

**Samuel Proctor Oral History Program**  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz  
Office Manager: Tamarra Jenkins  
Technology Coordinator: Deborah Hendrix



241 Pugh Hall  
PO Box 115215  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
352-392-7168 Phone  
352-846-1983 Fax

The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) was founded by Dr. Samuel Proctor at the University of Florida in 1967. Its original projects were collections centered around Florida history with the purpose of preserving eyewitness accounts of economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life in Florida and the South. In the 45 years since its inception, SPOHP has collected over 5,000 interviews in its archives.

Transcribed interviews are available through SPOHP for use by research scholars, students, journalists, and other interested groups. Material is frequently used for theses, dissertations, articles, books, documentaries, museum displays, and a variety of other public uses. As standard oral history practice dictates, SPOHP recommends that researchers refer to both the transcript and audio of an interview when conducting their work. A selection of interviews are available online here through the UF Digital Collections and the UF Smathers Library system.

Oral history interview transcripts available on the UF Digital Collections may be in draft or final format. SPOHP transcribers create interview transcripts by listening to the original oral history interview recording and typing a verbatim document of it. The transcript is written with careful attention to reflect original grammar and word choice of each interviewee; subjective or editorial changes are not made to their speech. The draft transcript can also later undergo a later final edit to ensure accuracy in spelling and format. Interviewees can also provide their own spelling corrections. SPOHP transcribers refer to the Merriam-Webster's dictionary, Chicago Manual of Style, and program-specific transcribing style guide, accessible at SPOHP's website.

For more information about SPOHP, visit <http://oral.history.ufl.edu> or call the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program office at 352-392-7168.

*-October 2013*

PCM-002

Interviewee: Richard Morgan

Interviewer: Nicole Cox

Date of Interview: June 16, 2010

C: This is Nicole Cox from the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program. I am here today, June 16, 2010, at the University of Florida with Mr. Richard Morgan who currently lives in Sarasota. First of all Mr. Morgan, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

M: Thank you very much.

C: Before we discuss your Panama Canal Zone experiences, maybe you could begin by telling me a little bit about your early life before the Panama Canal, maybe about your parents, your background, where you're from, that sort of thing.

M: Sure. I was born in Minneapolis, grew up in the Midwest and the New York area both. We moved around quite a bit while I was a child. I graduated from high school in Scarsdale, New York, and went on to Northwestern University for my undergraduate degree in business administration when they had an undergraduate business school.

C: [laughter] When they had an undergraduate business school.

M: And then joined the army for four years, served in U.S. Army Counter-intelligence and two of those years were in Germany. While I was in Germany, I stayed on as a civilian working for the U.S. government and met a gal who was a Panamanian,

by coincidence. A few months later we were married in Germany and in Switzerland both, because of the separation of church and state in Europe you have to have two separate ceremonies.

C: Right.

M: And that was how I came to learn about Panama.

C: Okay, do you mind if I ask where you met?

M: Where? In Frankfurt, at a Foreign Service party.

C: Okay.

M: She had come over from Panama as a tourist and was staying with her sister in Frankfurt and went to work for the U.S. Army to stay on for a year or two and I met her at a Foreign Service party in Frankfurt.

C: Okay. In what year were you married, did you say?

M: We were married in 1963. I think we knew each other all of four months.  
[laughter] And that was a lot of years ago.

C: So that started, I guess, your education about Panama.

M: That started my education about Panama. She had gone to college in the United States in Los Angeles so she was bilingual, but I hardly knew where Panama was in 1963. Like many Americans, I knew all about Europe and I knew about

the Far East. I didn't know much about Central America or South America. But I began to learn with her.

C: Okay. Maybe you could, if you don't mind, go ahead and maybe talk about how you ended up in the Canal Zone and in Panama.

M: Okay. In 1965 we took what the U.S. government calls home leave from a foreign assignment. That is a trip to the United States, the two of us. At the time our first-born child was about a year old or a little less, so we had a baby. We traveled to the United States to the Midwest to visit my parents, and she said let's take a side trip to Panama while we're on home leave. We were young and had almost no money at all, but we could scrape together enough to fly to Panama and stay with her family who lived in Panama City, which was the capital of Panama, and at the southern end of the Panama Canal. So not knowing what to expect, we got on the red-eye plane, and they were all red-eyes then. They left Miami at midnight and got into Panama at 3:30 in the morning and as soon as they opened the door to the plane, the humidity and the temperature hit you. Both of them were about ninety-five degrees and before you got off the plane you wondered what in the world am I doing her? This is a Turkish bath. And actually, within a week, I came to love it. We spent about a week and a half there and saw all of Panama, stayed with her mother, and she still has family in Panama and we still visit. I grew to really like the place and the people. So I knew things were gonna be closing down in Europe in the mid [19]60s by that time, [19]65

and [19]66. The plans were on the drawing board to close down and pull out a lot of units. We lived in Verona, Italy, at that time, which was a beautiful place to live. After Germany, we moved to Verona. I decided to look for a job with the government in Panama since I already had four years of army service and three years of civilian service in Europe by that time. So I introduced myself to the personnel director of the Panama Canal Company, it was called at the time. He interviewed me all one afternoon about the civilian personnel practices in Europe and where I would fit in to the organization and at the end of the afternoon he said, well do you want to work for me? I said, I sure do.

C: Do you remember how you answered those questions?

M: Yes I do. It was an impressive thing. First of all, very few job applicants, U.S. or Panamanian were interviewed by the personnel director. He just liked the fact that I worked for the army in Europe and he wanted to pick my brain about how civilian personnel things were handled in Europe. It wasn't a one-hour job interview; it was a three-hour all afternoon, pick-my-brain interview. We never really talked about position title, grade, money, until the very end when he said, well, do you want to work for me? And I said, I sure do. He hired me on the spot and my wife and baby stayed in Panama with her family and I flew back to Italy, put together what few household goods we had, and got on the plane and came back to Panama. So the government handled it as an inter-agency transfer. I officially transferred from the army in Europe to the Panama Canal Company in

Panama, both of which were United States government agencies. That was in August of 1965. That's when I went to Panama. Didn't really know what I was getting into except I knew that her family was there, which was a good thing, and I knew that I liked the lifestyle there and the people I had met.

C: Do you remember your first impressions of the actual canal itself?

