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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Jack Johnson
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
November 1, 2000
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon and Reccia Jobe

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 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with
2 Mr. Jack Johnson. It is the 1st of November, year 2000 at approximately 8:35 a.m. We
3 are in the Special Collections Library Interview Room. Mr. Johnson, would you please
4 begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

5 Jack Johnson: Steve, I was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1932. I grew up in Des
6 Moines. My parents were from that general area. A product of the Des Moines school
7 system; I went to East High School, graduated from East High School in 1950 and
8 entered Iowa State University. I went to Iowa State for four years, degree in education,
9 participated in the ROTC program and was commissioned a second lieutenant on
10 graduation in 1954. I reported to Ft. Sill in 1954 and went to the Officer’s Basic Course
11 in Field Artillery, which is my branch. After completing the Officer Basic Course, I
12 applied for aviation flight training, was accepted, and stayed at Ft. Sill for another six
13 months or so until I could be integrated into flight training at Gary Air Force Base in San
14 Marcos, Texas. At that time the Army was not doing any primary flight training. The
15 flight training was under contract with the Air Force. The Air Force did all the flight
16 training and we had a very small Army detachment of about four people that were down
17 there and they were the ones that did the check rides. If you were in trouble you would
18 ride with an Army evaluator, Army aviator, and if you didn’t make it they were the ones
19 that washed you out, not the Air Force. I completed flight training in about September I

1 think it was of '55 and moved to Ft. Rucker, Alabama, where I completed the advanced
2 portion of flight training. After I completed the advanced portion I graduated fourth in
3 my class. I was selected to stay on as an instructor pilot and teacher at Ft. Rucker and I
4 stayed there for another three years, and after that I was reassigned to Germany where I
5 was in an aviation section for the 32nd Air Defense Brigade in Kaiserslautern, Germany
6 and I flew in Germany for three years. Following Germany, I came back to Ft. Sill where
7 I attended the Advanced Field Artillery Basic Class because as aviators we had to
8 maintain branch qualification as well as aviation qualification. So, I went back to Ft. Sill
9 for the advanced course and then following that I was back reassigned to Ft. Rucker,
10 where I was a flight commander and instructor pilot in the rotary wing department. At
11 that time we were teaching warrant officer candidates and officers who were coming
12 through the flight program. This was in 1962-'63 timeframe. Things were starting to
13 build up in Vietnam at that time, and it was pretty obvious that we were going to be
14 making trips over there because the people we were training were being sent to Vietnam
15 at that time. In fact, just before I left in 1964 we had already started training Vietnamese
16 Air Force people in helicopter operations. We had the first contingent of Vietnamese Air
17 Force came down there and we were teaching them how to fly helicopters which was
18 completely foreign to them...and particularly difficult, we were teaching them how to fly
19 the H-34. At that time the Huey, the UH-1, with the turbine engine and the flight control
20 systems that were controlled through governors and so forth, so it was a much easier
21 aircraft to fly than the H-34, but since the Vietnamese Air Force was going to be using H-
22 34s we were teaching them how to fly in the H-34. It was a pretty difficult task. Then in
23 1964 I was assigned to Vietnam. That was my first assignment. I left the States in May
24 of 1964 and reported in to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base and had no idea where I was
25 going to be assigned, what unit, but because I had been a flight instructor; I was Huey
26 qualified and I'd been flying the Huey gunships at Ft. Rucker. I was gun qualified so I
27 was assigned to the UTT, Utility Tactical Transport Helicopter Company which was the
28 first armed helicopter unit in the Army and the one that was formed up in Okinawa
29 supporting Special Forces and was sent to Tan Son Nhut as an experimental unit, really.
30 We were there to develop tactics as to how the gunships would be employed.

1 SM: Why don't we go ahead and take a step back and go into a little bit more
2 detail about some of your earlier experiences. I was curious about your upbringing, and
3 when you went into college and went into ROTC, was the university a land grant
4 university, so part of the requirement was the first two years of ROTC?

5 JJ: Yes. In 1950, the mandatory ROTC program still existed. It was a land grant
6 university, so the first two years basic ROTC was mandatory. The second two years
7 came up; the question was did I want to go into advanced ROTC or not? I looked at it,
8 one from a financial standpoint. Yeah, they were going to pay me; not much, .90 cents a
9 day, \$27 dollars a month, but to a struggling college student at that time it was a pretty
10 good deal!

11 SM: Yes, sir.

12 JJ: I was also preparing to get married. I was engaged at that time and it looked
13 like that would be helpful and in fact I was married in my senior year following ROTC
14 summer camp in 1953. I came back and was married, and then my senior year in college
15 I was married. Frankly, my ROTC paid for our housing. Student housing on campus
16 was \$20 dollars a month and \$27 dollars a month paid for our housing and gave us seven
17 bucks a month to live on! So I did go through, complete ROTC and graduated 1954 with
18 a commission.

19 SM: How far would that seven dollars go for you and your wife?

20 JJ: It would go a long ways because everything was fairly inexpensive in '54,
21 1954. We lived in a converted Quonset hut that was left over from the war, World War II
22 and that was converted into student housing. It was very inexpensive living. My wife
23 did work on campus, she was secretary in the alumni office so we had a little income
24 there and a little income from ROTC pay, and made out well.

25 SM: How about in your family history, was there a history of military service at
26 all?

27 JJ: My father was drafted in World War II fairly late. He was drafted, I think he
28 was about 34 years old at the time that he was drafted. He spent a year and a half in the
29 South Pacific. He was in the Navy. He spent a year and a half on an attack transport. He
30 did make the invasions at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. He came back, didn't say much about

1 the war. I had two other uncles that were also drafted and were in the service, and that
2 was the only military background of the family was two uncles and my father.

3 SM: Your father didn't talk much about his experience with you ever?

4 JJ: No, not really.

5 SM: Not even later in life after you became a military officer?

6 JJ: No. He kind of said, 'Well, it was one of those deals.' They went over and
7 did their thing and everybody else was doing the same thing. I guess the only connection
8 that he had with that was he was a member of the VFW and became an officer of the
9 chapter and then later he became a VFW claims officer and worked in the Veteran's
10 Hospital as a volunteer to help other veterans process claims.

11 SM: How about your uncles? Did they discuss much of their military
12 experiences with you?

13 JJ: No, neither one of them. One of them was not really near us. One lived in
14 Los Angeles and we were still in Iowa. The other one that was in Des Moines with us
15 came back, got married, started raising a family, and it was over with.

