisted?

MR. BRYAN MCGRAW: No problem. Well, actually, I decided when I was high school I wanted to be a military officer, so I went to the Air Force/ROTC route. I made a decision too late to even be considered for the military academy, so I graduated from high school in 1980, and shortly before then is when I decided I wanted to be a military officer, and I wanted to fly originally. So I went the Air Force/ROTC route, and got my commission in 1984 from Southeast Missouri State University, and I was a distinguished graduate of the program and ultimately received my regular commission in the Air Force, which is something that most folks don't do when they come out of ROTC or officer training school. Typically, only the academy graduates are given that status, which means you are a permanent fixture, you cannot be risked. Things like that, as a regular officer. It was a quite an accomplishment. I went on active duty in 1985, early that year of January. And I'm from the St. Louis area originally.

MR. MOSHE: What were some of the reasons why you decided to join?

MR. MCGRAW: I've always had a deep commitment to serve a higher calling. I think part of that was just the way I was raised to look at the collective, societal view versus your own individual goals or desires. Obviously, we all want to be able to live a good life and provide for ourselves and our families, but I found that working in public service was very rewarding, because there's a lot of things that we do that are not necessarily quantifiable from a standpoint of the financial aspects, but they are very important because of the service that's provided or the protections that we take on for the nation. A deep commitment to public service was what led to that.

MR. MOSHE: Why did you pick the Air Force?

MR. MCGRAW: I wanted to fly, and I figured that was the best branch. All of my family up to that point on both sides had been Army folks. I had a few relatives that had been in the Navy, and I think a couple of Marines in the past, distant relatives. But nobody that I was aware of had gone in the Air Force, and I just thought that was the neatest thing. Unfortunately, when I got into college and going into my junior year is when we started the preparations for your final selection, what you were slotted to go into, when you started going through various physicals and things like that. I found out that I was not going to be able to fly. I had a medical issue that would not allow me to go to flight school so I ended up being in a support role on the ground, in engineering services, which is similar to a quartermaster-type function. So I took that. I was a little disappointed at first, but once I got past that, I made the most of my time.

It was challenging, and I was in college during the Reagan years at massive buildup after the military had been decimated after Vietnam. There were a lot of opportunities, but they were hard and fast, as I'm sure you know, with various medical qualifications, and I thought I could've still flown the heavy so to speak, the transports or tankers, but I had a problem with high G-forces so they said, "Nope, can't go." Of course, if you get in the service and then you develop something, they'll find a way to work with you, because they've made that investment, but they figure, "we spend millions of hours to train you as a pilot, so we're not going to go down that road, because we don't want to waste the money in case you can't make it through the school." I understood it, but for a while there, I was really bummed out. Then after that, I had to "suck it up,

buttercup” and move on. So I did.

MR. MOSHE: Do you remember your first days in the service?

MR. MCGRAW: It was kind of strange, because I was slotted in engineering and services, but initially when they said I couldn't be in the flight program—and this is just some of the bureaucracy of the military—they put me in a missile slot to be a missile launch officer because this was still the height of the Cold War. My first assignment was to Brandenburg Air Force Base in California to attend school for missile officer. I was in the midst of that, knowing that at some point, my assignment would come through, and I would be reassigned to a different career field completely, but I got through about half the program before they reassigned me, and I up and pulled out of there and went to New Hampshire on the other side of the country to Pease Air Force Base, where I was stationed initially as a full-time member of the Air Force and began training and working in the field. My first days were full of a lot of anxiety, I guess, it's a big change for a lot of people. Basic training for officers, especially ROTC, occurs while you're in college, so between my sophomore and junior year is when I went to basic training. It was just a matter of assimilating into the system, and I left home and drove to California. My entire life fit into a Jeep CJ-7. If you fast-forward to where I am today or when I left the military with a family and kids, and it was completely different. I couldn't imagine my entire life fitting into a Jeep. [laughter].

MR. MOSHE: That would be a lot of Jeeps.

MR. MCGRAW: Yeah, it'd be a fleet of 'em! I went there and was living in temporary quarters as you do when you're typically in training. It was kind of different, but I got used to it, so it was fun, but it was a little unnerving at times, because I wasn't sure how long I was going to be there.