M: Astounding. My first impression of the canal itself, not the canal going through the jungle as a waterway but the locks in particular, were just astounding. I'm not an engineer but I had some engineering background, and I just was in awe. The more I learned about it, the more I worked there, the more in awe I was. I still transit the canal about three times a year as a lecturer on cruise ships, and every time I do I'm just like a kid again. It's awesome to think that this was the Panama Canal, designed by a bunch of geniuses in the early 1900s and built in less than ten years. After the French had failed, after the Spanish had failed, after some of the greatest health and medical achievements in the world, to actually see and work at the canal was a wonderful thing. It was an honor, actually. But I was an outsider. Here are where some of the differences were. I was coming from the outside in my mid-twenties. I was not born and raised there. My major impression was not so much the canal, as life in the Canal Zone. The Canal Zone was five hundred square miles of land and water set down right smack in the middle of the Isthmus of Panama. It actually cut the country in half right down the middle. It was ten miles to each side of the canal, and fifty miles long, five hundred square

miles. And when you were in the Canal Zone, you were under United States police jurisdiction, United States courts, United States schools, United States everything to the complete exclusion of any Panamanian law or legalities at all, and so were Panamanians when they passed through the Canal Zone. If they broke the law in the Canal Zone they went to U.S. jail, Canal Zone jail, where they better know how to speak English because nobody else knew how to speak Spanish. They went before U.S. judges, magistrates, and if they went to penitentiary, they went to Canal Zone penitentiary. Nobody could have ever prepared me for that and I don't think any student in the United States then or now could imagine... It's kind of like drawing a hundred mile wide swath down the Mississippi River, from Canada to the Gulf. When you're in that swath of land you're under French jurisdiction, you better speak French and a French driver's license and a French court system, which is completely different than American, as is American from Panamanian. It's a foreign country inside of another country and that's exactly what the Canal Zone was. Even my wife could not have prepared me for that, although she told me stories about it. For example, when she was growing up in Panama City she had to carry two driver's licenses. She had to actually pass tests in both nations, if you will, a Panamanian license and a Canal Zone license. A few years before that, you had to have two license plates if you were Panamanian and you wanted to drive from Panama City up to the beaches and the interior of Panama on the way to Costa Rica, which actually is driving west from Panama City. You had to have a Canal Zone license plate on

your car or you would be arrested crossing the ten-mile wide Canal Zone by police. I began to understand why there was animosity that had grown over the years. The Canal Zone had to exist in the early 1900s because Panama itself was a backwater, a jungle, a pestilent place where there was no sanitation at all. There was no health, there was no hospital, there were no sewers, there were no potable water facilities. All of those were brought in by the Americans who not only constructed the canal, they constructed the two terminal cities in Panama, Panama City and Colón. The Americans built the sewer system, built the potable water system, built the hospitals, the clinics, everything. My wife's mother thanked the Americans in her prayers every day because they cleaned up that pestilent piece of jungle down there. But as the years went by and Panamanians became more self-sufficient, which they did by the 1940s and [19]50s, and economically well-off, a banking center, a financial center, they grew to resent the Canal Zone and everything it stood for. The fact that it still was under U.S. jurisdiction, flying the American flag, cutting their own country in half. There began to be a series of serious problems, some of which resulted in killing and deaths in 1964. The flag incident...

C: So that would have happened before you got there?

M: That happened just before I got there. My wife had lived there during some of that. It was building up to a high-pressure situation. The students in Panama were the most active anti-American. There was a very small Communist party,

which was always fomenting problems with America. But the existence of the Canal Zone by 1965 was a serious thorn in Panama's side, and any leader of Panama would have done anything he could to get rid of the Canal Zone and turn it into Panamanian property. That's how I landed in Panama. Here I was trying to find my way around a new agency, a new organization, trying to find which jobs were the right ones to get into, to rise in the organization, living a hometown American existence. Let me just tell you about the Canal Zone that the old timers won't tell you. Again, you see this more as an outsider.

C: Sure, that's great.

M: If you were born there, you were born in an American hospital, as was John McCain, as a matter of fact. You went to school in American grade school, middle school, high school, and junior college. If you wanted to go to college you had to go off in the States and many did and came back to work for the canal. If you went through the apprentice program, you worked for the company. It was the last company town on Earth, as I say, except for the Falkland Islands, which still does things that way pretty much. You worked for the canal your entire career. If you died there you were buried in the company cemetery--I'm very serious—with the American flag flying in perpetuity, supposedly in perpetuity, because that treaty between the United States and Panama was in perpetuity, which meant forever, we thought. We found out how long perpetuity really was. Jimmy Carter had a different idea of perpetuity and that all changed. But the

attitude in 1965 was very much like a small state in the Midwest or the South of the United States. It was all-American and it was more American than America was in the[19]60s: more churches per capita than any small town in America, boy scouts, girl scouts, boys clubs, boys and girls clubs, a little league, just everything you could imagine. All of our kids did all these things together, grew up together, and it was like they weren't even in another country. It was like they were in Des Moines, Iowa, in miniature. Even the number one American leader there was called the governor. He was the Governor of the Canal Zone, as if the Canal Zone was another state of the United States. In fact, he went to the governors' conferences and was treated as a governor of a mini-state.

C: I didn't realize that.

M: He was a major general in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; that was always the governor since the construction of the canal, since Goethals, who had been a major general in the Corps. The Corps kind of held on to that job for years and years. But he did not work in uniform; he worked in a white suit and most days when I got there in a Panama hat and we called him governor. He had two positions: Governor of the Canal Zone and President of the Panama Canal Company. But it was not part of Department of the Army; it just happened that he was a career army officer. It was a plush position. Not only was he governor, he had a household staff of his own, he had a mansion that had been moved to its present location that was originally the home of George Goethals during canal

construction. I think the only thing holding it up were the termites by the time I got there. He had a lifestyle, as we all did. I remember how surprised I was to learn that you could live like a millionaire without being one by being a Zonian, by living in the zone. Many of these third- and fourth-generation friends of mine are called Zonians. They don't call themselves that very much. It's a derogatory term that was thrown at them mainly by Panamanians and other Americans who did not live there. Zonians simply to me meant that you were born and raised in the Canal Zone, but it became a term that you didn't want to have used about you. I never was a Zonian because I had gone there from the outside, but my kids were. Two out of three were born there, went through the school system there, and consider themselves Zonians and are proud of it. Two of the three are part of this mob of three and four thousand that is in the Panama Canal Society. . .

C: Okay, I was going to ask you if they participated in the Society. . .

M: And they love it! It's the only time they get together with the kids they went to high school with. It takes them back years and it's just fun to watch them for three or four days a year just relive this whole thing, which they do at the Panama Canal Society Reunion once a year in Orlando.

C: You kind of touched on what family life was like, and living like a millionaire, could you elaborate a little more on that and what it was like to raise a family in the zone?

M: Yeah, you had a choice on where to live. You could live in the Canal Zone, and if you chose to do that you had to live in government-provided housing. There was rent, it was not expensive, but the housing itself was barely adequate. It was government housing like you would find on any old army base that dates back many years. It wasn't large, square-footage wise. By the time I got there it was air-conditioned, thank goodness.