16 SM: What was the training like for you at ROTC in terms of conventional versus
17 unconventional warfare and things of that nature? Did they talk much about any
18 distinctions or differences, or was it pretty much just straight World War II textbook type
19 of stuff?

20 JJ: Boy, you're talking...that's a long way back!

21 SM: I know! It's a long time ago.

22 JJ: No. As I recall it was branch oriented at that time, so field artillery was the
23 major thrust of the training. Unconventional, no. I don't think we even discussed much
24 of unconventional warfare and of course helicopters were not even in the inventory or
25 very, very early on in the inventory. Helicopter tactics and using them in an
26 unconventional warfare situation or in a jungle warfare situation wasn't even a
27 consideration.

28 SM: Do you remember what they emphasized in terms of the more immediate
29 military experience? Was it World War II or Korea?

30 JJ: Probably more toward Korea and more toward artillery tactics in Korea,
31 things like it was really more how to survive in the wintertime because Korea was so

1 bitterly cold, and being in an artillery outfit that was their focus was how do you keep an
2 artillery outfit moving and shooting in extreme cold conditions? The tactics were never
3 other than how to survive and live and the basics of being an artilleryman. There was a
4 lot of math and lot of surveying. The firing problem was the big deal, you had to learn
5 how to compute the firing problem.

6 SM: This is the Field Artillery Officer Basic Course?

7 JJ: Yeah, that was the thrust of all of it was really how to become a second
8 lieutenant battery officer, and that entailed how to compute the gunnery problem.

9 SM: Now in the Officer Basic Course at Ft. Sill, did you just focus on tote
10 artillery or also self-propelled? Was self-propelled around yet?

11 JJ: Self-propelled was around, but very limited. Most of it was all towed.
12 Everything had wheels.

13 SM: When you were training in basic course, did they discuss issues of the trucks
14 in terms of maintaining them in cold weather?

15 JJ: Yeah, that was part of it; the whole gamut of what consisted of a battery, the
16 prime mover, the weapon itself, maintenance, those kinds of things.

17 SM: What artillery pieces did you primarily focus on?

18 JJ: 105 millimeter, 105 towed.

19 SM: Did you find that the training you received there was adequate to what you
20 encountered when you became a line officer?

21 JJ: Absolutely. First of all, branch training was very much task oriented. When I
22 went to the Officer Basic Course, it was a piece of cake. The people that went through
23 non-branch oriented ROTC at other colleges came down there who were then
24 commissioned field artillery and had been through sort of a basic course of Army and
25 other ROTCs, they had to work very hard to get through. We had gone over the survey
26 problems, the gunnery problems, the communication problems in two years at Iowa State.
27 Iowa State was a tough college. It was not a party school or anything, it was a tough
28 university. So, my training was very adequate, very detailed. I had no problem at all in
29 Officer Basic Course.

30 SM: What was the most challenging part of the basic course for you?

1 JJ: I think some of the other subjects that were not part of our training. We did
2 some other aspects of military life. One of the things that we did do, we were starting to
3 get into nuclear weapons at that point, so part of our training was thinking about and
4 being also involved in prefix-five training, nuclear weapons training which came through
5 full force in the advanced course where we actually had to go into a classified area and
6 we learned nuclear weapons employment and became prefix five qualified. We also had
7 to go through all of the employment of nuclear weapons.

8 SM: Are you talking about actual artillery shells that are nuclear tipped?

9 JJ: Yes.

10 SM: Do you recall at what point those became part of the 105?

11 JJ: The 105 never was; the eight-inch was nuclear qualified, the 280 was nuclear
12 qualified. Both of those we had to learn, and then of course the [Honest John] missile.
13 So, we had to learn gunnery problems and solving the gunnery problems for those. Of
14 course the 280 gun was such a long range gun that it fired over the curvature of the earth,
15 so you had to go into spherical mathematics to compute the trajectory and the firing data
16 for a 280 gun. The same way with the [Honest John], of course it being a free missile
17 you had to compute all sorts of metrological stuff because it was fired and winds could
18 have an effect on its trajectory. So, it became a complex mathematical problem in order
19 to figure the firing data for something like that.

20 SM: That math didn't give you too much of a problem as you were training?

21 JJ: Luckily, again, we'd done a lot of the gunnery computations when I was in
22 college and following on at Ft. Sill was not that difficult.

23 SM: And the tactical nuclear warheads that you had to learn about and train to
24 use, these were all within the...you, as an artilleryman, if you fired those tactical nukes
25 you were always outside the danger area?

26 JJ: Yes. We knew what the danger area was and that was part of the contingency
27 effect, part of the problem. When you would deploy one of them or contemplate
28 deploying one, the first thing you'd do is determine what would be the effects radius and
29 then that became part of the decision as to whether that would be deployed or not.

30 SM: But the max range of the guns was always...

1 JJ: You could shoot it short enough that you would be inside the effects range,
2 but at the ranges that they were going to be employed before any decisions like that
3 would be made you determined well that it was going to be clear of your friendly troops
4 and areas.

5 SM: The reason I'm asking is because I'm sure you're familiar with some of the
6 controversy surrounding Davy...

7 JJ: Davy Crockett was insane! The infantry was insane! You were in the effects
8 zone when that sucker was shot no matter what.

9 SM: You were always in the danger zone?

10 JJ: We knew that, part of our computation was in the engineer, I forget what they
11 called them, they were mines. They were actually atomic mines. You could place those,
12 and that was part of the computations, so we were aware of the shortfalls that came in
13 under weapons systems.

14 SM: Was there much discussion amongst artillery officers about potential
15 employment of nuclear weapons and tactical nuclear weapons in particular?

16 JJ: Absolutely.

17 SM: As far as concerns? What would you talk about?

18 JJ: Absolutely, with any decision. There have only been two that were ever used
19 and to think that we had the capability and we had the weapons there and those might be
20 part of any kind of a tactical problem became a big issue; even when I went through
21 Command General Staff College in 1966, we were still at that point talking about the
22 employment in a tactical situation of nuclear weapons. That became a big concern; were
23 we going to be in some place sometime where that might be a concern, and very carefully
24 had to think about the consequences of what would happen.

25 SM: Was there much hesitancy or was there much concern that if the order were
26 given to use a tactical nuclear weapon in an artillery context, that commanders may not
27 do it; coincide with the fear of silo operators, concern that they won't employ them?

28 JJ: At our level in that time, I'm talking captain/major level, our job was to do the
29 computation, figure up the consequences, and then the decision to fire was made
30 somewhere up the line and if the decision came down to shoot it, we'd shoot it. It was
31 just another piece of equipment we had, another option.