MR. MOSHE: Do you remember your instructors at all?

MR. MCGRAW: Yes, my flight commander was a really good guy. He had been prior enlisted, and he would work with you, and he wouldn't ride you that hard, but we had other officers that were part of the whole training contingent and we all had nickname for 'em. I don't remember their actual names. I only remember the nicknames, and there was one guy we called Captain Schwinn because he always rode a bike, and he would come out of the fog of Vandenberg, which is where I went to basic training too. He would come out of the fog in the middle of the day, because it was always foggy there, and catch you doing something he thought you shouldn't be doing—he'd give you demerits. He ruined a lot of people's lives for weekend duty, and I got nailed one time; we were practicing and practicing after evening chow, military formation, and some parade we had coming up. They kept playing the old military music, and after a while, you get a little stir crazy. You keep doing it over and over. This is like the 10th, 12th time we've done this, and some of us, we weren't talking, because that would be a major breach of protocol, but some of us were a little bored, and we started doing a little dance in place, and I got nailed for doing that from Captain Schwinn coming out of the fog. I spent the rest of that week and that weekend doing various custodial duties that were not very pleasant, but that was just kind of the way things were.

My first active-duty assignment, I remember, it was finally when I got to New Hampshire, and they said, “okay, you're the operations officer for this squadron,” and I had suddenly 20 people that reported to me, and I worked for a lieutenant colonel. My senior NCO, the guy that was kind of my right-hand person, was a Vietnam vet, and he was pretty hard-nosed. I mean he wasn't like the character that Sam Elliot plays in *We Were Soldiers*. If you're familiar with that film, Sam Elliot's the rough and gruff old NCO who answers only to the commander. Well, I had a guy that was like that, but not quite like that. He was a little more personable, but here I was, a second lieutenant, and he knew more than I would ever know, and he worked for me. And so that was always a dynamic that you had to really be prepared for and you had to be very humble, and I

was not afraid to say, “okay, I don’t know what’s going on here.” Let’s find a solution. He was very complimentary and kind of took me under his wing. It was still kind of intimidating at times, when you’re a 23–24-year-old. And here’s this guy who’s old enough to be your father, and he works for you, and he’s been through all this stuff and he’s got ribbons, so it’s kind of intimidating.

MR. MOSHE: Which wars did you serve in during your time?

MR. MCGRAW: I was in during largely the Cold War, the majority on active duty, although we did have a lot of contingency operations, so the Grenada conflict was right as I was coming in, but after that, the War on Drugs. I deployed in support of some of those operations. I also went to Bright Star, which was in the desert in Egypt. I used to tell people, I was in the desert before it was cool to be in the desert. Because now, everybody goes to the desert. And then, all the way up through the first Gulf War. I was overseas at the time in a contingency support role; I had basically sent most of my squadron to the desert, and then there was group of us from around the country that were on call to be assigned to the mortuary operations because that fell under the umbrella of my organization. I was on call to deploy to Dover or to Travis Air Force Base to work in the mortuaries. Early on, there was the presumption that we were going to incur tens of thousands of casualties—that never materialized, thankfully. I rode out that war, then after that, there was a variety of contingency assignments, from the Balkan campaign, all in a support role: helping to establish the air base and helping the commanders run those. It was a lot of fun. Kept me busy.

MR. MOSHE: Were there many casualties there in your unit?

MR. MCGRAW: No, I never really had any—we never really deployed into combat zones. We typically deployed to the air bases and worked from there. There were times where there was some pretty contentious situations when you’re on a drug interdiction mission, and you’re out in the middle of the jungle somewhere in South America, and you’re not really sure who the good guys are. You have to be ready, but nobody died that I worked with, in a combat role. We had a lot of people die in peace time, and being mortuary officer, which was one my duties, I had to deal with all those. We had a lot of people killed in training accidents over the years—with aircraft crashes or live weapons, fire, car accidents, and a lot of suicides. Fortunately, nobody really close to me was involved.

