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Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Joe Gilligan  
Conducted by Gary Hayes  
June 4, 2000  
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

**NOTE:** Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Gary Hayes: This is Gary Hayes and I'm interviewing Joe Gilligan at 6360 Brown Road  
2 in Mesa, Arizona on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000 at 12:45 p.m. Could you please say your years of service and  
3 what rank you were when you retired?

4 Joe Gilligan: My years of service were approximately 21 years active duty and I retired  
5 in November 1980.

6 GH: As?

7 JG: Oh, I'm sorry. I retired as a lieutenant colonel, yes.

8 GH: And when were you in Vietnam?

9 JG: I was in Vietnam from July 1969 to July 1970.

10 GH: And the units you served in in Vietnam?

11 JG: I served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Military Police Group, Criminal Investigations. I served six  
12 months when I initially got there as the adjutant S1 at the headquarters in Long Binh and then the  
13 last six months of my tour I served as the Detachment D commander in Saigon.

14 GH: When you found out you were going to Vietnam, you were a career military officer  
15 at the time?

16 JG: That's correct.

17 GH: What was your thinking, your feeling? How did you feel about going there?

18 JG: Well, I guess I had mixed emotions somewhat. I didn't like the idea of leaving my  
19 family for a year but at the same time I was excited because I was a career officer. I felt very

1 strong about the involvement in Vietnam and I felt it was my obligation to serve there and so I  
2 had mixed feelings of excitement and anticipation at the same time, and some regret to leave my  
3 family.

4 GH: When you arrived in Vietnam, what was your first impression of the country and  
5 the people?

6 JG: Well when I arrived initially I didn't have a heck of a lot of contact with the people.  
7 I was picked up at Bien Hoa and if I remember flying in and then whisked away to the 18<sup>th</sup> MP  
8 Brigade Headquarters [at Long Binh] because being a military police officer they had friends  
9 there that knew I was coming and they brought me in there and so my first few days and weeks  
10 were there while I got my assignment as the adjutant S1. So, my impressions of the country, of  
11 course, was hot and humid and I didn't see much of the Vietnamese initially.

12 GH: As the S1 of a CIDR, Criminal Investigations Battalion, you were mainly  
13 responsible for personnel...

14 JG: Personnel and supply, yes, and that's what I did for a lot of the aspect of it and went  
15 out to some of the units throughout the country to see what their needs were on the personnel  
16 side and supply side and that type thing, so I had the opportunity to go to a few other places like  
17 Vung Tau and Qui Nhon and I actually went to Cu Chi several times.

18 GH: Then that's a normal position that a career officer will hold throughout their career  
19 as an S1 as a staff officer, correct?

20 JG: Well, that's...and a progression...not everyone would be able to do that but that  
21 would be normal at that time in my career, yes.

22 GH: And what was your living conditions like when you were...as part of the battalion  
23 staff?

24 JG: Well, in the group staff area, I was in Long Binh which is kind of a built up area.  
25 There are hooches for...not a Quonset hut but similar to a Quonset hut type thing and I had a  
26 room with a bathroom in it and it was a little complex with other officers of similar rank there in  
27 Long Binh, close to our headquarters.

28 GH: So as a field grade officer, you were a major at the time?

29 JG: I was a Major.

30 GH: You had fairly good living conditions?

1           JG: I have to say yes. It was austere and certainly the latrines were not portable potties  
2 but they were all wooden one-holers so to speak and so that aspect was rather spartan but in  
3 comparison to people in the field I had it rather good, if I can say that.

4           GH: Now when you visited the outlying troops, did you experience any interaction with  
5 the Vietnamese people or the Viet Cong?

6           JG: As a matter of fact, I did, especially in the Cu Chi area. You're making me think of  
7 things. Things are coming back to me a little bit. I recall going into the town of Cu Chi itself.  
8 Can I tell you a little story about that?