1 SM: Do you think that it was maybe easier for men in the types of units that you
2 were in, easier to deal with this in that the tactical nuclear weapon would more than likely
3 be solely employed against other enemy forces versus a SAC environment or a missile
4 environment, the potential of using those weapons against civilian targets was much
5 higher?

6 JJ: We were looking immediately to our front. It was a classical battlefield
7 situation, opposing forces. You knew where their guys were. You knew why you
8 wanted to use it. So, it was nothing like tactical strategic weapons that might be flown in
9 or missiled in from somewhere else. Ours were strictly the problem that you were facing
10 in front of you. That's what the decision was made on.

11 SM: Just out of curiosity, and I don't know if you could talk about this, but was
12 there a specific range that those weapons fell into in terms of a tactical yield, their nuclear
13 yield, kiloton range?

14 JJ: Gee whiz, they weren't very big. I think the biggest we had was something
15 like a 10KT. I think the 280 gun was somewhere around a ten kiloton. Later, I never did
16 get into the missile end of artillery. The corporal came in and the sergeant and some of
17 the missile warheads were bigger. I was out of field artillery at that time. I was more
18 into aviation, later in my career, and I never really got back into the employment of some
19 of the bigger missiles at field artillery had that had bigger yields. Most of them we were
20 talking about were fairly small. I mean, ten kilotons is considered small. At that time we
21 had mega weapons.

22 SM: Can you talk about the minimum safe distance?

23 JJ: I can't even remember what it was! It was...no, I can't recall the distances
24 that were involved. We had to be...we were very concerned about things like flash and
25 radiation, not blast because it seemed like radiation would go out further. Of course one
26 of the things, we never wanted to touch the ground. It was always a higher burst so we
27 didn't get the contaminants. We didn't get dirt and other things contaminated and pulled
28 up into it. But, the distances that were involved, I can't remember. They were not that
29 far. We could shoot them pretty close in when we considered flash and radiation
30 consequences and if we could protect for that. They could be shot fairly close in.

31 SM: Within a mile?

1 JJ: 5,000 yards. Probably, I think some of the smaller ones, maybe some of the
2 eight-inch stuff was capable of that because the range on those is not all that far. I can't
3 remember the exact ranges now we're talking about but I think the range on the 280 gun
4 was something like 24 miles. I think the eight-inch was something less than that. It was
5 something like eighteen.

6 SM: That's a considerable distance.

7 JJ: You could shoot it fairly far out, but you could also bring it in fairly close.

8 SM: And you mentioned the blast and radiation concerns. How about EMP
9 concerns, electromagnetic pulse concerns?

10 JJ: Didn't have any that I know of that we even thought about at that time. It was
11 more neutron than it was atomic.

12 SM: But it is a byproduct of all atomic weapons.

13 JJ: I guess, but it was never part of any of the training that we were involved in.

14 SM: You mentioned the neutron bomb. What about that? Was there ever a
15 neutron or enhanced radiation weapon developed for artillery?

16 JJ: That was down the line after my career was no longer involved in any of that.

17 SM: That's fascinating. Why did you decide to jump into aviation? You
18 mentioned that after your Field Artillery Officer Basic, you applied for aviation.

19 JJ: I had been interested in aviation since I was a kid. The greatest thing my
20 folks could do would be take me out to the airfield and watch airplanes land. I was
21 always fascinated with flying; I think I had one ride in an airplane as a kid, and here was
22 a chance to go fly. Here was a chance to become a pilot. The Army was going to pay for
23 it. They were going to pay me to fly, extra. When I was going through the basic course
24 Ft. Sill was the center for Army aviation at the time and they had a number of the small
25 liaison aircraft, a bunch of L-19s or O1 Birddogs. We had some of the basic helicopters,
26 some of the A Model H-13s, the early, early models of the H-13 and when I was down
27 there at Ft. Sill going through the basic course here were these L-19s flying around and
28 the H-13s were flying around, and I thought, 'Man, this is the greatest!' My next-door
29 neighbor was one of the instructor pilots. He was a warrant officer, and was an instructor
30 pilot when I was going through the basic course and he took me out and gave me a
31 helicopter ride and I said, 'This is what I want to get into.' So, I put my application in for

1 flight school when I was in basic course and by the time we had gone through about a
2 year in basic course, why here came back orders early in 1955 that said, 'Yeah, you're
3 going to flight school!'

4 SM: You said that was at San Marcos, Texas?

5 JJ: Gary Air Force Base, San Marcos, Texas.

6 SM: What was that training like?

7 JJ: Tough. First of all, the Air Force instructors that were down there were kind
8 of an unhappy bunch. These were guys who at that time were wanting to be jet pilots.
9 Korea was over, here were guys who wanted to be jet aviators and fighter pilots and
10 somehow or another they had gotten sent down there to teach Army guys how to fly little
11 bitty airplanes because we were flying Cubs. I went through training in a PA-18 or a
12 Super Cub; no radios, no hydraulics, nothing sophisticated, no gear that came up or
13 down, a basic airplane. The second lieutenant, Air Force instructor that I had had either
14 washed out of gunnery school at Nellis Air Force Base or something and he was banished
15 to San Marcos, and to say he had a bad attitude was probably an understatement! 50% of
16 my class washed out. Anything, slightest infraction, you could be washed out very, very
17 quickly.

18 SM: Could you give some examples of why many were washed out of that
19 program?

20 JJ: Simple; you come in and make a landing. You've used flaps. You're
21 supposed to go through an after-landing check, flaps up, carburetor heat off, and if you
22 forget that, leave your flaps down or something, they'd toss you out.

23 SM: Just for leaving your flaps down?

24 JJ: Yeah, very, very basic kinds of mistakes that were part of the training. We
25 had more applicants. We had many more applicants than they had positions in training,
26 and if you just made some minor mistakes, you could be gone, or forget to use a
27 checklist, forget to do the checklist in a certain order. It was very regimented. We lined
28 up every morning. It was like OCS. You lined up every morning and were inspected and
29 if your uniform wasn't just right, you were in trouble.

30 SM: You wouldn't get washed out for that, though, would you?

31 JJ: Yes, indeed.

1 SM: For uniform infraction?

2 JJ: That became part of the record, yes. A pink slip had many factors in reporting
3 an unsatisfactory performance. If your attitude was wrong, you could be written up and a
4 couple of pink slips and you'd get a check ride. Yeah, it was not easy.