MR. MOSHE: Can you tell me about some of your most memorable experiences?

MR. MCGRAW: Engineering services is a support operation that runs on inner base. We were the cradle-to-grave folks, but we took care of everything on the front end to establish an air base, working hand-in-hand with engineers and with other units to build the air base up, whether it was contingency one—a true wartime environment where you’re living in tents to something more permanent with hard structures. All the logistics associated with that, dealing with building an air base, constructing facilities, runways, plumbing, electrical, all those things. Food services, making sure people had all those basic needs met, housing.

Then in the peacetime role, even things like child care centers, all the morale, welfare, and recreational opportunities that we could provide, based again, upon where you were. On the other end of the spectrum was the end of life: all the military honors and mortuary affairs, search and recovery. Some of the biggest challenges I had and most memorable ones was when I was overseas. I was in Okinawa for three and a half years in the 18th Services Squadron, which was part of the 18th Combat Wing, and at the time, Kadena Air Base was the largest operations Air Force location in the world. We supported 70,000 people, including dependents and civilians, on the base through a variety of services, and there was a very, very high operations tempo. The norm was a 12-hour day, and you did things at very quick pace, always with an eye on being able to execute the mission—the wartime mission if it needed to be, on a moment’s notice.

Because of that, I really enjoyed working in those kinds of environments, and I got to work with some really outstanding people over the years. One of the gentlemen that I ended up mentoring, General Patrick Gamble, went on to be the vice chief of staff. When you're around really outstanding people, you can learn so much from them, and in turn, they invest in you and give you a lot of opportunities to do things. After active duty, I went into the Reserves, and I became an executive officer, and I worked in the Air Force Reserve wings in that capacity. Again, working for the commanding general. In that role, you're exposed to a lot of stuff that most people in your grade, which was either a captain or major—depending upon the size of the unit—most people wouldn't have that exposure. It was very, very rewarding in that regard, but in all of them, you really had to work hard.

I think one of the neat things was I met my wife while I was in the service—the Air Force was really good to me, and I really enjoyed it. I wouldn't change anything about it.

MR. MOSHE: Were you awarded any awards or citations?

MR. MCGRAW: Yes, it was one of those things that I think, again, because of just the nature of working hard and having good people that looked out for you, I was fortunate in that I earned things like the Air Force Accommodation Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters, so I earned three of those awards. Then a variety of other peacetime awards, whether it was six Air Force outstanding unit awards and several individual awards, officer of the year for different commands. When I was in the Pacific, I just really tried to apply myself and better myself so whether it was weapon systems, getting your expert marks on multiple weapons systems. I was one of the few support officers in the Air Force that was qualified in, not only the M9, the nine-millimeter pistol, a typical sidearm, the M-16, but the also the grenade launcher and the M-60 machine gun. That was just by luck that I was able to get qualified in those, but I really worked hard to do things, and I didn't do it for my own personal gain. I did it because I wanted to do it. And along the way, those things came along. It was very humbling, because when you're standing up in front of a wing of hundreds of other officers and they're reading a citation about you that sets a very high standard. You have to live up to that, and I tried to do that every day.

What I really enjoyed about the service was . . . they say joining the military gives you all this training, and it's absolutely true. When I went into college, I was mortified of public speaking. There was no way I was ever going to be in something like that. That quickly was something that had to change. In the course of just going through the academics of ROTC as well as following assignments once you're on active duty, leadership is something that you learn, and obviously I think you have to have a good basis to work from, but I really learned so many things. I got my graduate degree in public administration because of the Air Force. I completed a lot of professional military education—squadron officer school, Air Command, and staff college. You just learn so many things about so many different facets of working an organization that it really prepares you for that, and I really feel lucky in that regard. It's something I wish more people would consider, because I think it only makes you better down the road.

MR. MOSHE: What was the best-run air base or workplace that you ever worked in?

MR. MCGRAW: I would say it would be Kadena in Okinawa, because it was one of those things. When you're overseas, you naturally kind of band together. Military folks deployed together. You rely on each other for a variety of reasons and responsibilities. But beyond that, you tend to develop a very good rapport, and you become friends with people.