C: You arrived at the right time. [laughter]

M: Yeah, Panama's a hot place. Just a few years before I got there it wasn't even air-conditioned. So, there were very few nice houses. The way you got a better house was to be a senior in the service. A few executive positions in the canal got special housing by virtue of being in designated positions. I later rose to that level, but even then the housing wasn't great. But it didn't matter because everybody was in the same boat. You weren't looking at somebody who was living in a better house unless he had a lot more service than you did and that was fair. That was the way things worked. Almost everybody had a servant or two, or three, a live-in maid who was your cook, your babysitter, your house-cleaner. That kind of labor was super cheap in Panama, and it wasn't just Zonians that had these. Every family that could afford it in the Republic of Panama had live-in maids and that was something you don't hear of much in the United States, other than for super-rich people. Here, these were people making median-level government salaries in the area of thirty to forty, fifty-thousand

dollars a year, was a huge salary—fifty was—in the 1960s. But most of these folks were making twenty-five, thirty-thousand a year, with a live-in maid twenty-four hours a day that did their cooking, took care of their kids. Their babysitting was built in. They had a yard boy or man that would come once or twice a week and take care of the grounds. The government agency itself mowed the grass, cut the trees, did all of that for you, so you didn't even need to have a screwdriver or a hammer in the house, which was a good thing because I was never very good with those. If there was any maintenance of a government house, it had to be done by government people in their employment as mechanics for the Panama Canal. So people didn't have to maintain much themselves, and there were just so many outstanding activities to participate in of every interest in the world. For example, our kids all played in little league. Well, who were the coaches of little league? Primarily the police, the law enforcement people and the younger managers of the canal, who all knew each other. Everybody knew everybody else's kids and kept them from getting into trouble. It was a fish bowl. [laughter] You could tell exactly what time your neighbors had their argument last night and what they were arguing about. Of course, the place was always full of gossip and the word was spread as it would in any small town. But it was a great place to raise kids. It was an outdoor life: they rode *cayuco* boats, they raced, they were in scouting. It was a life that became unreal by the 1970s. Nobody in the States lived like that in the 1970s, but the people in the Canal Zone thought they did because this Canal Zone life had been plucked out of time, almost like a

time capsule from Des Moines, Iowa, 1958. And here it was still going on just the same way in 1978. When people would come from Washington on official business and see what life in the Canal Zone was like, they couldn't believe it. They thought it was a time capsule, and in many ways it was. Many of the Zonians who were born and raised in that did not realize what an anachronism that was, and why people in Washington resented that, because they no longer had it. Because I was an outsider and traveled a lot, too, in my job, I was travelling back and forth to the States constantly.

C: Okay, that was one of the questions that I wondered. . .

M: I was several different positions in the organization, but for many years I was in charge of contracting and procurement, which meant I was the chief contracting officer for the agency and I had to travel to the States and other countries to do contracting. I could see, coming and going, what a lot of the Zonians couldn't see because they hardly ever left the zone but once every two years. They'd go visit Aunt Mary in Iowa or in South Carolina, but they wouldn't travel as much as we did.

C: From your experience, if you had visitors say from, Washington D.C. coming and they saw this life, were they interested in seeing if maybe they could transfer to the Canal Zone? Did do you have a lot of transplants, people who wanted to be part of that?

M: Yes. People loved to see this because it was storybook America. It was the American flag waving everywhere. It was churches and just everything that life had once been in the States, we think, in small-town Midwest and small-town South. And of course they envied that. Many of them didn't like it, just plain didn't think it was right for that to be going on, and were a little bit jealous of it. The ones who lived it, for the most part didn't even realize how good they had it. I still get together with some of the old-time Zonians like the once a year thing when I do go, and I'm just shocked that some of them still don't realize in their seventies and into their eighties how a good a life they had in the Canal Zone. Some do, many don't.

C: Well, I know that you had said when you arrived you were kind of in the middle of the rising tensions with native Panamanians and things like that. You sort of had a unique perspective with your wife being from Panama. What sort of interaction did you have with people outside of the Canal Zone?

M: We had the best of three worlds, as time went by. Because she's Panamanian and her family lived in Panama City and had their own bookstore—well, *librería*—and were a successful business family in Panama, we had that side of the street and the social life and the close family life. The Panamanians have a very close family life, and they do things with their kids, even when their kids are grown up, all the time. We had that going. Our kids had that, and their grandmother was a Panamanian and their cousins were Panamanian. My kids all grew up completely

bilingual, which was just a wonderful thing for them, with no accent at all. The only you can do that is to learn it when you're growing up, really. We had the best of the Canal Zone life as time went by and I grew higher in the organization. Life got pretty good and I got better housing and the best of the Canal Zone life, but I could get up and go across into Panama any time I wanted to, which is something a lot of Zonians didn't do. A lot of them didn't go into Panama, much like some military stuck on American bases overseas, and don't mix with the locals. I think they lose a lot when they don't do that. Then toward the last six or seven years of my career there, in addition to those two pieces of the perspective, I was also assigned diplomatic immunity. I carried a diplomatic passport, so I had the protection that that carried, and so did my Panamanian wife. [laughter] Now she was a U.S. citizen by that time but also Panamanian citizen, so she was a U.S. diplomat in her own country, which meant we could do things like shop at the military commissaries and the military PX's, which were not all that great but it gave us access to things that some others didn't have. She still remembers it as the best of three lives; it was just a wonderful thing for us and for our kids to grow up that way.

C: I was listening to the interview with Mr. Krziza, which I had mentioned earlier, and I thought it was really interesting because he described his time in the Canal Zone as a thirty-two year vacation with pay. . .

M: Yes, he did to me too when I interviewed him, the same words. [laughter]

C: I think that's his standard phrase, but I wondered how you would compare your experience with that?

M: For me, it was a twenty-six-year vacation. Not a vacation because I valued my work too much and I put a lot of effort and time into my work and into my jobs. It was a almost twenty-six years for me, twenty-five and a half, piece of paradise. I could not imagine a better place to live, or raise my kids. I have been a lot of places in the world, and there was no better place. Of course that's all gone, and you can't go back and there hasn't been a Canal Zone since 1979. And that's when things changed completely; it all became integrated into Panama. I agree with Leo Krziza completely. It was paradise.

C: Okay, maybe before, I'd definitely like to talk about what happened after 1979.

M: [laughter] Oh yeah!

C: But maybe before we do that, I'd like to hear more about what kind of work you were doing in Panama. I was reviewing your resume and I noticed that you held a number of different positions so maybe you could explain where you started in 1965 and then sort of. . .

M: This is an area where some of the older Zonians will differ from me and with me. I learned when I went there that the Panama Canal organization was a relatively small agency as U.S. government agencies go. It numbered about fifteen thousand people and that's small when you're looking at a general service

administration that was forty thousand people at that time, or any of the large agencies in the United States. They were all bigger than the Panama Canal. But the Panama Canal did everything, from A to Z, from birth to death. It ran all the same activities that any government agency in the United States runs, and in addition paid its own way. I don't know if Leo brought that out, but that was an important point for many of us. It was the only government agency at the time that paid one hundred percent of its own bill with the revenues that we brought in from the shipping and other things that we did. We were the water company and the electric company, in many cases for part of Panama too. We were required by United States law, to pay our own way. So there was a pride there that we had to run it like a business, even though it was a government agency and we were all government employees in the government's civil service system. We had to pay our own way completely. Therefore, in a small organization that had to pay its own way, I didn't want to get into a slot and get so far into a corner that there was nowhere for me to move job-wise. I saw that happen to a lot of people. They would get into a particular professional-type job or engineering-type job, whatever it was their career field was, because they liked that niche. Then all of the sudden within three or four years there was nowhere for them to go. They couldn't go any higher because they'd reached the pinnacle of that little niche, and they were too high to go laterally into some other field. So I decided from the start that I would move around. From the first time I joined the organization, I went up a couple grades and I moved to another job, and I went up a couple

grades and I moved to another job, and so on, which is why I got to the very top, it really is. Plus, I had some good people along the way that helped and mentored me. But I did not want to end up at the mid-level in that organization and then not be able to go any higher because I had put blinders on myself. I kept moving around and fortunately with my education—and I picked up a masters degree along the way from Florida State University in public administration. I think the foresight of moving around within a small organization and not getting stuck somewhere going up the line got me to what they called a bureau director, General Services Director of the Panama Canal, which meant I reported to the agency head. My last three and a half years I was the General Services Director and Procurement Executive. I never would have gotten there had I not been flexible and moved from job to job. You'll notice probably in my resume I worked in different fields. [laughter] I liked to joke and say I couldn't hold a job long in any field. Well I didn't want to hold a job long in any field was what it was.