5 SM: What you're talking about as far as check ride, that's when the Army
6 personnel would step in and evaluate you and determine whether or not you should
7 actually wash out?

8 JJ: Yes, as I recall we had four Army personnel that were assigned down there
9 and they were the administration of the elimination program. If the Air Force instructors
10 felt that you were unable to perform or were not making progresses as they expected,
11 they would send you to the Army staff. If you heard you were riding with one of the
12 Army guys, you knew you were in trouble. They would come in and ride with you and if
13 they gave you a check ride, they said, 'Yeah, we don't think this person's going to make
14 it,' you were eliminated. Like I said, we lost about 50% of my class was eliminated.

15 SM: Did you know of anybody who was eliminated who probably shouldn't have
16 been?

17 JJ: Yeah, I'm sure there were. But, I think by and large those that were
18 eliminated, they weren't making adequate progress. They weren't studying. Of course
19 there was an academic side of it, also. A lot of them flunked out on academics.
20 Meteorology was very difficult. Theory of flight was another academic subject that was
21 difficult. Then toward the end of the training we got into the instrument flying and
22 instrument flying is difficult. There's a certain...you need certain aptitude to be oriented
23 in space and relying on a set of instruments to tell you when you're right side up and
24 doing things right. That was another area where a lot of people were eliminated was in
25 the instrument phase. You'd get to the point where you just could not comprehend or
26 could not do what was supposed to be done.

27 SM: And you did your instrument training in the Super Cub as well?

28 JJ: No, toward the end of the training we were transitioned into the L-19. They
29 had a few L-19s and the L-19s that we did instrument training in had a panel, an
30 instrument panel in the backseat and curtains around the side, so you could curtain

1 yourself all the way in the back and the instrument panel was right in front of you. That
2 was big time when we got to move up to a metal airplane that had radios!

3 SM: And other instruments?

4 JJ: Yeah!

5 SM: Wow, okay. All right, we've been joined by Kim Sawyer who is a graduate
6 research assistant on our Lubbock Area Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project. So you
7 graduated from the basic flight school at Gary Air Force Base, San Marcos and moved on
8 to Ft. Rucker where you received advanced...well, that's where you were trained in
9 helicopter flight, correct?

10 JJ: No, this is just advanced fixed-wing. When we completed training at Gary,
11 we were basically...we had about 125 hours as I recall, 100 hours of basic flight. We
12 were able to fly an airplane essentially. Rudimentary instrument training and night
13 training, we were training to fly at night, and had done some cross-country navigation
14 and that was about the state of training. We had no tactical training at all; we'd never
15 worked with a tactical unit and never adjusted field artillery, had never done any recons
16 and never done any field training – that was landing and taking off from field sites.
17 Grass, when we went through basic we were on runways and when we got down to Ft.
18 Rucker the advanced flight school had left Ft. Sill and had moved to Ft. Rucker in the
19 interim. When I left Ft. Sill to go to basic flight training at San Marcos, this school was
20 still at Ft. Sill. While I was at basic flight training, the school all moved to Ft. Rucker
21 and they opened up Ft. Rucker for the first time since 1941 I think. This was '55. So, the
22 base at Ft. Rucker had been closed for a number of years and they were looking for a
23 place where we could do tactical training, again thinking that Korea was over and the
24 training that the guys had received at Ft. Sill when they went to Korea...they wanted a
25 bigger place. They wanted a place with capability where it wasn't as crowded. Ft. Sill
26 was pretty crowded and shooting artillery and flying airplanes didn't mix. Bullets flying
27 through the air and airplanes in the same air space was not real cool. So, we moved to Ft.
28 Rucker and essentially reopened the base. I arrived down there and it was pretty
29 primitive. They had a big airfield and plenty of space, but everything else was just being
30 rebuilt and was being refurbished. Essentially we went through the advanced training,
31 which consisted of field artillery training. That was mandatory. You had to successfully

1 fire three fire missions in your training from the air. You were given target information.
2 At that time you were able to fly solo yourself so everybody was issued your own
3 airplane. The flight instructor, territory instructor would go up high and everybody else
4 would be assigned an altitude and then in sequence the instructor would come down and
5 say, 'Okay, Lieutenant Johnson your mission is so and so, fire your mission,' and you
6 would send in the firing commands, fire the mission, adjust the artillery, and if you were
7 successful in doing that, you had to be successful three times, plus...and this is
8 everybody, not just field artillery officers that were in flight training but we had
9 everybody. We had transportation corps officers, we had infantry officers, we had signal
10 corps officers who were all in flight training. Every one of them had to adjust artillery
11 successfully and pass the artillery exam. That washed some people out. To those who
12 were in field artillery, it was a piece of cake because we had done that in our basic
13 training so that was another easy thing to do but another way of getting washed out.

14 SM: So the emphasis so far, up to this point in training, was really it seems like
15 you were a FAC? You were going to be, in many respects, a forward air controller
16 bringing in artillery strikes?

17 JJ: Exactly, because that was the major source of aviation in the Army. We
18 didn't have aviation companies. Every field artillery battalion had two L-19s and then
19 the other air assets were spread throughout the Army, very, very small, and major thing
20 then was route recon and field artillery and radio relay and flying people back and forth
21 for aerial observation and recon. Yeah, we were pretty well FAC-oriented.

22 SM: Did you receive additional training on other aircraft while at Ft. Rucker?

23 JJ: Yes, we were able to qualify in the L-20 Beaver which was then a big
24 airplane, and we also did more basic instrument training. A lot of the training and
25 transition in the Beaver was instrument, instrument orientation. We did not get an
26 instrument ticket at that point, but again everybody was pretty familiar and pretty
27 confident in flying. You could get yourself out of trouble if you happened to get into
28 some bad weather sometime. You'd fly instruments well enough and get yourself out of
29 trouble. Shoot a base approach you could do it in a GCA approach and best thing I
30 learned is to do a 180 turnaround and get out of the trouble you got into, and do it safely.

1 SM: Actually I forgot to ask you, you mentioned that one of the reasons they
2 moved the advanced flight training from Ft. Sill to Ft. Rucker is because, as you aptly
3 pointed out, space and artillery firing and flying aircraft don't mix. Were there any
4 accidents that you're aware of at Ft. Sill involving artillery and aircraft flying?

5 JJ: No, the ranges at Ft. Sill are well defined. The areas where aircraft could fly
6 were just driven into your head not to get mixed up and they really didn't. We pretty
7 much didn't get anything mixed up. Nobody ever got shot down by our own fire.

8 SM: How about other training accidents or problems at either the basic course,
9 the field artillery basic course at San Marcos or Ft. Rucker while you were in training?