When I was in Japan, because of the criticality of the mission, which was largely to provide the air superiority for the Pacific. With Korea being so close, from a standpoint of potential wartime location, it was something you really had to hone your skills and be ready to go. That really high operations tempo forced

you to really get your act together if you didn't have it. In the course of doing all the training, you really became a better person and you saw ways to do things better. We were always trying to find ways to do things better, because we typically tied it into mission execution, and if we do this, then maybe fewer people will die. Or we can achieve the objective quicker. So whether it was even peacetime or preparing for wartime, I found that to be just the most rewarding. I'm not saying it was perfect, but we certainly did very well when it came to the validation from the office of the inspector general through the readiness inspections. I never earned anything less than an excellent rating in any program area that I worked, and I earned a few outstandings even over those years, and those are not easy to do.

MR. MOSHE: How did you stay in touch with your family?

MR. MCGRAW: Well, as I like to tell some of the folks here, there was a time when we didn't have social media and the Internet. When I was overseas, I would try to call my parents periodically, couldn't really afford to do it frequently, because it was so expensive. I remember one year for Christmas, somebody in my family got me an AT&T calling card, and it was loaded with so many minutes, and I was like, "Holy cow, this is awesome!" So I was able to keep in touch with them. But typically I would talk to my parents maybe once a month or once a quarter. We'd send letters back. This is still at a time when the Internet is not there yet, and I had a huge time difference. It was 15 or 16 hours between where I was and back home, so it was hard.

Typically, I think most people at that time just kind of relied on the written word so we sent things back and forth. We also did videos, which was rather amusing, especially after we were married. And my wife and I, we would do some videos of the sights, but mainly the family wanted to see us and hear us. We had a special request one year for them to—they said just set the camera up and just go about your lives, and let it run for a couple of hours, I think was the length of the tape. And I thought, well that's boring. But they just wanted to see what we were doing. We did that one time when we were putting up a Christmas tree, and that was one of the highlights. My wife sent mine and they just thought it was funny as the dickens. We didn't have instant communication so it was a little different. Now, of course, it's so much different than—and people don't have any context to that, but it was quite a change.

MR. MOSHE: What was the food like?

MR. MCGRAW: I found the food to be wonderful. Of course, you were always working out anyway to stay in shape, but the Air Force always did a great job with the service. In fact, many of the sister services that were stationed with us like in Okinawa or other place I deployed with, they always wanted the Air Force to do the food, because we did it better than anybody else. It was a lot of work, but they did a pretty good job.

MR. MOSHE: Was there something special that you did for good luck?

MR. MCGRAW: No, I did have a bit of a routine about things, but I had that kind of stuff going before I even went in the military. I just get in a routine, and if something worked, I tried not to change that too much. I also played hockey for years and being a goalie, very superstitious, even though we don't admit it, about how we do things. I would just get in a routine, and I'd have a certain way I would go about getting ready for work and do that and try to do it every day. Even if I was deployed somewhere, I tried to replicate it as best I could. I know it was silly, but I just tried to get into that routine so that I could have a little bit of normalcy or stability, because a lot of times you're in a stressful environment, and you don't want to admit it, but you've got to get through it, so you try to find things to make it as comfortable as you can and that was one of the ways I think I was able to do that. That was really important for me too when I was doing mortuary affairs stuff, because that was very, very demanding, very stressful, and it was something that took a lot of out of you. Emotionally as well as physically because of the hours you worked, and if you had to do a search and recovery, those could drag on for days or weeks to locate everything. You really found out who were friends

that you could rely on, but at the same time, you had to really make sure you were the bastion of strength, because they were looking to you for leadership and guidance, and so I couldn't show that to the people that worked for me if I was feeling really down or depressed. I had to do the best thing I could to keep everybody motivated, because if they saw me getting down, then everybody else would just get down as well and it would be real unproductive and bad environment. I tried to get into routines, and I tried to find things to perform those distractions for you to cope, like sports.