9           GH: Uh-huh.

10          JG: And walking on the streets; the streets had...the sidewalks were wooden planks -  
11 reminds me of the old wild west, when you see the movies - and I can recall walking...people  
12 that I'd met there had brought me in to show me the area. I can recall walking along that street,  
13 coming to the corner, and seeing three dead Viet Cong laying in the gutter right there at the  
14 corner which shocked the dickens out of me and I asked about it and they said that they had been  
15 shot the previous night in the area and that the ARVN soldiers had put them there as a warning to  
16 the people not to give any assistance Viet Cong or they could be maybe...they could suffer the  
17 same type fate, which was...I won't say shocking to me, but what's surprising to me was I watch  
18 the children, women and everything walk down the street. When they got to where the bodies  
19 were they simply side stepped around them like they were sidestepping a puddle or something.  
20 There was no shock or surprise. It was like, "Ho-hum, daily routine," type thing. It didn't seem  
21 to bother the Vietnamese as much as it bothered me to see them laying in the street. They were  
22 used to seeing this on, I guess, almost a regular basis. It got to that point. It got to be, "Ho-hum,  
23 what's new?"

24          GH: As the S1 you were responsible for personnel, so...

25          JG: Oh, another story about Cu Chi...

26          GH: Go ahead.

27          JG: I'm sorry, it made me think of that, too. At the same time after doing that, they  
28 decided to ride out and show me some of the perimeters where some of the soldiers were and  
29 ARVNs were and we rode out on this road out quite a ways from the main camp there and the  
30 next thing I know I did hear gunfire and there was a couple of squads of Vietnamese soldiers in  
31 front of us and one was shot and killed right in the road there maybe not 50 to 100 yards in front

1 of us and we were in a quarter ton jeep. It was three of us; a full colonel and two majors. One of  
2 the majors was driving. He was with the division of 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He was driving and  
3 showing us the area, and the three of us got out of the vehicle and got down behind the quarter  
4 ton and I was carrying a Smith-Wesson 38 with six rounds in it, two inch barrel, and that was the  
5 weapon. That was all we had amongst the three of us and we hoped that the ARVN would take  
6 care of whatever they had to take care of and they did. They gave an all clear about five or ten  
7 minutes later, but that was my sole exposure to any kind of combat.

8 GH: That was your brush with combat?

9 JG: That was my brush with combat. I saw a soldier get shot and killed, a Vietnamese  
10 soldier get shot and killed, and I was a little concerned of if a group came down the road because  
11 all I had was the .38 with me.

12 GH: Since you watched the south Vietnamese Army operate 50 feet in front of you, what  
13 was your evaluation or how did you feel they were able to fight and protect you, I guess, and two  
14 other officers?

15 JG: That few minutes there, of course, they seemed to be doing the right thing. I  
16 watched the way they deployed and the orders they were given and they seemed to, to the best of  
17 my knowledge, to do what I thought was right and cover the area and deploy themselves  
18 correctly, so I got a good impression at that time and of course to be very truthful I was very  
19 happy that they were able to secure the area and declare it clear for us.

20 GH: As S1, you had to...you were responsible for all personnel. Did you have any  
21 casualties or any losses of American soldiers while you were the adjutant of the group?

22 JG: No, we did not. We really didn't. We were very fortunate we didn't have anything  
23 like that happen to us.

24 GH: The main mission of the group was...

25 JG: Well, it was to provide...plus the mission of the military police is to ensure good  
26 order and discipline. We were responsible for investigating felonies involving US Army soldiers  
27 or Department of Army civilians and that was basically what the 8<sup>th</sup> MP Group, Criminal  
28 Investigation, was to do and that was the main mission of the CID in Vietnam.

29 GH: You mentioned briefly your .38 Smith and Wesson. That was the weapon that you  
30 were issued in Vietnam?

1           JG: That was the weapon I was issued, that's correct. And all the CID agents were  
2 issued either the five inch or the two inch Smith and Wesson, the agents were, and of course we  
3 had other weapons; we had clerical personnel and supply personnel and other soldiers assigned  
4 to us and they, in most cases, probably had rifles. They were M-16s at the time, I guess.

5           GH: I'm assuming that the .38 - and I know that usually the .38 was issued for those who  
6 were working under cover because its easily concealable - usually they'd use the .45. Were the  
7 CID agents in country, were they wearing civilian clothes or were they actually in military  
8 uniform performing duties?

9           JG: That's a...we had some wear civilian clothes and in the Saigon area we had some in  
10 civilian clothes because they participated with other agencies and stuff like that and while  
11 wearing civilian clothes they did special assignments and special investigations. But otherwise,  
12 the agents wore the normal fatigue uniform. We all wore the field uniform.

13          GH: So the CID agents actually had an office and just investigated like they were part of  
14 the military? They didn't actually attempt to do covert operations or under cover operations?