10 JJ: Some engine failures. We had a time or two when an engine would fail and
11 an emergency landing was made. We had ground loops, the typical kind of training
12 accident where you lose control of it on landing and you do a fast 180 and you're out of
13 school. You do a ground loop and usually you get a wing tip, the spring gears on the old
14 L-19 Birddog were funny; you could bend them pretty good. If you pranged one in quick
15 line, two or three feet in the air when you shouldn't have, hit the ground and lose control
16 and do a quick 180 or ground loop, you'd hit a wing tip. We hit some trees with aircraft
17 on the strips. The field strips were in fact little holes in the woods, and if you got into a
18 tree with a wing tip, that was usually grounds for making you an infantryman again or
19 field artilleryman and not an aviator.

20 SM: Was this all the way through the training to include at Ft. Rucker? That
21 single infraction, and that was it, a serious infraction?

22 JJ: Yeah. If the engine quit on you and you made a successful landing, no. That
23 was a plus. If you flew into a tree on approach, that was a judgment factor and they said,
24 'Your judgment is not quite as good as it should be.' Props on the runway, usually if you
25 cracked that you could spread a gear far enough that you could hit a prop on the runway
26 and bend the tips of the prop. If you did that, usually you got washed out.

27 SM: Just a slight landing that's a little bit too hard, and that's it?

28 JJ: Yeah.

29 SM: Also what about the tactics? You mentioned that tactics were more heavily
30 emphasized at Ft. Rucker?

1 JJ: That was the main thing. Field artillery training started early on because if
2 you're going to flunk out in that, they got you out early. In fact, field artillery training
3 was the first thing that we did when we got there besides the continuation of academics.
4 Then we got into tactics immediately and we actually went out and did field exercises.
5 We would go out and live in the field and operate out of a field strip and we would
6 practice road landings, pick a road and get on...people that have been on Army bases
7 know that there are roads that go out through the boon docks and what you do is you go
8 out and pick a spot in the road that looked adequate and make the necessary recon and go
9 in and actually learn how to land on it. Then there was an infantry unit at Ft. Rucker and
10 they became sort of your headquarters. They would act as a CP someplace and would set
11 up missions for you. They wanted the S3 picked up and taken from this point to that
12 point, so you had to go out and find them. You had to find a road strip that was adequate
13 to land on. You actually landed, picked that person up that you were going to haul,
14 simulate that you were hauling them someplace. They wanted to make a recon of the
15 front lines so you'd take them up flying and they'd do the recon. They could also judge
16 whether you were doing it correctly or not. They were not only instructors, they were in
17 fact players in the tactical situation and that was the main part of the training at Ft.
18 Rucker was really tactical employment. We got to do fun things like throw flour bags at
19 some of the troops. That was bombing. Or marking, instead of shooting a rocket at them
20 to mark them, well you'd throw flour at them. Message drops, message pick-ups...at that
21 point, we were still...message drop, you'd write the message and put it in a bag with a
22 big, red streamer on it and you'd fly by and throw it out and the infantry would pick it up.
23 If they wanted a message pick up they had two big poles with a rope between, riser off of
24 a parachute, and they'd hook a message bag on the end of it and you'd trail a line with a
25 weight on it behind an L-19 and you could come sweeping through and that would hook
26 onto this loop and pull it up and you could reel it back in. We dropped a parachute, made
27 parachute drops with an L-19. They had two bomb racks out on the wingtip and they'd
28 take a 155 or a 105 ammunition box and fill it with rocks and put a parachute on it and
29 you could make Para-drops with those.

30 SM: How did you release?

31 JJ: There's a switch inside the cockpit that released it.

1 SM: And would you be graded on the accuracy of the drops?

2 JJ: Yeah, of course you dropped them fairly low. It wasn't too hard to hit what
3 you were aiming at.

4 SM: What was usual altitude for a drop like that?

5 JJ: A couple hundred feet. The minute it was dropped, the parachute opened.
6 There was no delay; in fact, it was hooked to the aircraft with a break away cord so that
7 when it came off, it would just clear the aircraft and the chute would deploy and it would
8 be out a couple hundred feet.

9 SM: What about those field strips? Was that a difficult transition for you or other
10 pilots to go from a paved landing strip to a grassy field strip?

11 JJ: Yeah, they were dirt, they were gravel. Yes. Again, the difficulty was in the
12 approach because it was different kind of flying. You held a constant altitude and then
13 you controlled the approach with the throttle so it was kind of a flat. You didn't dip the
14 nose or pull the nose up. You maintained a steady attitude and really controlled the rate
15 of descent with the throttle. That was judgment and whether you could visualize rate of
16 closure and visualize the angle of approach was the big key in short strip operations with
17 little bitty airplanes and that was what washed a lot of people out. They never could get
18 on to controlling the throttle and working together with the perception of depth and
19 closure. Of course, the L-19 had the capability of some like 60 degrees of flaps which
20 was really, you could hang the barn doors out and slow that thing down and you're right
21 on the verge of a stall. And that's what you were working on was right on the ragged
22 edge of a stall and controlling the rate of descent with the throttle. The strips were fairly
23 short. I mean, 1,000 feet was a fairly short strip when you've been working on a 5,000-
24 foot runway. We got to where we could go in and out of short strips, no problem.

25 SM: When you found yourself in Germany in the 32nd, how did you evaluate
26 your training based on what you found in the real Army?

27 JJ: Well, most of what we were doing over there was administrative.

28 SM: In Germany?

29 JJ: Yes. 32nd Air Defense Brigade was already deployed into their field position.
30 If we went to war, they were already in position. All of the Air Defense assets had been
31 placed in the field in tactical configuration. I didn't get to fly with any of the divisions

1 and didn't get to fly with any of the tactical units. We were mainly servicing the 32nd
2 headquarters and the units that were deployed in the field so most of it would be flying
3 back and forth, well, flying back and forth with administrative things. Now, the only
4 thing we did tactically was the deployment of warheads. The Nike Hercules was a
5 nuclear warhead. And we deployed nuclear warheads; we hauled the nuclear warheads in
6 an H-37. 32nd wouldn't fly them, but we flew the Reaction Squad. We had H-34s and
7 we'd load the Ready Reaction Force. They had two ways of moving nuclear warhead in
8 Europe: ground and air. And ground convoy was always difficult because moving a
9 nuclear warhead down a road you had a column of vehicles. You had security vehicles
10 and you had decoy vehicles and road clearances and those kinds of things, so if you
11 could, you moved them by air. It was a lot easier. Any time you moved a nuclear warhead
12 by an H-37, it was internally, carried internally. And the H-34 flew a squad of armed
13 soldiers so in case the 37 went down, you can immediately put soldiers out in security
14 and get relief back and forth. Go for medical evac or firefighting or whatever happened to
15 be needed wherever the 37 went down.