C: So, when you started, I know you were explaining to me about the three-hour long interview and things like that...

M: I didn't realize that was unusual [laughter]. Well, I never know these things. Months later people said, you spent how long with Mr. **Dylan**? He never interviews people himself anyway. And he spent all afternoon with you? I began to realize that he had done that to pick my brain, too, because of my background.

He liked to hire an occasional outsider; he didn't like the inbred-ness of the Panama Canal Organization. He wanted outsiders coming in and new blood, and that's what I represented to him. I didn't realize at the time, and to the third- and fourth-generation Zonians who were already in place, some of whom I would go right on past, I represented a threat. I could feel that too. When you're in a place like the Canal Zone in 1965, 1970, if the inbred group doesn't like you, they let you know it, real fast. I learned pretty fast that the only way around that or to deal head-on with that was to mix them socially, do things with them, play baseball, play softball, get the kids involved with their kids doing things socially, don't put myself off by the side to give them a chance to pick me off, become almost one of them, but without what I consider the inborn prejudices of Zonians, which was an interesting change for me.

C: If you're okay talking about this, how did your experience in security and counter-intelligence in the army prepare you for what you ended up doing in the Canal Zone, the many different positions that you had?

M: Involvement in counter-intelligence and the army, believe it or not, was a lot of psychology: learning how and why people do things, learning how they cover up for things, learning how to deal with people. I think that helped tremendously, no matter what field I would have gone into eventually, but particularly in the Canal Zone and in the Panama Canal. I had dreams at one time of staying in the intelligence field as a career but my time in Germany and what was going on

during the Cold War in the early [19]60s, from 1960 to [19]65 changed my mind completely on that one. It was a pretty dirty business to be in, in the early [19]60s. When the wall went up in Berlin, I don't know if you've read the history of that at all, we almost went to war with the Russians at that moment. I was attached to the battle group that President Kennedy sent up the Autobahn, to keep the Autobahn through East Germany open. That battle group was strung out over about a ten-mile period, with Russian tanks sitting on each side of the Autobahn pointing at it. That was a hairy moment. It was really tricky. It was interesting, and fun to look back on. It was one of the interesting things in my short-lived career in army counter-intelligence.

C: What year did you say you became the General Service Director?

M: General Services Director was the highest job I held, it was a Bureau Director reporting to the agency head. And when did I get it? Let's see, I retired in 1990...late 1986 or early [19]87. And before that I had been the deputy to that position for five years. So I was in the same office.

C: You were well-prepared for the transition.

M: [laughter] Exactly.

C: Well, maybe we could talk about the 1979 treaty and your involvement in that and what was going on at that time, if that's all right.

M: Okay. In those last years of my stay in Panama, 1987, [19]88, [19]89, up to 1990, was a growing period of serious tension between the military dictatorship that was running Panama which originally was headed by Omar Torrijos. Then when he was killed in an airplane crash mysteriously, Manuel Noriega became the military dictator of Panama. Manuel Noriega was a fascinating guy, still is to this day I would imagine, although I don't speak French and he's in a French prison so I'll never know again. [laughter] There was severe tension between Noriega and his thugs and the regime in Washington, which was President Bush Senior. It was kind of interesting because Noriega had once been Bush's man in Panama when Bush was the head of CIA. Noriega was on everybody's payroll. He was on the Soviet payroll, the Cuban payroll, Washington's payroll, France. I used to think of him as an old-fashioned telephone switch board. I called him the switch board. He was switched into people in all these countries. What he did was he would pass information from one to the others, and then from one to the others, and get paid for it. He was everybody's switchboard and all he was doing was passing intelligence around among all these people. This was long before the drug thing became what it eventually was, and he was noted for this and he became very wealthy doing this. He socked his money away in Spain and the Dominican Republic and got more and more independent and gutsy as time went by. He did not think he had to kowtow to anybody. He was a killer, a street killer. I'm not making that one up, I mean, that's proven. He scared the hell out of everybody. He simply ran the country. He took what he wanted and got rid of

who he wanted to get rid of and was pushing, pushing, pushing. We went through about a two-year period there of severe pressure. For example, as it reflected on me, when I became the General Services Director, I went immediately on his hit list, close to the top. I was number three on a list of thirty-three and I was quite proud of that, as it turned out. People wonder how we knew where we were on the list—he made sure we got the list. Psychologically that was part of the way...he didn't have any formal psychology courses. . . he didn't have to, he was street smart. He grew up on the streets of Panama.

C: But again, your counter-intelligence experience probably came in handy with that. [laughter]

M: Well yeah, and that's what he was. He was in charge of intelligence for all of Panama too, before he became the self-appointed general. He made things harder and harder, particularly on the Panamanian civilians who worked for the Panama Canal. He wouldn't renew their driver's licenses. He wouldn't allow them to cash their checks. He just pushed, pushed, pushed to make life tough for them, which in turn made it harder for the Americans to run the canal. But he stayed away from putting pressure on American civilians working for the canal, an interesting psychological ploy. Of course, there were more Panamanians than there were U.S. By that time it dropped from fifteen thousand down to about ten thousand when the Canal Zone functions disappeared in 1979. So running the Canal itself took about ten thousand people. By that time, nine thousand of

them were Panamanian and everyday he made it tough for them to come to work, tough for them to buy a house, tough for them to do anything, even drive their own cars around Panama. He would sit back and laugh about it. He also kept the pressure up on the U.S. military, which George Bush didn't like. It was going to come to a head, there was no doubt about it. There were a series of practice invasions, if you will, exercises on a small scale over a one-year period. Noriega thought that every one would always be a practice, that the real thing would never come. The Americans never had the guts to invade Panama, he thought. He said so publicly. Of course the big one came, the one that wasn't practice, on the night of December 19, 20, in 1989, early in the morning on the 20<sup>th</sup>. It actually, by mistake, started an hour too early, and that cost a few lives. That was a fascinating night in the history of Panama. It was one of those things where if you were there, you'll never forget it. Everyone remembers what they were doing when the planes flew into the buildings on 9/11, same thing in Panama. If you were there the night of the invasion you could picture it in your mind and know exactly what you were doing. My wife and I were home. My daughter was home from college and attending a Christmas party of other college young adults. Fortunately, it was close to a U.S. military base in the former Canal Zone area. It was not off in Panama City somewhere, where it would have been difficult to know if she was all right. Most of them were there that night. I think there were close to two hundred of the college people who were home, were at this same party. Which meant that the U.S. Army put a barricade