15          JG: The Detachment A in Saigon...I was Detachment D which did the normal things.  
16 Detachment A was special action operation and they probably did get involved in some coverts  
17 that I wasn't exposed to. The...when I was in Saigon, the commanding officer...I was  
18 commanding officer of Detachment D - I'm getting off, again, from the [?] - but the  
19 commanding officer to Detachment A was a guy named Flip Fleur, CR. His nickname was Flip  
20 Fleur, and he had done the My Lai investigation previous to that assignment so after doing that  
21 he stayed in Vietnam and took over that attachment for about six months doing other special  
22 investigations in the Saigon area.

23          GH: We can get onto the Saigon because its probably a more interesting part of the year  
24 there in Vietnam. That's very interesting about the other commanding officer. Did he tell you  
25 anything about the My Lai investigation or did he talk about it at all?

26          JG: Yeah, he did, a little bit, and I'm trying to recall some of it. If I recall rightly he had  
27 some photos to show me at one time and did talk about it and not to a great extent at that time. It  
28 wasn't public knowledge, but it happened and unfortunately it was a black eye for the Army and  
29 it certainly wasn't something that the Army could be proud of in that situation. It was a terrible  
30 thing, and it happened. Lieutenant Cally was involved in it and apparently, as you've read about

1 it, this was all true. People were killed unnecessarily and civilians and women and children; just  
2 a terrible thing.

3 GH: As the commander of Detachment D, what was the main mission? Did you have  
4 road patrol? Did you actually send patrols out, or did you...

5 JG: No, we brought CID support for the Saigon area and we were investigating people  
6 who were involved in black marketing and drug dealings and other aspects of other crimes you  
7 might want to call it or felonies or things of that nature. There was a lot of black marketing  
8 going on and people were making money. Unfortunately some of the soldiers fell into that,  
9 greed or whatever caused them to do that.

10 GH: What was the size of your detachment and what was it comprised of?

11 JG: The Detachment D was...I had about 15 criminal investigators and most of them  
12 were warrant officers and I had a couple of enlisted investigators and I had some clerical people  
13 and soldiers. I had supply sergeant, I had some civilians who were interpreters and did some  
14 clerical work for us, too. I had an unusual...we were in the Cholon district of Saigon, that's the  
15 Chinese district, and our headquarters...our building...our detachment was in a three story  
16 building that had – prior to the war, to the hostilities – had been owned by two doctors; a man, a  
17 husband and wife who were physicians, and used that as a clinic and actually treated people  
18 there, and in some cases, housed patients there. It was, as I said, three floors and I don't recall  
19 how many rooms it was; eight, nine, ten rooms, maybe more than that, maybe 12 or so rooms  
20 and it had an inner courtyard inside and we had a roof set up where we set up a recreation area  
21 on the roof, a bar where we could have beverages and chairs and tables where we could sit  
22 around and read or eat or things of that nature. So, we converted to our own needs. That was  
23 our quarters. We had a kiosk out front with...I can't remember what the name, we called those  
24 soldiers those conscripts we had where they sat with shotguns right in front of the door, so his  
25 job was to make sure no one came in or came up the walkway that didn't look like they were  
26 authorized, especially Vietnamese, and also not to let anybody stop on the street in front of our  
27 place. There was no parking, there was no loitering, and he would...we had him there 24 hours a  
28 day and his job was to make sure nobody would come near the building that he didn't think was  
29 authorized and periodically during the day we would hear gunshots because what they did was if  
30 someone stopped or loitered or pulled up, he would order them to move and if they didn't he  
31 would fire a round over their heads and they would move.

1 GH: Was this an American soldier?

2 JG: No, I'm sorry, these weren't Chinese, they were conscripts, I forget. They were  
3 employed, working with the US Army, but that's what they did. They'd sit on kiosks like a  
4 little...you know what I'm talking about?

5 GH: Guard box?

6 JG: Guard box, exactly. They were all fortified with the sandbags and things like that,  
7 but that was his job and we had them on 24 hours a day. We had automatic weapons and in this  
8 arms room and stuff, I mean besides the .38 the people carried we had rifles and machine guns  
9 and that type thing and we were...we had an action plan in case we were...came under any kind  
10 of attack or any kind of hostilities there in Saigon and we did that when the Tet Offensive. I was  
11 there the year after the original Tet Offensive, I guess it was '68, I was there '69-'70, or  
12 '70...'69, I don't remember, but anyway, we were there a year later and we had a plan if that  
13 happened again and I had a staff sergeant who had been former infantry and we assigned him to  
14 the weapons and to figure out what to do on the rooftop and things of that nature and I recall  
15 when the Tet came on the anniversary in '70 we were there. That morning we heard some  
16 explosions and we set the plan into act and flew up onto the roof and locked all the doors and had  
17 machine guns and rifles and pistols and the whole group was up there but it turned up to be  
18 somebody throwing a hand grenade not too far away from us from a vehicle but there was  
19 fortunately no second Tet Offensive that year, but we were prepared.