16 SM: What time period was it that you were in Germany?

17 JJ: '59 to '61.

18 SM: Were you in Germany at the time of Sputnik?

19 JJ: No, I was in Vietnam, when Sputnik...

20 SM: You were in Vietnam when Sputnik?

21 JJ: No, I'm sorry. I was back at...

22 SM: Oh that's right, that was '57.

23 JJ: I was back at Ft. Rucker then as an instructor.

24 SM: Okay. While you were in Germany, I would image that the heavy emphasis,
25 of course, was on Russia.

26 JJ: Oh, absolutely.

27 SM: Was there much concern that Russia was monitoring the transport of Nikes
28 and other nuclear weapons?

29 JJ: Absolutely. We knew they were. The relationship then was that there were
30 certain Russian vehicles that were allowed into our zone and we would see them. You
31 were supposed to report them, but they had free access. Their advisory people were

1 moved around. You'd see them at Bahmholder all the time. Bahmholder's a big artillery
2 base, which was just north of where we were. You'd see the Russian vehicles and they
3 were clearly out there and they were monitored.

4 SM: Any cases of espionage while you were there that came to light that you
5 recall?

6 JJ: Of high echelon of command?

7 SM: Well, I mean, that had been publicized somewhat, but not heavily in the
8 United States, maybe.

9 JJ: No. We were spying on them. They were spying on us. While I was there, of
10 course, we had to go to the border, the Czech border and the East German border. We did
11 have to get a border check out. We had to go fly the border and know where it was and
12 recognize it. Every so often, I had to fly over to Grafenwöhr, which was on the border.
13 There was a beacon in Czechoslovakia that mocked the Grafenwöhr beacon exactly.
14 They would turn that sucker and we lost a couple of aircrafts that were lured across the
15 border and were captured while I was there.

16 SM: Were there exchanges for those personnel?

17 JJ: Oh, yeah. They were released later.

18 SM: Spy exchanges.

19 JJ: They claimed they were spies. One of the guys was in an H-19 and he was
20 flying to Graf and they had the beacon on in Czechoslovakia and the Czech beacon was
21 stronger than the Grafenwöhr beacon and the next thing he knew, he was in
22 Czechoslovakia. He was in jail.

23 SM: How many pilots did you unit lose or that were lost that you recall?

24 JJ: We didn't lose any. It was some of the Cav pilots that I recall who were on the
25 border all the time.

26 SM: Do you recall a specific number approximately?

27 JJ: I think we had two aircraft. I think there were at least two aircraft that were
28 lured across the border and actually were captured. I know one H-19. I think there was a
29 H-13 or something also that might have got across the border then.

30 SM: This was purposeful on the part of the Czechs and the Soviets.

1 JJ: Yes, I think the H-19 was probably purposefully, he was actually flying the
2 beacon and was really disoriented and got there because he was honing in on what he
3 thought was the right beacon. I think the H-13 just wandered across.

4 SM: But do you think the Czech beacon was stronger to try to lure people over or
5 was that a coincidence?

6 JJ: Yes.

7 SM: It was. It was a conscious plot?

8 JJ: No question about it. Yes. Absolutely. They tape-recorded this call sign, this
9 signal from the ground. It sounded exactly the same.

10 SM: That's hilarious. Everybody knew about it?

11 JJ: Everybody knew about it and they would warn you. Grafenwöhr would really
12 shut down. Whenever the Czech beacon came on, they would make a blanket
13 announcement, 'We are closing down beacon approaches to Grafenwöhr because of that.'

14 SM: Because otherwise pilots might be lured over there.

15 JJ: Yes.

16 SM: Anything else that was of interest or that was important for you later in your
17 career that you took away from your first tour in Germany?

18 JJ: Probably the importance of maintenance and the importance of keeping your
19 aircraft really in good shape, not abusing it. That was a difficulty with younger, more
20 inexperienced aviators that I found when I got in Vietnam, particularly when we were
21 getting a real influx of young, 19, 20 year old warrant officer candidates who had
22 never...their only experience was join the Army, fly a helicopter, and the next thing,
23 they're in Vietnam. They really didn't understand the need not to abuse the aircraft, to
24 really take good care of it, to be concerned about what you did with it when you were
25 flying. Not to overstress. I don't mean abusive from the standpoint of being wild and
26 crazy. I mean, they were just kind of wild and crazy because they were 19 year olds, but
27 they could do things that was good judgment and there were some things that would
28 stress and aircraft and cumulative over time, that's going to bite you because it's going to
29 give up on you sometime when you really need it. And you've wasted it in doing some
30 other things.

1 SM: I don't want to get off the subject too much and get to your Vietnam
2 experience too quickly, but with that particular point in mind, when you went to Vietnam,
3 they were using the weaker powered Hueys. Was that particularly important because of
4 that, because the Hueys that were employed early in the war did not have the kind of
5 power plant?

6 JJ: That was state of the art.

7 SM: Yes, it was state of the art, but it still was an underpowered helicopter.

8 JJ: Yes. Well, listen. If you think that was underpowered, I flew in the A model.
9 My first qualification with a Huey was the YH-40, which was the prototype of the UH-1.
10 We got Hueys at Ft. Rucker in '62, right in that time frame and it was then the YH-40,
11 which then became the A model. And the A model UH-1 only had and hour and five
12 minutes worth of fuel on board and the engine, the turbine engine, I think it was the
13 Lycoming-1. Two people, two or three people was about max capacity on a warm day.
14 By the time I got to Vietnam in 1964, we had B models, which was the next generation.
15 The B model was night and day different in power and the D model was coming on and
16 the D model was again, another upgrade. The C, of course, being the gunship, a
17 completely different rotor system on it and so forth, wasn't really a troop carrier or troop
18 hauler. It was made mostly for gunship deployment – a little slicker, a little faster and a
19 little more maneuverable and a completely different rotor system on it. But for troop-
20 carrying wise, when I was first was qualified in a Huey, the first ones were, you could
21 carry about four people and a verbal message. That was about your capacity for tactical
22 employment. Then the B model was a vast improvement. You could haul five or six,
23 seven, maybe on a good day. The D model, you could get up to eight. If you really were
24 down in fuel, you could load 9 or 10.