And I might say too that, and this is again, 80s into the 90s when you're thrown in that role—I didn't go in the Air Force to be a mortuary guy, no way, that was not my plan, but I took the duties and responsibilities, because that's what I was asked to do. I did them to the best of my ability. But at the same time, yes, you are human, you can only do so much and we didn't have the systems that we have today with support to help you through it. We didn't understand PTSD. We didn't understand death and dying. It was a job. "Get it done."

And you had to do it, and it was not pleasant; a lot of people had expectations, whether it was the commander or the family and you saw the full gamut of emotions in those roles too. You had to be the bastion of stability, and not let any of that—much like a police officer has to calm down parties in a domestic dispute and try to be a voice of reason. In some ways, some of those things I had to do was like that. You had to rise above all that and keep the mission in mind and get things done and do it in a manner that was not received negatively, which is hard—when you feel horrible about it as well.

MR. MOSHE: How did people entertain themselves?

MR. MCGRAW: All sorts of things. We had a lot of intramural sports. Just about everything you could imagine where I was stationed throughout my career. If you didn't want to do sports, there were typically all kinds of clubs. Obviously, various arts and crafts; there were chess clubs; people with the libraries would have different things going on there. Computer clubs and associations, kind of the same things that you see in schools and universities today. Again, depending upon where you were. If you were stationed in the north—I was stationed in Michigan for a while with great fishing and hunting, there's a lot of opportunities. If you're in Okinawa and you wanted to learn how to dive or snorkel, well, that was a great environment. You got a chance to do and learn a lot, and that I found was a way too to meet other people that had similar interests and you typically would become friends. One of the closest friends I have is a guy that I worked with in 1985. He was a young lieutenant like me, and he worked on a mortuary case with me. He was a summary court officer and we became close friends, and to this day we keep in touch all the time.

MR. MOSHE: Do you remember any particularly humorous or unusual event that happened to you?

MR. MCGRAW: One day, it was in the winter time, and I was in New Hampshire. We had a snowstorm, and it was dumping a lot of snow, making a mess, and I was coming back from lunch. I was in my Jeep, which I had when I went in the Air Force, and I pulled in my parking lot, and I realized I was a little bit late to a meeting. As I'm pulling in, I'm driving a little faster than I should be, but parking lots pretty vacant, you know, not a big deal. The hardest thing I had to do was find an open spot and so I'm kind of tooling down the main lane and all of a sudden this person walks out in front of me in their full parka and mukluks. And I almost hit this person. Now the neat things about the military and some of the uniforms is you can't tell gender. So I couldn't tell if this was male or female. But I said something under my breath like you know, like, "What the heck's with that idiot," or whatever. I almost killed 'em, just walked out in front of me. I found a spot and pulled in and I was little miffed at everything, and I saw that this person was going in my building, and I said, "Aha, this is somebody that works, probably for me," or, "I'm going to tell them not to be such an idiot or whatever and pay attention so they don't get killed." Because I'll have to deal with that as a mortuary guy. [Laughter] So it was a little twisted.

Nonetheless, I went in the building and lo and behold in my office is waiting this individual. Snow dripping off of her parka, and it's this young lady who's there to ask me about working on a military honors event that was coming up. She was a second lieutenant; I was a first lieutenant. And I thought, wow! That lady is now my wife of 30 years, and so, it's kind of a fun story, because here's someone who doesn't expect to see anything like that, and of course, as soon as I saw her, all of my anger and everything was gone and so I was just smitten with her. She worked in aircraft maintenance, and so we didn't work together by any stretch of the imagination, but we obviously started dating and went from there.

MR. MOSHE: What were some of the pranks that you pulled or others would pull?

MR. MCGRAW: Well, there was a procedure that I was actually not part of, I was guess culpable in the sense that I had to keep my wife detained a little bit. My wife worked in aircraft maintenance, and at the time and I would assume today it's pretty much still probably a male-dominated world. And these are large units of hundreds of people that maintain the aircraft. And she was an officer that oversaw hundreds of these airmen, NCOs that worked in aircraft maintenance in one of the units. So when you left the base where you were stationed at the time, which was in New Hampshire at Pease Air Force Base, long since closed, there was a process that everyone went through that was in the aircraft maintenance and that was there was a kind of, they called it hail and farewell, which sounds pretty innocent, but it was actually pretty degrading in many ways. It's something that we would never condone today in our society. Somebody would film it with a phone, and it would be posted and the next thing you know, the commander's fired. But it was all in good fun, and people never got offended by it or anything. But just to show you how far we've come.