20 GH: Did you billet there as well or just the troops, just your men?

21 JG: No, we all stayed there. I had an individual room with a tile bath. I have to tell you,  
22 it was...because it was a clinic, it was like a little hospital. In fact, all the rooms were that way;  
23 they were all tile, tile floors and each had an individual bath, so it was a unusual assignment to  
24 tell you the truth.

25 GH: CID does live better than the other half!

26 JG: Yeah, and we had all sorts of...we had quarter tons. We had a bunch of vehicles  
27 assigned to us, I don't remember the number, and we parked them...we had a parking area  
28 directly in front of the building, a little bit to the side, where we chained them up; chained the  
29 steering wheels and parked them there at night and the guy in the kiosk would kind of keep his  
30 eye on them. We had it lighted and stuff like that.

31 GH: So how did you run normal operations? Did you have an agent on duty?

1 JG: Of course; there was always a guy on duty, and then I had a CW3, chief watcher  
2 three was an operations officer and he would make the assignments and that type thing, you  
3 know, administrative side and went around coordinating with other agencies and stuff like that in  
4 Saigon.

5 GH: So you had the entire area of Saigon?

6 JG: For the United States Army, yes, and some parts north of Saigon. It was a big area.

7 GH: Do you remember any...what was your special emphasis or how did it work? Did  
8 the group commander tell you, "Major Gilligan, concentrate on drug interdiction, concentrate on  
9 black market," or did it work like that?

10 JG: Yeah, he did, we had some priorities, and those were the areas exactly we did get  
11 involved, so I don't recall anyone's particular priority. Things just happened. They reported to  
12 military police, referred to us, and we looked into it further. It was a busy operation all day long.  
13 But, those were the ones we did look into, the black marketing...there was a lot of drug dealings  
14 going on and stuff like that, unfortunately.

15 GH: How did the military police actually refer these cases to you? Did they come out on  
16 a blotter and you had to get it that way, or how did it work?

17 JG: Yeah, well, as a matter of fact, yeah, through the Provost, there is a Provost Marshal  
18 there, there's an MP battalion in that area. Anyway, yes, we got it through [interruption in tape]  
19 the 716<sup>th</sup> MP battalion was there. They provided military police support, did a heck of a job, and  
20 the year before they got really involved in the Tet Offensive. They did a lot of infantry type stuff  
21 and distinguished themselves quite well the previous year.

22 GH: Do you remember, as a commander of a detachment, you would be in charge of  
23 discipline for any of your warrant officers and your enlisted crews?

24 JG: Yeah, of course.

25 GH: Did you have any discipline problems during your six months there?

26 JG: I don't recall any discipline problems at all. It was an unusual situation I guess. We  
27 were all...although that was a built, very cosmopolitan city despite being in a war zone or  
28 whatever you want to call it, people worked together as a team. They looked out for each other.  
29 We were concerned for our safety even though we were in a big city. We rode around in quarter  
30 tons and we carried...we used to take...we all carried...I carried a two inch Smith/Wesson in the  
31 small of my back in a little holster. We would...the driver, when we got in the vehicle we



1 always talked about if someone threw a grenade at a vehicle, which was common. People would  
2 run up to a vehicle and throw a grenade in it, so we said if somebody threw a grenade in, “Which  
3 way will you go, and I’ll go...you’ll go to the right and I’ll go to the left,” so we could figure out  
4 how to jump out of the vehicles. So we always kept a rifle in the backseat. We carried weapons  
5 on us. We were always cognizant of who was around us. When you pull around the streets and  
6 stuff, the traffic was horrendous with cars and bicycles and petty cabs and trucks and everything  
7 would be right on top of you and people could easily just throw something in or fire on you or  
8 something so we were always cognizant of that. We looked out for each other. We were  
9 concerned about our well being, I mean, we didn’t want to get hurt or hurt anyone else.