around that little town site and kept them safe for the next three days or four days, which was wonderful. Unfortunately, the fellow she went out there with that night wasn't so lucky. He was a young man who had been the quarterback of the high school football team and he picked her up to take her out to that party. I didn't know there was going to be an invasion; none of us did that night. We knew it was inevitable but we didn't know it was coming that night. But I had a bad feeling and I said, be careful tonight with your driving and don't go anywhere you shouldn't go. I have a bad feeling about tonight. Well, when he got out to this—it was about ten miles from where we lived—he started pretty heavy with the beer and he got loaded, and when the invasion started he turned into the macho hero. He jumped in his Volkswagen Beetle and drove out to the main highway, which by that time had roadblocks set up on it by U.S. Army, and he ran the first roadblock. They told him to stop, they were standing there with machine guns and he ran right on through it, because he didn't know who they were, good guys or bad guys. They radioed ahead to the next roadblock. He didn't make it through that one. And his poor little Beetle Volkswagen was shot with fifty-caliber machine gun bullets and so was he. He was one of the first casualties that night. She didn't know that, my daughter, because she was back at where the party had been held. She found out a few days later. She spent three days out at that location, safely, and we were in our house. At about one in the morning came a soft knock at the front door. As I mentioned, I had been number three on the hit list. Number three on the hit list in those days meant that one of his specially

trained hit squads who worked directly for Noriega—and there were eight or nine of them. They were eight-man hit squads trained by United States Special Forces to kidnap people in time of war. They were specially trained and given this hit list and said, this is the priority. They were assigned who to go get, should there ever be an invasion. Should anybody ever come in to try to get Noriega, their job was to go out and get us first and hold us against him. So I was pretty sure that I was high enough on the list that I was gonna get a hit squad that night. Well about one o'clock, I got a squad from the 101<sup>st</sup> United States Army Airborne Division, a squad of about twelve guys and one gal. It was never publicized there were females in the war there too, in combat. They said, we're going to go around on your back porch and we're gonna wait because we understand there's a hit squad coming for you. We want you and your wife to get down on the floor, get under the bed. Well, you can't get under a bed that's only this far off the floor. Put anything on you that you have for protection, like a bullet resistant vest and a safety helmet, anything really, and just stay down on the floor because there's gonna be a firefight. And sure enough, about twenty minutes, we were down on the floor and we were whispering through the windows to them. They were across my back porch, which was about twenty yards long, overlooking the backyard, which was about ten feet lower. And up through the backyard came the eight-man hit squad, with automatic weapons, dressed in U.S. uniforms, U.S. fatigues, with U.S. weapons. Fortunately the good guys had night-vision glasses and the bad guys didn't, and all the lights had been

turned off or shot out during the initial stages of the invasion. There was a firefight in my backyard about 1:40, 1:45 in the morning, automatic fire in both directions. Of course, bullets zinging off, all the windows in Panama had bars on them, and so the bullets were zinging off. That was the problem, ricochets. They couldn't fire directly into the windows because of the angle of attack from the lower lawn, but they were hitting the bars and you never knew where the ricochets would go. Bullets were flying everywhere and we just stayed down on the floor and it seemed of course, when you're in a fight like that, that it lasts forever. It was over in less than two minutes, I'm sure. I went outside and I said, you get them all? And he said, yes sir, they're all dead in your backyard. Any of you hurt? Not at all, but the lady would like to come in and use your restroom. [laughter] I said, I don't blame her. [laughter]

C: I'm sure you were happy to oblige. [laughter]

M: Exactly. I went out in the morning at six o'clock when the sun came up and watched them put all the bodies in the body bags. They were all in U.S. battle uniforms. They made a serious mistake. When the U.S. goes to war, they sew the American flag on the right-hand shoulder. You'll notice that from anybody going or coming from Iraq or Afghanistan right now, to this day, has an American flag here. Anybody who doesn't have the American flag is not going to a battle zone or coming from a battle zone. You'll see that like in the Atlanta airport. The bad guys didn't know that they were supposed American flags. They had stolen

U.S. uniforms, and all the good guys did have it. So you could tell the bad guys from the good guys. And they threw them all in body bags, no I.D., didn't have any idea who any of them were, and carted them away in trucks. That was my experience. Meanwhile, our troops were out hunting for Noriega for three days and nights in Panama. Finally found him and took him to the States. After the United States completely got rid of the Panamanian military force, which had been the military dictatorship of Panama for years by that time, there was complete anarchy in Panama for several years. I don't know which was worse: the military dictatorship or the anarchy. But that's when I left. I didn't leave because of that, I had planned to leave at that time anyway because in 1990 the administrator of the Panama Canal who had been a United States general, who was my boss for the last ten years that I was there, and a wonderful boss, he was leaving. He had to leave. He was gonna be replaced by a Panamanian. Administrator of a U.S. agency. . . Panamanian? Non-U.S. citizen, for its last ten years. I decided by that time I had well over thirty years in government service and I decided it was a good time for me to leave too and turn my job over to the Panamanian who had been in training for a while. So I left in January of 1991, just after the invasion.

C: Did you know other people that had similar experiences that might have been on Noriega's hit list?

M: Yes, one was Joe Wood, who somebody in your organization will be interviewing if you haven't already.

C: That's correct.

M: Joe is the president of the Panama Canal Museum, has been for years. Joe was a compatriot of mine and a University of Florida graduate. My goodness, he couldn't pick the right school. [laughter] We kid each other a lot about that. Joe was high on the hit list too. As I recall, he was number four or number five, pretty high up. He had a protective squad come to his house, just like I did. I knew a few others who did too. But I don't know of anybody else who had a firefight actually in his backyard. I know that the other hit squads were successful in capturing some of the people, but not Panama Canal people. Not everybody on the list was Panama Canal. There were some businessmen, or at least they said they were businessmen in downtown Panama, and there were some Smithsonian Institute people, of all things, scientists. I don't know for what reason in the world they were on the hit list. But one of those was captured and one businessman was captured downtown. They lived in apartment buildings in Panama City. They had no protection. Nobody came to protect them and they were taken. They were kidnapped. Some very interesting stories there. One of them was killed that night by the hit squad that took him because he was fighting them all the time and they finally got tired of it and shot him. Another one who was fluent in Spanish, a Smithsonian scientist of all things, who you wouldn't

think would have this kind of street smarts, talked to the leader of the hit squad all night long in Spanish, almost like the Oslo effect. Before the night was over he turned him around completely, and when the sun rose the next morning he marched the hit squad that had captured him in and they turned themselves over to the U.S. Army unit in the area.

C: Wow, that's unbelievable.

M: That is unbelievable. That's one smart guy, saved his own life. But I don't know of anybody else in the canal who actually had a hit squad come for them. And I also did not know that we were going to be furnished protection by the United States Army. That was part of their invasion plan.