The process was they'd have some big things in the hangar where they would have some food, typical kind of sendoff, right. And they would have some food, snacks, drinks and people would say stuff and they'd give them mementos. They may give them a decoration, a formal decoration if they were able to get it finished in time, an accommodation medal or something like that to send them off on to their next assignment. And that's all pretty standard. But then after that, they would take this individual and they would put them on a throne, and they had this makeshift throne that they had fabricated from scraps of wood and metal, and it was basically an old office chair-type thing. And they'd put the person in there, and they'd secure the person to the chair so you weren't going anywhere. They would put a crown on you which was made from something in aircraft maintenance world and then they would proceed to do various toasts and say things, so it was kind of like a roast in many ways, right. So when you get to a point where you get done with your little spiel on the individual, you would do a toast, and they would pour the beverage over the individual. So by the time they're done, and if it's eight, ten, twelve people, going through it, the individual is soaked with whatever beverage of choice was there. And these things were always done at the end of the day, so there was no mixing work with pleasure. And at the end of that, the commander would say—and this is a full colonel—colonel would say, "Well, you know lieutenant, you're out of uniform." Because your uniform's all wet, you're soiled and this and that. And he would say what regulation was violated and so forth and then he would turn to the assembled mass of humanity that was there and he would say, what should we do?

And then the masses would say, "To the klong, to the klong." K-L-O-N-G, klong. And the klong was nothing more than a drainage ditch that was behind the hangar. And it was pretty nasty, because there was standing water in it, and they would take the individual, and they would toss them into the klong. Now, that's a pretty degrading thing.

They would make up for it, because they would take the individual out at the end and then they would take them over they'd get them all showered and everything, and the significant other, the spouse or the boyfriend, girlfriend or roommate or whatever would always have clothes for them to change in. I would say, today, it would never fly. They did this, and they did it to everybody, and it didn't matter what their rank

was. So if it was the colonel, then the general would participate in it. So it's just one of those things that was just like, wow. That's amazing.

I didn't actually do a lot of pranks or anything. I tried to have fun, but I never did things that would get me in trouble or come back to haunt me. But I did see people do squirrely stuff from time to time, and I thought that was pretty significant. And my wife went through that—we still have a picture of her in the klong taken just as she is coming out of the water, and it's hilarious. But when she tells that story, a lot of other people are just like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe they did that to you," but that's just the way it was. But it was, again, a close-knit group, and you were not offended, because you knew, that was in some ways a show of affection for what you did. If you got thrown in the klong, you were one of the team.

You see a lot of other things in the Air Force too. It's customary when pilots finish their last mission, if they're retiring, they hose them down. Sometimes they'll throw them into a pool. The Air Force has this thing about water. Everywhere we go, we build swimming pools, no matter what the situation is. We had heated pools when I was in Bosnia. We had nice pools in Egypt. We even had a makeshift when I was in Colombia. So we always make sure we have a pool. And somehow, we always end up in the pool. [Laughter]

MR. MOSHE: Do you remember the day that your service ended?

MR. MCGRAW: I went from active duty into the Reserves and going into that role was a little different because the full-time job was gone, going to a part-time role. But when I left the part-time, we had a little send-off when I was leaving the unit at the end of the day. It was nothing like what I just described. It was something much more appropriate that we would see today. A lot of pats on the back and well-wishing and hugs. At the time, I was like, okay—I was looking forward to a change. I wasn't necessarily wanting to go. I had some medical problems that precluded me from being qualified. I had had an appendix rupture and I'd lost my ability to be worldwide qualified, and I had to leave. So it was a little bittersweet for me, but at the same time, I was trying to look forward to the new opportunity for me.