10 GH: Were your vehicles identified as CID or military police?

11 JG: Well, no. You know, that’s funny you should say that. I think we probably did have  
12 8<sup>th</sup> MP group on the – the more I think about it – on the bumpers. But, we had some civilian  
13 vehicles, too. We had a couple of Toyotas, too, which sometimes people rode in, that we had  
14 actually leased. I remember we had two Toyotas.

15 GH: Well not only did you have to worry about the Vietnamese and Viet Cong, but not  
16 too many American soldiers liked CIDs or MPs as well, so you had to be cognizant of pretty  
17 much everybody except your little inner group.

18 JG: Of course.

19 GH: Did you have to investigate the fratricides or any of the investigations that dealt  
20 with the soldiers besides the drugs and the black market?

21 JG: Well, I never got involved in it. There were cases where the 8<sup>th</sup> MP Group did  
22 investigate that I was aware of. There was one in the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne where we had an NCO that  
23 was shooting civilians and it turned out finally that they realized what he was doing and  
24 investigated it. I can tell you a little bit about the story; what he would do was go out on patrol  
25 with people and go off by himself somewhere and wind up shooting civilians. This is the digest  
26 of it. He would shoot, indiscriminately, people and then check them out and if they weren’t Viet  
27 Cong he had carried in his pack and stuff some Viet Cong clothing and artifacts and weapons  
28 and stuff and he would drop them there at the area and then call the squad or his platoon sergeant  
29 or his platoon leader on it and say that he’d shot these Viet Cong and they’d come over and see  
30 the black pajamas or the weapons and say, “Good job, Joe,” or whatever his name was, and after  
31 his second extension or something, he was working on his second year there or something and he

1 was always doing this, people got concerned, “There’s something screwy here,” and they wind  
2 up getting the CID involved and it turned out that’s exactly what he was doing. He was shooting  
3 people. He had gone, apparently, mentally unstable after a while and that kind of stuff. If I  
4 remember right, if I remember, he’s 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne.

5 GH: But that stuff was mainly in the field rather than in Saigon?

6 JG: Yeah, I just was called out as one of the agents from up in that area, some sort of  
7 liaison meeting, and that’s when the story was said. It was kind of a wild story. Unfortunately,  
8 that did happen.

9 GH: What was your impression of the city of Saigon?

10 JG: The city of Saigon, I liked it. It was bustling and a lot of markets and they had some  
11 good restaurants, that type thing. Actually, I went to some French restaurants. It was somewhat  
12 surreal at times to be in Saigon, to be very truthful. You realize it’s a war zone and people were  
13 being shot at and terrorist acts were going on but the city seemed to not even be cognizant of it. I  
14 went to church in the immaculate conception cathedral down by the palace on the...the royal  
15 palace, the palace they had there. Diem was in the palace; well, he wasn’t at the time I was in  
16 the palace. He used to go to church there and Sunday mass would be a couple 100 Vietnamese  
17 people, and it was...[?] seemed to be normal to the city. There were...and at the same time,  
18 other times I can recall going to eat somewhere by myself driving the quarter time on a Saturday  
19 night and coming back to my quarters and going through the market area it was always bustling  
20 and a lot of activity and looking around and realizing there was no activity, and there was  
21 nobody on the streets and I’m riding down the street saying, “What the heck is this?” and then all  
22 of a sudden I hear loud noises and firing and then I could smell tear gas and I realized something  
23 was going on and I made a decision, “Should I go back to where I came from or should I  
24 continue on,” which was probably about a quarter of a mile to my hooch and I put a handkerchief  
25 around my neck and floored that sucker and drove up to the Cholon area and the tear gas got  
26 very strong and I could hear a lot of shouting and activity and I pulled up in front of my place  
27 and ran in the building, went up to the rooftop where all my people were and there was some  
28 rioting going on and the Vietnamese soldiers and police were handling some sort of disturbance  
29 about the war or whatever they were doing and they were throwing tear gas and for many blocks  
30 there was no activity and people were back in their homes, closed the shops down and stuff. So  
31 that was unusual, but that kind of stuff happened periodically. But otherwise, the city seemed to

1 be just like any other big city. You wouldn't know that there was...you were in a combat zone.  
2 You wouldn't realize that when you rode around, except you saw armed soldiers walking down  
3 the street, but this city was just clipping along, and this is '69...this is '70 now.