25 SM: Then it was the H model.

26 JJ: H came in and on my second tour I was equipped, the unit I was flying or
27 commanding in, I was equipped with H models, which was beautiful. I mean the dash 13
28 engine was just a powerhouse, but again very sensitive. We had all sorts of foreign object
29 damage. Very sensitive to anything getting into the turbine system. The dirt and debris
30 could kill and engine. It wouldn't stop it, but it would just decrease the power output and
31 it became a real weak system.

1 SM: Well, let's talk about your transition from Germany and you came back to
2 the United States and went to the advanced artillery force. Why don't you discuss that
3 briefly?

4 JJ: Again, the advanced course was a lot, very similar in some aspects to the basic
5 course. You went back into the gunnery problem with the new equipment. By then, the
6 280 was gone and we had the 155 self-propelled was the big weapon, so you had to learn
7 a new gunnery problem. They were getting into missiles. The corporal was coming in, the
8 sergeant. We didn't learn a whole lot in the advanced course on that, but we were
9 oriented. Maintenance was a big issue because self-propelled had tracks. Tracks require a
10 lot of maintenance. A lot of the training was done on how to maintain self-propelled
11 weapons in the field. At that point, we had to become air defense qualified. That was
12 when the field artillery was not only gun, but was air defense. So six months was spent at
13 Ft. Sill. Three months was spent at White Sands or Ft. Bliss where we had to go down
14 and actually become battery qualified in the Air Defense systems.

15 SM: Excuse me. What systems, air defense systems are we talking about here?

16 JJ: Ajax, Nike Ajaxes, Nike Hercules.

17 SM: Okay. What about the Hawk missile?

18 JJ: Hawk hadn't come in. Hawk was just coming in. We learned the Hawk
19 system, but it was almost brand new. It was just being deployed and it was just becoming
20 part of the major deployment throughout Europe and Korea.

21 SM: What about the Vulcan? Was that in yet?

22 JJ: Not yet. Hawk was there. Hawk was particularly difficult to learn. Their
23 engagement system, it was really an electronics quandary. It had what they call a 'speed
24 gate' as I recall. Boy, this is a long time ago. But a lot of it was learning the electronics
25 system in it and if that sucker failed to fire, why? As battery officer, you were expected to
26 be able to troubleshoot and know which system. It almost required a tech rep from
27 Raytheon to be right with you in the field to keep that thing going. It was really a
28 complex system.

29 SM: Was there much resistance amongst artillery officers to some of the systems
30 like the Hawk given the complexity or self-propelled artillery?

1 JJ: No, because it offered so much more potential. It was just a cut above the Nike
2 Hercules and the Nike Ajax and could do so much more. It had the capability and
3 potential for doing so much more. But like any improvement in technology, it was a
4 difficult system to master. Deploying things all day, all night, weather didn't matter, there
5 were glitches. Learning to live in that environment and to treat the equipment so you
6 didn't get more glitches.

7 SM: How about the issue of self-propelled, like you pointed out, your dealing
8 with other issues and problems, treads, a track vehicle has a whole slew of problems,
9 versus just a truck or a piece of towed artillery. You're taking a simple system and
10 turning it more complex.

11 JJ: Yeah. More complex.

12 SM: But there wasn't much resistance to that.

13 JJ: No. By that time, the 105, M181 was an excellent weapon, but the killing
14 radius and the lethality was pretty low. You could shoot them and it didn't hurt a whole
15 lot of people. It didn't have a whole lot of penetration of bunkers. That was the big thing.
16 Of course, Korea was over and we'd run into the bunker, the need for 'bunker busters'
17 and weapons that would penetrate and have lethality in situations where you were up
18 against the trench. So the 155 was a pretty good 8-inch. Again, that was self-propelled,
19 and we had the 175 gun at that time. Long, long shooter and the 8-inch was a very
20 accurate weapons system and again, tracked. No, there wasn't any resistance to it that I
21 can recall. It was just a more difficult system to work with. The maintenance requirement
22 was much higher and you had to be aware of that.

23 SM: What was the most difficult thing about the advanced course for you?

24 JJ: Nuclear weapons training. Again, you went back into full nuclear weapons
25 training, you had to go through the entire prefix 5. You could not study at home. The
26 study halls were in classified areas, so anytime you. I mean, you'd go to school at eight
27 o'clock in the morning; you might get home at nine o'clock at night because you were in
28 the cage as they called it. It was a secure area.

29 SM: Because everything you were studying with regard to weapons was
30 classified.

1 JJ: Everything we were studying was classified. Everything that we dealt with
2 was classified; all of the weapons systems were classified. You had to clear in and clear
3 out of the cage. You could not bring anything in or out with you. You couldn't take your
4 study materials. You had to study there.

5 SM: Did they have a large enough facility to accommodate all of the students that
6 wanted access to that information or was it limited?

7 JJ: Oh yes. One whole wing of Snow Hall at Ft. Sill was dedicated to the cage and
8 it was locked and secured and guarded and swept and lined for listening devices. It was a
9 24-hour operation.

10 SM: Was there any kind of foreign exchange going on there while you were there
11 with other countries' officer, allied officers?

12 JJ: Yes.

13 SM: What countries were present while you were there?

14 JJ: British have always been there. French were there. Germany had some liaisons
15 because we were doing a lot of training for German field artillery. Foreign exchange
16 students. We had all sorts of foreign exchange students at Ft. Sill at the time. Even some
17 that became not so friendly afterward, some of the Middle Eastern countries.

18 SM: You don't recall specific countries, though, from the Middle East?

19 JJ: I think the Iranians and Iraqis and Jordanians.

20 SM: How about Israelis?

21 JJ: Yes. Israelis have always been part of the foreign exchange program. They
22 didn't have a foreign liaison officer constantly there like the Brits and the French did, but
23 there were Israeli students, yes.

24 SM: Now was this a new development in your training as more of a joint
25 approach and integrating, not just different aspects of the American armed forces but also
26 American and foreign forces like for NATO and things of that nature or was that also
27 stressed in previous training?

28 JJ: No. We were just starting to get into it at that time frame. We got into it much
29 greater when I went to command General Staff College. We had a lot more integration of
30 the officers that we were dealing with from foreign countries in the Command of General
31 Staff College. We had a much broader range of representation at C&GS. We actually

1 studied foreign countries and their armed forces and their techniques in C&GS than we
2 did in the basic courses at Ft. Sill. But we did have the field artillery officers from other
3 nations that were there. And they were integrated right into the training with us and they
4 just were patriots. They became our peers.