C: I'm sure that was a pleasant surprise, though [laughter].

M: [laughter] I know that there was some involvement of people in Washington and some people leaked the word in advance that you oughta take care of these people that are on the hit squad. But it was all done behind the scenes and backchannel. So when they came knocking on my door I said, thank God you're here. Yeah.

C: Well would you like to take a break for a minute?

M: Yeah, let's take a couple minutes.

[Break in interview.]

C: This is Nicole Cox. I am resuming my interview with Mr. Morgan. Okay, Mr. Morgan, one of the things that we hadn't talked about, and I know that we sort of skipped around some and I got you off topic onto the 1980s stuff, but I wondered if you could talk more about what was happening in 1979 and some of the transition issues that occurred after that.

M: Sure. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed a treaty with the military dictator of Panama, General Omar Torrijos, self-appointed. The treaty was just barely ratified by the United States Senate by one vote, and also ratified by the population of Panama, but not overwhelmingly, and was to take effect in 1979. No, that meant a lot of things had to happen in less than two years for that treaty to take effect in [19]79, because a lot of activities were going to disappear or be transferred to Panama or to the U.S. military in that short period. In fact, according to his treaty, the original transition period was one year but Senator DeConcini from Arizona or New Mexico, I'm not sure, Dennis DeConcini, objected and said the only way you're gonna get my vote is if you extend that transition period to two years 'cause it's impossible to do it all in one year. That's how the one-year period turned into a two-year transition. He was absolutely right. It barely all got done in two years. One of the things that was gonna happen was that the Panama Railroad, which had run since 1855, was the first transcontinental railroad in North America or anywhere in the Americas, was gonna transfer to Panama. All the port activities were gonna transfer to Panama.

They had previously been operated by the Panama Canal Company. This was a huge thing because they were the logistical backbone of the canal. All the goods that were brought into Panama were brought into the ports and everything that crossed the Isthmus of Panama from one side to the other went on the railroad. These were to be turned over to Panama, which meant in that two-year period the Panamanian management had to be trained in how to run them. Some of this training fell to the activity that I was working in at the time: logistical training, supply system, how to run a railroad and how to supply it, how to run ports. They didn't have a clue. A lot of the training had to be done to novice Panamanian managers, if you will, who didn't have a clue on what they were gonna have to do. It was complicated by the fact that Panama's political system at the time was one hundred percent the spoils system. We started out training one National Ports Director and his staff, which was primarily his in-laws and his friends. We would get about three months into that and he would be fired and all of his in-laws and friends would be fired. And in would come an entirely new National Ports Director, appointed by the dictator, and he would bring in all his relatives and staff, because that's the way it was in Panama in those days. You stole as much as you could as fast as you could because your time wasn't gonna last very long. And then we would re-train the next group for six months, and then he would be fired because he would get crosswise with the general and then somebody else would be appointed and all new people. With the ports, this change over personnel happened three time; with the railroad I think it happened

twice, maybe three times. We finally just shrugged our shoulders and gave up. It was impossible to train people to run a railroad and the national ports of a nation if they were not gonna be at the job more than two or three or four months and all their cronies would be fired along with them. This was a major problem in trying to carry out our mission of training Panamanians to take over what they were gonna take over. It was pretty much a disaster. It set a mental tone for people like myself about, oh my God. Is this the way it's gonna be when the Canal turns over? Why is it gonna be any different? It's just the way they operate. The things that were turned over like garbage collection, a lot of grounds keeping, a lot of buildings maintenance and buildings that turned over, just absolutely fell apart. Things regressed to the jungle. It is the tropics and if you don't maintain something it will fall apart in no time at all, or turn to mold. This is what happened with activity after activity after activity that was turned over during that interim period right around 1979. When the Canal Zone ceased to exist, September 30, 1979, then all of the sudden there were no more Canal Zone police. There was a joint transition force where X Canal Zone police still had jobs, still wore uniforms, and were riding side by side with Panamanian soldiers who were learning how to be policemen for the first time in their lives. They were Noriega's troops. They called that a joint police activity. That lasted for, as I recall, eighteen months and then the U.S. was gone completely from the police force. After 1980 and [19]81 our neighborhood police force in what used to be the Canal Zone was Noriega's thugs, troops. I'll never forget that, about the time the hit list came out, one of

their major missions was to surveil me and Joe Wood and other managers of the canal on an almost daily basis. They would sit in front of my house in their car, smile at me and wave or give me another obscene sign, look at their watch to make sure that I knew that they were checking what time I was leaving for work, film me on a moving camera walking to my house, to the office, or driving from my house to the office—if I walked it was ten minutes to my office, if I drove it was two minutes—and then follow me to my office and film me getting out. They didn't have to tell me anything. Their whole point was, we know exactly where you live, what time you go to work, what route you take and when you get there, and anytime we wanna grab you, we can grab you. It was all non-verbal and they did this to several of the high-ranking managers of the canal. Purposely, by direction I'm sure from Noriega, to keep us on edge, to keep us nervous, to keep us scared. I remember when the hit list did come out and Noriega made sure we got a copy, a couple of the managers of the Panama Canal whose names were on that list did exactly what he wanted. They quit. They retired early and got out of there. They said, I didn't sign up for a career at the canal for being a hostage of Noriega. So that was the kind of atmosphere we lived in. Meanwhile, things began to get tougher on the Panamanian employees of the canal and we had to cope with that. In some cases we had to find bus transportation for them. We had to provide food packages for them in some cases. When Panama actually went off, there was no cash in the country for a period of about six months except the cash brought in by the United States, the Panama Canal and the military.

Panama's currency is the dollar, so there had to be cash. The entire country, including much of what the canal did and what the people who worked for the canal did went on the barter system. You provide a service to me, I provide a service to you and we barter. It was just amazing how people coped with a no money available system. Life was very difficult during those years. It was difficult first because the Noriega regime made it difficult, but secondly because the Bush regime and response put sanctions on the Noriega regime and made life tough for everybody down there. The things that did turn over early, in 1979, for the most part fell apart, just did not operate well at all. The people who operated them stole, in many cases, everything they could. By the end of the 1980s there was no Panama Railroad in existence any longer. The trains didn't run anymore and many of the cars had burned. They decided to burn the grass one day in the railyard because they didn't have machinery to cut it anymore. Well, they didn't realize that when they burned the grass that would burn the boxcars and then the boxcars would burn the creosote in the ties. The entire railroad was out of business within nine years of being turned over to Panama. The ports were so decrepit and falling apart that they were dangerous and ships stopped stopping in Panama. Cruise ships and cargo ships that previously had stopped there for refueling and for taking on provisions and for delivering cargo would not stop in Panama, it was just too dangerous. Everything was just falling apart as a result of this. We look back and said what we said about Jimmy Carter's treaty in the beginning, is true in spades. Why are they ever gonna run the canal any

differently when they get it on the last day of 1999 than they have these other activities? It was pretty plain up front that this wasn't working at all. In retrospect, now many years later, I think it was primarily because of the military dictatorship and the fact that they were all a bunch of thugs and thieves and killers and all they wanted to do was to rob as fast as they could as much as they could.