4 GH: This kind of brings up a good point now that you said you went out to dinner. What  
5 was your normal day like? I mean, did you have a set eight to five and then free time, or how did  
6 that work as command...

7 JG: Well, as command...yeah, yeah, we got up in the morning. Well, eight to  
8 five...sometimes we worked long hours. We didn't really punch the clock, so to speak. You got  
9 up in the morning and you worked until when you thought...whatever it was, five or six. If you  
10 had to stay and do something you'd continue to do it. If you've got a special project, you  
11 worked 12 hours. If you didn't, you worked eight hours. What I would do was do my  
12 paperwork, talk to people, go over cases, have meetings, go to lunch, dinner. We got friendly  
13 with a local school there in the Chinese district which was very close to our compound. One of  
14 the soldiers somehow...one of my people, somehow, got to meet someone and volunteer that we  
15 would help them out with as much assistance as we could. We wound up playing basketball with  
16 them probably a couple of blocks from our place in Saigon and they had a basketball team at the  
17 high school. They had some big young men in there that were learning the game and we used to  
18 go down there with six, seven, eight of us including myself and play them maybe once or twice a  
19 week, basketball at night in a courtyard. We had to go through a big gate and they locked it all up  
20 and we got inside there and they had a basketball court set up and, you know, what did you do  
21 daddy in the war? Well, some nights I played basketball at six, seven o'clock with some big men  
22 and tall Vietnamese guys and they sometimes did pretty good. We probably won two out of  
23 three games or so, but that was what I did for recreation, to tell you the truth. During the lunch  
24 hour I might go up on the roof and do some exercises and stuff like that. We didn't really have  
25 an exercise program. Normally a unit would have, a military unit would. Or, we used to sit in  
26 the sun maybe during our lunch hour and read.

27 GH: So your free time would go up to the roof or go out to eat or go play basketball?

28 JG: That's about it.

29 GH: Did you feel safe when you would go out to eat by yourself?

30 JG: I always did. Of course, I was younger then. I was in my 30s and I was invincible I  
31 thought and I wasn't worried about getting hurt. I was cautious.

1 GH: You were cautious, but I mean did you...

2 JG: I wasn't worried about it, no. I have to tell you I wasn't. I know that sounds funny.  
3 I mean I was going up and down the street, as I said before. I'd be careful who I was next to  
4 driving and stuff like that. I wasn't real concerned.

5 GH: When you left for Vietnam you had a wife and kids, I'm assuming, at the time?

6 JG: I had a wife and two daughters, yes.

7 GH: And how was communication back and forth and how did you feel about leaving  
8 them and how did that work, the home front?

9 JG: How did it work? Well, here's what we did; when I got my orders to Vietnam...I  
10 checked into it a little bit, we had to figure out...at the time I was living in the Washington D.C.  
11 area and we had to figure out where the family was going to live and at that time I read  
12 something where it says you could relocate to Hawaii if you wanted to. Prior to that, your family  
13 could only go to Hawaii if you were in fact a permanent resident and that was your home, basic  
14 home, so I checked that out and found out that the Army was now permitting to people to  
15 relocate their family to Hawaii if that's what they chose to do and I chose to do that and we went  
16 and I moved my family to Pearl City, Hawaii, right outside of Pearl Harbor, my wife and two  
17 daughters. We got a small condominium type place, and they lived there for a year and that  
18 allowed me the opportunity, when I took my R&R...I went over there in July I guess it was, I  
19 took my R&R at the holidays around Christmas and so that allowed me to fly to Honolulu which  
20 was one of the R&R sights and spend my Christmas holidays with my family. At the eight  
21 month mark they allowed you another R&R and you weren't guaranteed where you could go.  
22 They would give a space available for you, and my commanding officer allowed me to go on  
23 R&R after the 8<sup>th</sup> month in Vietnam and I put myself on a waiting list to go to Honolulu and  
24 fortunately, after being there only a couple of hours, I was gone on the flight to Honolulu. So, I  
25 went up at the four month mark and going to see them at the eight month mark, going to see  
26 them for a week which broke up the tour nicely as far as I was concerned and that was good for  
27 them, too, for us to see each other.

