

9-23-1990

## Interview with Thomas McKeon

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey\\_docs](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey_docs)

---

### Recommended Citation

"Interview with Thomas McKeon" (1990). *Currey Document Archive*. 25.  
[https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey\\_docs/25](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey_docs/25)

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the Cecil B. & Laura G. Currey Archive of Military History at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Currey Document Archive by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact [ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu](mailto:ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu).

Mr. Currey,  
I've made a couple of  
corrections.

Please omit my comments  
on my unit. What I said  
is not for print.

I would appreciate the  
return of these photo's they  
are the only copies I have.

Sam McKeon

P.S.

Also enclosed is an after  
action report for Set of '69"  
and a history of my unit.

Interview  
3:15 p.m., Sunday, 23 September 1990, by telephone  
**Thomas McKeon**  
Co, A, 720th MP BN, Long Binh, Post & LBJ Reaction Force  
POB 856  
Indian Rocks Beach, Florida 34635-0856  
telephone = 813-595-6451

When I arrived in country, I was assigned to the 90th Replacement Company at Bien Hoa. I was there three days and then a 3/4-ton truck picked me up and took me to the 720th MP BN. When I arrived there they said this is your hooch, this is your squad leader. Report to the armory in 15 minutes. You're going into LBJ. I was a PFC. I got to Long Binh the third day of the rioting. It was not one of the highlights of my tour; it was intimidating to face this on the first day. Basically, in half an hour after arriving, I was at the armory getting my gas mask and the whole works. The compound where we had our barracks was one street over from the jail. We were the only combat MPs in Vietnam; not assigned to any division. We did no law enforcement but rather ambush, recon, convoy escort, prisoner of war escort . . .

Since we were combat MPs, we were the reaction force both for the post and the stockade. During the rioting, we were the ones who went in there and put it down. We had heard rumored that the inmates had killed the chaplain and his assistant. We heard all kinds of stories. We were never told anything. We were totally ignorant of what went on around us. We knew only what we personally saw. We heard there had been several--three or four--smaller disturbances before the big one broke out.

Has anyone else told you about the drive-bys? Blacks who would drive by and throw .45s over the fence? Double-cyclone fencing, real tall, with razor wire at the top. They'd come by in a deuce and a half, or a ten ton truck--especially people from transportation companies who had access to vehicles--and would stand on top. They'd be really close to the top of the fence. There was just a drainage culvert between the road and the fence and they would heave weapons over the fence into the exercise yard. The rioters didn't use them because they were afraid to. Open gun jeeps with M-60s were lined up on them. M-113 APC too. B & C Company had A-Cavs.

We were told the riot had already reached its peak and they were no longer going to tolerate any more from them. That's why they were bringing us in. When we went in the hooches had already been burned. They had us wearing flak jackets, MP brassards, steel pots, gas masks, each man was issued two gas grenades, M-14 rifles with unsheathed fixed bayonets and a full load of ammo locked and loaded. My squad leader asked me if I had any problems with <sup>USCIBG</sup> the bayonet. No, I said, I don't have any problems with it. When we went in there it was just getting dark. We stuck a lot of them. We bayoneted a lot of them. We went in in V-formations. We stuck them; we impaled them with the bayonet. In the body. I know of three who died against the fence. Their entrails

were hanging out. I saw this. When I got back it was dark, about 9 or 10 o'clock. We never had to go in again. That squashed it.

We went in in double rows, V-formation, with the foot stomp--NCOs behind us--and pushed right through them and pushed them up against the fence. When we got done, there were about seven of them laying at the base of our formation. Two of them I know had to die, because they were gutted. When you stomp, you're lunging at the same time.

They had strands of barbed wire, maybe six, cut in two foot lengths with 90mph tape for a grip and they were swinging those at us, plus they were throwing debris over the heads of people in front of them.

Afterwards a lot of the new MPs who weren't yet working at some other job were assigned as security inside the jail. A lot of them were stripped down and put naked into conexes. Our job at night would be to carry a night stick, a brassard and a helmet and walk along those boxes and check on those inside. If there were problems we had hoses and hosed them down right there inside the conex. That lasted about a week to ten days. At the same time construction was rebuilding the hooches and also prisoners were being shipped back to CONUS, so the jail population dwindled down quickly. Within a month, all those who had been involved were gone, replaced by new prisoners. Afterwards, prisoners were levied out much quicker than had been the case before.

One of the guys in a conex told a buddy of him that he was there on a bum rap. His M-79 had gone off accidentally three or four times, killing his whole squad. The M-79 is a single shot weapon.

We believed the whole thing was racial. But there was a lot of brutality. In the jail the guards saw all the inmates the same, in a bad light, plus they took it out on them because of what they were charged with because a lot of blacks were killing these white lifer squad leaders to get out of the field. Yeah, they did, but then they had to deal with the guards when they got to the jail.

~~For a short time there it was really great and then we got some bad NCOs. A 1/SGT who was a thief and stole from unit members; the last CO I had--an ROTC captain--] was a homosexual and allowed the men to do anything they wanted so long as they didn't bother him. After I left he was relieved. They found him in a compromising position with an NCO. They sent him home in disgrace. That was Co A, 720th.~~

--E N D --

*Please omit.*