Meanwhile, the United States mission and the thousand of us, reducing by at least a hundred every year, who were left there, who decided to stay on to make it work, our job was to keep the canal operating through the midst of all this, and train Panamanian managers to replace us. That was our major mission for that period 1979 to 1999, in the middle of which came the invasion of Panama and the complete change in government. So it was a period that really wasn't well understood in the United States and there wasn't as much press coverage, in my opinion, as there should have been about how this whole thing—it happened in almost ten year increments. In [19]79 the Canal Zone ceased to exist, in [19]89 the invasion of Panama, in [19]99 the entire Canal transferred to Panama. I expected disaster and so did just about every Zonian you will ever talk to.

Because the first few things were disaster, why would we expect any different?

C: One of the questions that I had, and this is just kind of your perspective throughout the time that you were there, what role did the canal agency play with the government of Panama? With the U.S. military? With the U.S. embassy? Those sorts of things.

M: It was the strangest relationship I have seen anywhere in the world. I have lived in Europe, and I have traveled pretty widely throughout the world. It was almost like a four-headed group. Number one, the United States ambassador and the embassy supposedly are in charge of all American interests in every country in which they are located, and it's true everywhere in the world. For example, if there's a major difference between the ambassador and the commanding general of the army unit in Germany, the ambassador takes precedence. He is the head of the United States interests in that country and that's true throughout the world. So every ambassador who came to Panama thought that that's the way it should be in Panama because that's the way it is everywhere else. However, the Governor of the Canal Zone, when there was a Canal Zone, was equal to the governor of a state. He treated the ambassador politely. They treated each other politely, but one of them did not tell the other one what to do. Because that Canal Zone situation was in place from 1903 until 1979, that attitude was very hard to change. So even after [19]79 when there was no more Canal Zone and no more governor, the Panama Canal people acted toward the embassy and the ambassador the same way they always had: we're equal to you, you don't tell us what to do. Well all of the sudden, overnight, he had the right to tell us what to do to protect American interests in Panama. So that didn't work well at all. Then the third entity was the United States military. From my perspective they acted one hundred percent independently and on their own. They did whatever they wanted. Whatever the four star general said, they did. It

didn't matter if they lived on military bases or not, they followed their orders from their chain of command. Many of the years I was there the four star, whoever he happened to be, the general in charge, had no time to waste with the Ambassador of the United States. He and the administrator of the Panama Canal always got along because they had a joint military background; both of them came from a similar background. So they got along okay, generally speaking. Neither one of them got along very well with the United States ambassador some of the time. Then the fourth entity, of course, was the governor of Panama, which for all of those years from the mid-[19]70s on was a military dictator, who got along with everybody or nobody, whoever he cared to. When it was Noriega, I understand one of his pet peeves was he had to drive along that beautiful Avenida Balboa by Panama Bay to get to his office every morning. He had to look straight out the front of his car at a mountain standing out at the end of that Avenida Balboa about two miles out at the end of the Bay with the biggest American flag in the world flying from the top of it, from Quarry Heights. It was a super large flag. That started his day every morning. You can imagine how he felt when he got to work. He was so anti-American, constantly. He hated the U.S. military, the U.S. ambassador. He put up with the canal. I'm not sure why he was softer with us than he was with the others and I never really figured out what the reason could be but he was never a pleasant fellow to begin with. So here are four different entities, no two of whom are really friends with the others. It made life more difficult during this particular period of time, during the twenty-year

transition when we were supposed to be training Panamanians to run the canal.

There were fewer and fewer U.S. managers there, because they would leave when they could. I've never seen the likes of that anywhere in the world.

C: Well, when you decided to leave, was it in 1990? Is that right?

M: Yea I decided to leave in 1989. I stayed on a couple of extra months until my boss left and then I was going to leave when he left, the same day, but we both got delayed because of the invasion on December 20.

C: Okay. What was it like to leave? Did you have mixed feelings about it? How did you feel?

M: For me personally, it was a huge relief because of the pressures that I'd been living through, especially the previous three years. I felt very strongly that if I hadn't left then, they would've carried me out of there in the box. My wife on the other hand, was devastated by leaving. Living through these bad times didn't bother her at all. She was leaving her family and her country. We still differ on that to this day. I had some recovery to do afterwards, mental and physical, several years in other words to straighten things out, get the blood pressure down.

C: I can imagine.

M: I still feel another year there would have killed me. She wishes we hadn't left. Now that a lot of North Americans have gone back to live there, she's exploring that idea with me from time to time. Not aggressively because being a good Panamanian mama, she doesn't want to leave kids and grandkids and most of them are around us in Florida.

C: I see. Well where did you go when you returned to the United States?

M: We did some research for a year before we left, a lot of research as a matter of fact, on places to live in the United States. There are books on that. We narrowed it down to three places and we visited the three places. The places were Austin, Texas, Tallahassee, Florida, and Sarasota, Florida. By coincidence all three college towns, two of them state capitals. Of the three, we liked Sarasota the best. It had the transportation, the health facilities, the social life, the plays and that kind of thing. It was a great location and a beautiful town. We selected Sarasota and moved there in January of 1990. Once again we got lucky; it's still what it was then and better, and the other two places have gone downhill quite a bit actually. They've overgrown their infrastructure.

C: How old were your children when you returned at that time?

M: Oh, let me see. That's a tough question. I'm not sure how old they are now [laughter]. Yeah, I am. The two boys, the older two were living in the States with families of their own by that time. Our daughter had just graduated from college

and so she was twenty-one. She was still living with us when we moved to Sarasota.

C: What sort of work were you doing when you returned from Sarasota? I noticed a few things on your resume there.

M: Well it's funny because I did not want to sit—first I was the county purchasing director for a year because they liked my background in purchasing and they needed somebody right away to be the purchasing director. That was kind of interesting. A huge difference from working at the federal level to working at a Florida county level: a lot more politics and a lot more local, who you know, type thing. I didn't really enjoy it very much so I quit after a year. I was too young to sit and watch the grass grow, like too many people in Florida do, I think. I notice in Sarasota a lot of retirees who sit and watch the grass grow and die. I mean, the mind turns to mush and it just doesn't work anymore. So I started to write a resume for the first time in—how long was I with the government?—thirty-two years counting my military. Never had written a resume in thirty-two years.

C: You had a lot include.

M: So I started to write a resume and I got a phone call, in the middle of the resume, and it was from a gentleman who runs a training company in the Washington D.C. area who had done a lot of training at the Panama Canal of our contracting people, including myself. I had gotten to know him well but we had never spoken

about work while I was still working for the government. On the phone he said, how would you like to come up here and teach a class for me in government contracting? I said, I've never taught a class in anything. He says, that's all right. He says, I know you'll be good at it and you know the subject. That's what I want, people who know the subject. Come on up and give it a try, he says, I'll pay you and I'll watch you and we'll drop in on you. Well nobody watched me and nobody dropped in on me. He offered me a job after that one week up there, being a government contracts trainer in about ten different subject areas of government contracting. Then I went off and got some training on how to be a trainer and that was then a second career. I never did that full-time. I did it originally maybe fifteen weeks a year, then twelve weeks a year. I still do that now about nine to ten weeks a year, pretty much weeks of my choosing, subjects of my choosing, cities of my choosing, anywhere in the country because now I'm one of their senior instructors. That's been twenty years now. I enjoy that immensely and it's a wonderful company called Management Concepts Incorporated, one of the best known in the government training field, particularly in contracting. To this day I've never had a written contract with them; it's always been verbal. To this day I have not finished my resume. [laughter] I guess I never will.