28 GH: So that was probably pretty much an anomaly in that most of the people didn't get  
29 to visit their families?

30 JG: Well in my experience and what I saw with average soldier and officer even, the  
31 average Army type was they would get an R&R, they would do one, obviously they weren't

1 living in Hawaii so they would have their loved one or perhaps the whole family or spouse or  
2 whoever they chose meet them in Honolulu and I mean, Honolulu was jumping at that time with  
3 people doing R&R but most people weren't living there, as I was. So, I would say the average  
4 soldier got one shot to go to an R&R and usually took it in Honolulu. There was people who  
5 were single and didn't have families or ties and they would go to...you were allowed to go to  
6 Australia and you could go to Thailand and you could go to Hong Kong and people opted for  
7 those, too, and in some cases even met significant others there, too. But, Honolulu was the  
8 biggest R&R sight.

9 GH: After your year in Vietnam, when you came back, how'd you think and feel about  
10 your experiences in Vietnam when you were leaving?

11 JG: Well I was happy to leave because I felt that I did my year there, but how'd I feel  
12 about it? I was glad to serve there. I felt it was, as a career officer and a career soldier, that it  
13 was necessary to do that. At the time I felt we were right in being there and providing assistance  
14 to the Vietnamese and I was glad I did what I did and did the best of my ability and I was proud  
15 of my service.

16 GH: Have those feelings changed at all?

17 JG: No, my feelings haven't changed, not at all. I still feel that I'm glad to have served  
18 there. I have some regrets about the number of Americans that were lost there and civilians and  
19 things like that and I said this later on and I wrote some notes there and I thought that our goals  
20 were lofty in what we wanted to do but I'm not so sure that losing 57, almost 58,000 soldiers in  
21 our military was worth what we achieved.

22 GH: When you returned to the United States, I'm assuming you flew to Honolulu and  
23 got...

24 JG: I flew to Honolulu and met my family which was wonderful and then of course  
25 Hawaii and Honolulu and that area was really a military area. The economy thrived on military  
26 and there was so many Army and Navy in that area that people were very supportive of the  
27 military and my experience going back there was the neighbors and people and everything  
28 welcomed us and were glad to see us and it was nice to do that. I went from there to Kansas.

29 GH: So your next duty station was in Kansas?

30 JG: I went to Command and General Staff College.

31 GH: Did you have any experiences of people that were anti-war?

1 JG: No, I never experienced that, and I was glad that that didn't happen to me. The  
2 people I knew and the people I met immediately after Vietnam didn't act that way at all.

3 GH: Now before you even left Vietnam, was the war unpopular and you realized that  
4 before you even went, or did it become more unpopular the year you were in Vietnam?

5 JG: No, I think the war was unpopular before I went and I think as time went on it  
6 became more and more unpopular, obviously. But, it wasn't a popular war and I could  
7 understand why it was. There were some reservations to why we got in it in the first place with  
8 the Gulf of Tonkin and at the time Vietnam was in chaos and President Johnson decided to use  
9 his powers that the congress had devoted him and it was order 64 where they said if you feel  
10 there was any threats to Naval vessels or something you could bring in forces to repel those  
11 threats and Johnson used that and he really did and declared war and there was some controversy  
12 over whether that was justified in doing that. We went from, what, 16,000 troops or something  
13 there then in '64 and then by '70, or '69-'70 there was 500,000 troops. It was unpopular because  
14 Johnson's theory was to bomb the heck out of Vietnam and that the communist and north  
15 Vietnamese would buckle down to the bombings and stuff, but they didn't, they didn't.

16 GH: Would you say that when you got...we talked earlier about when you went to  
17 Vietnam, was it pretty much fate accompli, for you, you are a military officer? You know that  
18 sooner or later somebody's going to say, "Okay, Major Gilligan, you're going to Vietnam," or  
19 was it...

20 JG: Yes. Oh, no, I knew that in the opening because there was such a turn around.  
21 Some of the infantry officers were going there and may come back for a year and may come  
22 back for two years and then they go back again. I knew some infantry officers that went - in a  
23 period of about eight years - went three times; seven-eight years, went three times. That was a  
24 lot, that was a lot to ask of them. But, as a career person I actually welcomed the opportunity to  
25 do that and I felt I should do that and we did. But, I'm glad I didn't have to do more than one  
26 year; I have to be truthful there.

27 GH: You alluded earlier to a question I'm going to ask now: How do you think of the  
28 goals of the US in Vietnam...was it justification for what happened?