At the time I was going off to grad school to work on my Ph.D., so I was kind of focused on that, and that helped me get through. Otherwise, I probably would've lost it at the end of the day or something, but it was kind of uneventful in many ways. Other than the fact that, this is it, and you're leaving with a couple of boxes of your stuff, but I really enjoyed it.

I was in the field of public policy, because I had my master's in public administration and so obviously took the various courses, did all my comps, and my dissertation was on a local group in St. Louis called Civic Progress and how that group of civic leaders was really the power behind the community. And not the governmental entities. It was rather eye-opening seeing how that works, the dynamics there, and especially going back over time. It started in after World War II, and there's all the things that were prevalent at the time from various race issues and discriminatory practices, and seeing how the community evolves and organizations evolve through that period was really interesting. One of the things I found in that was just the by-product. It wasn't in my dissertation, but Walt Disney was from St. Louis, and he had wanted to build an amusement park in the St. Louis area because there was some land that was available in what is western St. Louis County, and they had plans drawn up. They had all kinds of things and he was ready to do it.

Everybody was behind it, but August Busch, the second owner of Anheuser Busch, insisted that this park sell beer, and that Anheuser Busch be the provider of that. Walt Disney did not want that. And the whole deal fell through, and he went to down near Orlando and built Disney World. So Disney World was almost here. [Laughter] I just thought that was so ironic. Disney at first did not have the alcohol in their parks, but now, of course, they do. Kind of interesting.

MR. MOSHE: Lots of sad kids from that area, I'm sure.

MR. MCGRAW: Oh yeah. [Laughter]

MR. MOSHE: Was your education supported by the GI Bill?

MR. MCGRAW: Yes, I got my master's when I was active duty, and the Air Force paid for that. The only thing I had to do was service commitments, so with each course, I'd have to promise to do so many more months and I used the GI Bill for the PhD work that I did, and that helped, 'cause it was pretty expensive.

MR. MOSHE: Have you ever tried accessing your military records on NARA?

MR. MCGRAW: Yes, mine are at Randall Air Force Base. The Air Force has them. They're electronic, even though they were paper. I have a copy of them, and we actually take the records here for anyone that's employed in St. Louis if they have military service and they work here. Our process is we take those records, and we put them in our secure cage area, which has very limited access, and we do that to safeguard the records, because we don't want the individual who has access to records doctoring the record in any way or a staff member who maybe be upset with someone, doing something to a record. So anyone when you're hired here in St. Louis, we check to see if you had military service and any other relatives within your family, and we'll pull those records if they're here, and we safeguard them. And then when the person retires or leaves, then those records go back into the general stacks. So mine is electronically in Texas, but I have a hard copy that's in the secure cage here.

MR. MOSHE: Did you join a veteran's organization?

MR. MCGRAW: Yeah, I'm a member of the DAV, Disabled American Veterans. I had some training incidents, things where I got injured a little bit and then with my appendix rupturing and all that, so I'm a disabled vet, 30 percent. I'm active in that, although not really active on a local level, really more on a national level.

MR. MOSHE: What did you go on to do as a career after the service?

MR. MCGRAW: Well, I really enjoy military history, and I really enjoy project-type work, because I did a lot of project management stuff in the military. For a while, I worked in a family real estate and construction business, and I built homes, but I found that not to be as enjoyable as I thought it was going to be, and so I eventually ended up in civil service, working in what I think is the best job in NARA, and that is to be here as the Access Coordinator or Director for the National Archives in St. Louis as well as four other locations here in the Midwest: Chicago, Kansas City, Denver, and Fort Worth. And I worked with some outstanding people, and being around military history and all the records and everything that's associated with that is very rewarding.

It would be great if you had the time to go through all the records themselves, but that doesn't exist. You have to take care of the customer. Every now and then I see things, and we have to do research on something, but it's a lot of fun. And I really enjoy it, 'cause I enjoy public service, and I enjoy military history, so I get to combine the two.

MR. MOSHE: Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?