C: It must be getting pretty long at this point, pretty extensive.

M: Then along the way in I think 1995, the Panama Canal Museum of which I was a member of the board of directors at the time, got a call looking for somebody who

might be interested in lecturing on a cruise ship going through the Panama Canal. So we passed it around among the board members. Anybody interested, anybody interested? I said, what ship is it? They told me and I said, yeah I'm interested. So the museum passed my name to this particular shipping line, which was called Crystal Cruises at the time, and said Dick Morgan would be interested in doing this and here's his background at the canal. They took a chance on me with no tape, no rehearsal, no nothing, just looking at my background and word from the museum. I sailed on the *Crystal Harmony* in 1993 or [19]94 for the first time through the Panama Canal as a lecturer. Now this is tough. You get like a twelve- or fourteen-day cruise from one coast to the other, through the Panama Canal and you have to give four lectures. Can you imagine that? Four forty-five minute lectures—as a matter of fact it isn't even forty-five because they want you to leave ten minutes for questions and answers [laughter] on my favorite subject, the Panama Canal.

C: A lot of information to convey, too.

M: Oh yeah. Four isn't nearly enough. I asked for two extra lectures on one ship and did six and still couldn't get enough in there, and still packed. People who go on canal cruises want to hear about the canal. So I have now done twenty-five lecture cruises, mostly Crystal, but I've done a few other ships too. Crystal now has two ships, the *Crystal Symphony* and the *Crystal Serenity*. They are six star ships, the best in the world. They have outstanding lecturers, and I've met some

of the most interesting people as fellow lecturers on Crystal as I've been doing this. I do this three times a year. I don't get paid, on the other hand they don't either. It's a wonderful thing to do. I generally give four lectures per cruise and of course answer questions throughout the ship from anybody at any time, and talk about the canal in general. It's a neat thing to do. That's probably my third career [laughter] and I'm working on a fourth. I don't know what the fourth will be.

C: You can get back to me on that. [laughter] I know we were talking earlier about some of the organized reunions for workers and families that lived in the Canal Zone. Do you participate in these or do you keep in touch with other people from the Canal Zone?

M: Every year the Panama Canal Society, in the month of July, in Orlando, has a Panama Canal reunion. It lasts about four days and is just chock-a-block full of social activities and things to do and get-togethers and lots of class reunions. I have been four times, I think. I never go two years in a row because there's an awful lot of class reunion bonhomie-type thing and I didn't go to school there and I'm not a Zonian, like my kids are. They go more often than I do, as a matter of fact, because I didn't grow up in the Canal Zone. I have been four times and I enjoy them immensely, when I do go, but I have to be selective about what activities I go to because I wasn't part of the original clique. They get between three and four thousand people at one of those reunions.

C: That's amazing.

M: It is amazing. They have big dances. It's a fun thing. There's no serious discussions or serious business that is done at those things. They're just fun.

C: Maybe my final question: how would you describe or evaluate Panama's management of the Canal after 2000?

M: Well, I guess I'm gonna shock you now. After all that experience, after all those failures that I watched from 1979 on, after all of my expectations that they would fail miserably once it became their responsibility, I am happy to say that that was not true, that didn't happen. They've done an outstanding job of managing the Canal since they took it over on December 31, 1999. I think there are some important reasons for that. I do talk about this in my lectures on cruise ships because it is evident to just about everybody going through the canal today that they are doing a good job. Canal waters time is down--that's one of the metrics they use to measure—ship accident rate is down, transit time is down. They're putting through more cargo and more ships than ever in the history of the canal. It's something like between fourteen and fifteen thousand ships a year now. Which is much, much more than we ever did, even in the 1990s. Just about every measurement metric there is shows an improvement since it was taken over one hundred percent by Panamanians. There are no U.S. left in the management of the canal at all. There are a few senior U.S. pilots still working there on an individual contract basis for the agency that runs the canal. That's because they're still training some of the younger pilots and most of the old-

timers are gone. There are no other U.S. working for the canal at all. Now there are some reasons for that. The canal organization, which is called the Panama Canal Authority, ACP, Autoridad del Canal de Panama, is set up as an autonomous agency of Panama with no oversight from the politicians. Neither the President nor the legislature can direct them what to do or interfere in their operation at all. That's absolutely critical to keep the canal a success in Panama. Because it's such a political country, it's an unbelievable place. One of the first things I learned in Panama, an old saying was if you have four Panamanian politicians in the room you have six parties represented at least [laughter]. They switch and move; they bait and switch all the time. Everything is politics in Panama. Well, there are no politics at the Panama Canal. It's as politics-free as it possibly can be. That's why by organic law supported by the Constitution of Panama. Number two, the managers today are the same ones that we trained in the 1980s and 1990s on how to run the canal and we trained them well. They are very serious and committed to continue doing a good job. If it fails, it's not gonna fail on their watch. That's exactly how they have explained it to me. Now, my problem with that is some of them are getting older now and they're gonna be retiring soon, and I hope this spirit carries on with the next generation. But this generation says, it's not gonna fail on our watch. We're gonna do everything better than the gringos do. Not as good as, but better. I think number three, I think this is evident every time I go there again on a cruise, it's still the best place to work in the country of Panama. People are proud. If anything else struck me in

the old Canal Zone and even after it ceased to exist right between the eyes, was how proud the people were to work for that organization. That same pride exists today even though they're all Panamanians. It's the best place to work in Panama. You can't get anybody to quit a job at the Panama Canal. If they get it, they hold onto it and it passes on to their son or their daughter. It's just a great place to work. There's some things working in its favor. It's not a typical government agency. It's not just a job, it's really a way of life. Even though there's no longer a zone and even though it's all Panamanian now, there's still that feeling.

C: Well, Mr. Morgan I know we've taken up a lot of your time.

M: Oh, this is a pleasure. [laughter]

C: For me too. Were there any things you think that we haven't addressed or forgotten or anything you'd like to add?

M: I would just kind of end as I began, by reminding you or other listeners of this that my perspective is somewhat different than that of a true Zonian. You won't get some of the same observations from people who were born and raised there. You won't get some of the same observations from my own children, who were born and raised there, because I came as an outsider and then I left. But it was a wonderful almost twenty-six year period of my life. I'm privileged to have lived

and worked in Panama, and for the Panama Canal organization, all that time.

Great people to work for and with, great experience.

C: Thank you again for sharing your experiences.

M: Thank you.

[End of interview.]

Audit-edited by: Jessica Taylor January 7, 2014