29 JG: No. Well, the course of the war, you know I mentioned 50,000 or 57,000 Americans  
30 and I don't know how many civilians got killed. I'm not sure the losses that happened justified  
31 the participation. I mean, that's all hindsight.

1 GH: How do you feel about the anti...how did you feel about the demonstrators like  
2 President Carter pardoned all the draft dodgers, the people like Jane Fonda; how did you feel  
3 about those then and now?

4 JG: Well, I didn't have any problem with Carter pardoning those people. I guess it was  
5 some closure and bringing the people back, things like that. At the time I thought the  
6 demonstrators were wrong, but that was their right to demonstrate and I saw nothing wrong with  
7 that. I felt they were, perhaps, ill informed and not supportive of our country and our  
8 constitution and President and stuff. Jane Fonda, I have mixed emotions about her. I think she's  
9 a – and still do think – she's a little unbalanced in her thought process and suffers from poor  
10 judgement and things of that nature. But no, I didn't have any animosity toward any of those  
11 people. I was disappointed, perhaps, with some of them but I don't have any...I don't carry any  
12 animosity towards them. That was their right to do that.

13 GH: You mentioned earlier going to mass in Saigon. Do you think the religious fervor  
14 of the soldiers increased while they were in Saigon? Did you see more of a turnout on Sundays  
15 than you think you would have seen if you had not been in...

16 JG: Well that's interesting. I don't know. I never thought about that. I don't think so. I  
17 went to the cathedral where a lot of the people were mostly Vietnamese, but then I went to some  
18 services where...I was Catholic and I went to where the priest did it and it was somewhat  
19 different because all the soldiers would be there and there's be one priest and he'd say, "Do y'all  
20 want to go to confession?" and everybody raised their hand and he'd just simply say, "I absolve  
21 you," and he wouldn't listen to confessions. He'd just say, "Think in your mind what you want  
22 to tell me," and he'd give us absolution right then and send you right out. I think the soldiers  
23 maybe had a little more religion just like I'm sure they had a lot of religion...an atheist has  
24 religion in a foxhole type thing, and I'm sure they all do. But, I would think maybe that would  
25 be the case because you found people away from their families and their loved ones and their  
26 country and I felt sometimes going to church and sitting and thinking about things and  
27 appreciating what you did have in the United States was nice to do. You had some solace and  
28 you could think and I think people...the more I think about it, maybe you're right. Religion  
29 helped them along to put in their time for the year.

30 GH: Did your attendance increase or was it pretty much the same before and after?

1           JG: My attendance? Oh no. I still go. I just came from church now before this  
2 interview. I was born and raised with the nuns in St. Joseph and I learned to go to church every  
3 Sunday no matter what and I follow that over the years, and hopefully it's done me good.

4           GH: What did you take away from Vietnam? What did you learn that you can apply in  
5 your career afterwards and even now that you're retired and in another career?

6           JG: What did I learn from Vietnam? Well, I learned...I have to tell you, I certainly have  
7 an appreciation for the United States and our way of life and everything. I mean, what I saw in  
8 Vietnam was...well, of course a lot of it was autocratic and the way they ran the country and  
9 stuff and then they...the generals overthrew Diem and they didn't do so well and a lot of  
10 corruption. Perhaps some of our politicians are somewhat scamps in their doing. I thought the  
11 civilian leadership in what I saw in Vietnam was lacking. There was a lot of corruption. I  
12 thought their country was ill run, and what I took away from that was I've got appreciation for  
13 our way of life and our political system and our liberties which is important...which I didn't see  
14 in that area.

15          GH: Along the same lines, but how did it effect your life; or did it effect your life?

16          JG: I don't know. I don't think it...it didn't have a big impact on my life. I didn't suffer  
17 anything or suffer any losses either from family or friends. I was fortunate in that one. It was a  
18 help...a learning experience for me. Of course being away from the family was not the best  
19 thing, but did it effect me? I wouldn't say. I took it, I think, in stride as an assignment and a  
20 learning experience and it gave me appreciation for the things that we do have here in the United  
21 States. So, that's what I took away from it.

22          GH: That's pretty much all I have, if you would like to add anything.

23          JG: You know, I don't have anything to add. That was an unusual era for people to live  
24 through. I have a lot of unusual memories, I'm sure, but the protestors and the things that  
25 President Nixon did and things like that. But no, I don't have anything really to add. It was  
26 exciting times and unusual times. I'm glad they're all behind us and I hope we've all learned  
27 something from it.