MR. MCGRAW: I would definitely think so. Coming into the military, I came in at a time when there was no draft or anything like that, and I did it voluntarily, so you're a bit gung ho, I think at that point. At the same

time, when you through the experiences, whether it's peace time, whether it's wartime, those things shape your views, and a lot of times I found that what I thought to be true was substantiated or was maybe a little different but generally on tap. I don't remember anything that was 180 degrees from where I thought it was going to be. I have a tremendous loyalty to this nation, and when I see people in society just doing stuff that to me is almost criminal or certainly treacherous, it really makes me angry, and I just have to turn off the TV or turn off the phone or whatever I was looking at. Because I think if you really value what we have here, you need—if you don't have that inherent set of beliefs, you need to go live overseas for a while. I mean live overseas, not visit. Don't go to the tourist areas. Go work in a country, and pick the country. It doesn't matter. It could be somewhere in Europe. It could be somewhere in Asia. I don't care, but go live out there and live on the economy. Live in the housing the people live in and work in an environment. Drive that commute and tell me about your personal freedoms here and tell me about what you have here and how bad it is. It's nothing. There's nothing that compares to America. And I've spent time in Japan. I've spent time in Germany. I've spent time in a lot of other places that are not very nice, and there's nothing that compares to what we have here. It's not perfect, but by golly it's the best thing on this rock.

MR. MOSHE: How did your service or your experiences affect your life?

MR. MCGRAW: I think in a very positive way, it kind of helped shape who I am. I came in with a strong sense of nationalism, I guess. Along the way, I met my wife and so it brought me my best friend, and my partner, my daughter—my oldest child was born in Japan. You could say that the military contributed to my daughter being here. It really just kind of helped us prepare for the rest of our lives, whether it was through education, like the GI Bill, or just the way you need to embrace what your role is in society, and be a good person and be an active member of your community and raise a family to the best of your ability. I really feel for people that don't have that type of experience to learn from.

I think those times, whether you're deployed somewhere that's really hot and sticky and you have to watch your step, so you don't get bit by something that's going to put you in the hospital or whether you're freezing your you-know-what off out on a flight line in the snow—all those things make you stronger and make you, I think, a better person. At the time, you may not feel that. You're feeling the frostbite or you're feeling the tremendous discomfort, but as long as you remember there's a higher purpose, that's going to be value added. And the other thing is the military really made me resilient. There's very little stuff anymore that really bothers me. I deal with things, I think, pretty well. I've had a lot of medical issues over the years, and other people tell me they don't what they would do if they had to go through that but it's just part of the journey we're on. I think the military just helped me prepare for life in a lot of different ways.

MR. MOSHE: Thank you for expressing that, that's all very relevant to what the question was asking. It also made you pretty resilient when it comes to being a hockey goalie. I'm sure the frostbite and the strain and the discomfort leads to probably a better hockey performance.

MR. MCGRAW: Yeah, I mean I was never very good, but I had a lot of fun at it. And I played a lot of recreational hockey, so I was playing hockey until I was 47, and I'm 55 now. And it was fun when you're out there playing hockey with guys half your age and you're making the save, or you're making them look bad. Not in a negative sense, per se, but they think you're the old man and you're going to go down. And it's like, nah, not so fast!

MR. MOSHE: Yeah, show them the veteran tricks of the trade. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't covered yet?

MR. MCGRAW: I think military service is one of the most honorable things people can do. And I have people here that work for me that are Marines, Navy, Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard. I think it's a very

commendable thing. I don't think the rank matters. I don't think that the duty or the MOS or the specialty you were in matters. It's the fact that you served, and that makes all us better. I can see it in people. When I worked in other places around, throughout my career whether it was in the private sector or in government.

A lot of times you can pick up on someone and say, that person is probably a vet, because of their view of things, the way they handle things, the way they approach work. And nine times out of ten, that whole process is one that ends up being true. That they were a vet, and it's because of that experience, because of that training, that they seem to have a little bit of advantage, and I mean, we hire veterans in the government. They get preference, and I think that's a good thing, because there's a tremendous talent base there that is something that should never be overlooked, and I just wish more people had a view of service beyond just themselves, whether it's military or is it WPA or Civilian Conservation Core of the old eras, but I think service is something that we all benefit from.

MR. MOSHE: Thank you for your service, Bryan, and thank you for the interview.