5 SM: That was the advanced course and also in basic?

6 JJ: No. The basic course, that was a long time ago, I can't remember whether we
7 had many. We didn't have whole lot that were there. If it was, it was very, very limited.
8 We had some Canadians with us and the Brits.

9 SM: English speaking, mostly.

10 JJ: Yes.

11 SM: How about the officers that came into the advanced course with you from
12 foreign countries. They must have all been trained well in English as well.

13 JJ: They were 'able to communicate in English.' Now some of them were pretty
14 limited. We found out later, some of them were totally political too. I mean, they were
15 there in uniform, but they were in fact, part of the government system. I'm trying to think
16 what his name was, a guy that was supposedly a Naval officer from some country in
17 C&GS, but he wasn't any more a Naval officer than a sheik from Arab. He was strictly a
18 part of the royal family and that was how he got to the United States for his training.

19 SM: In the advanced course, do you remember any of the foreign officers being
20 washed out?

21 JJ: No. They could do anything and still get by. Funny situation. I think it was
22 Christmastime. A bunch of them took off and went to Hollywood. We were told we were
23 on leave. We closed the school down for a couple of weeks or something like that.
24 Everybody kind of stayed around or maybe went back to visit their family, but these guys
25 took off and six of them piled into a car and drove to Hollywood and I think they were
26 like ten days late getting back or something and nothing happened.

27 SM: And they still graduated on time.

28 JJ: Yes. They may have been called in and lectured a bit on proper decorum and
29 punctuality.

30 SM: So go ahead and discuss your typical day as you were about to.

1 JJ: We were talking about qualifications and training people. Well, I had a distinct
2 advantage because when I came through the basic, when I finished the advanced field
3 artillery course, I went back to Ft. Rucker and I was a senior captain or I was captain at
4 that time and I became a flight commander in rotary wing. And the flight commander in
5 the department of rotary wing. I think I had 13 to 15 instructor pilots that I commanded
6 and I would take, my responsibility was to take a warrant officer class or an officer class
7 that was coming through. Once they'd completed their training either at Ft. Walters or Ft.
8 Rucker, they were doing also basic training then and then we all switched it over to Ft.
9 Walters. Take that group of new incoming pilots who had passed their basic flight
10 training and take them into the advanced flight training. We would start the morning, at
11 six in the morning, we'd hit the flight line. We'd go through the assignment of students.
12 Most all of the instructors had two students that they were theirs. We'd issue the aircraft
13 out, we'd give the weather briefings and then we'd go out and fly that morning. Each
14 flight period was an hour, hour and a half, maybe an hour and 45 minutes with each
15 student. We'd go to a stage field and the instructor pilots would fly with their first student
16 for the first hour and a half and then they'd swap off with the second student and get in.
17 We were in H-19s at the time, cargo helicopters, so I had the ability to carry the student
18 on board and he would sit down there in the bottom and watch what was going on with
19 the other students and someone would send them out in the stage house and they'd sit
20 around and watch the other people fly. When we finished up in the morning, we'd come
21 back in, fill out our grade slips and do our paper work and then I would go out and fly
22 with the instrument students in the afternoon or I'd fly guinea pig for the examiners.
23 What that consisted of, the examiner students had to have people, they were training to
24 check on people who were going to get their instrument rating. So we got in every kind of
25 and emergency situation possible. And I'd be flying guinea pig. I never knew what the
26 guy was going to tell me to do, the examiner, so we got all sorts of training. And we
27 actually flew in weather. Part of the training was that we were all qualified to fly in
28 weather and so we'd be out in the afternoon or the morning and we'd swap and
29 sometimes in the morning we'd come out and if our flight was going in the afternoon, I'd
30 come out in the morning and fly guinea pig with the examiner students in the morning
31 and then go pick up my actual flight class in the afternoon. So for about three years in

1 there, from about '62 to '64 at Rucker, I was flying students half a day and being a
2 student to the examiners for the other half of the day. So we were building up tremendous
3 amounts of flying time and experience. Being prepared to fly into condition and
4 emergency conditions in Vietnam, I was much more qualified having flown with all of
5 those warrant officer students for a couple of years. I mean, they put you in every kind of
6 an emergency situation that you can think of as a student and you as a flight instructor
7 sitting there beside them, you have to let them go far enough to get themselves into
8 trouble and hopefully you'd get them out of trouble or they would then be able to get
9 themselves out of trouble and you could verbally coach them into recovery or take it
10 away from them and actually do the recovery and then simulate putting them back into it.
11 Those kinds of things. We had qualifications probably much higher than two thirds of the
12 people that we were commanding in the units, particularly later on in '67, '68, we were
13 getting people trained just as fast as they could get them through flight school. And the
14 washout rate had gone way down. I mean, they needed them so badly, it was just turnout.

15 SM: What aircraft did you receive training on at Rucker?

16 JJ: Practically everything the Army had. I started out training in the H-13. The
17 first helicopter I ever flew was the H-13, the H-23 Hiller. I went through flight school at
18 Rucker in helicopters in '58 and we did most of training then in the H-13. In fact, the H-
19 13 A model, I had wheels on it of all things and then the B model, C model, and D model
20 came in and they were all better because some of them had Servo systems on them. The
21 original H-13s had what were called irreversible flight controls and they were terrible.
22 But they were what they had. Then they put Servos or power steering on them and that
23 became much, much easier and transitioned into the UH-1, the YH-40, which was the A
24 model UH-1. That was in early '61, '62 time frame. Then I flew the H-34 in Germany
25 because I was H-13 qualified when I went to Germany and I got qualified for the H-34 in
26 Germany and then I came back and was transitioned into the H-19 and was flight
27 commander in the H-19 flight and then I qualified in all models of the Huey because the
28 test board at that time was flying the B model gunship and then the D model UH-1 and we
29 would go over and fly. The test board always needed pilots to come out and do their
30 profile testing. What they would do was load the aircraft to the max and fly it to the max
31 hours on parts. In other words, what they were doing was proving that the service life on

1 a particular part was going to be met and the way to do that was to fly it at maximum
2 weight and fly it to maximum hour and see if it failed or see if it met its service life
3 requirement. So they were always looking for pilots to fly over there and so we'd go over
4 and fly missions for them. So I was qualified in all of the Hueys through that process and
5 then I went through, before I went back on my second tour in Vietnam, I was qualified in
6 the Chinook. I went back for Chinook transition and was qualified in the B model, the A
7 model and B model Chinook and I never did get qualified in C. I got out of the Army, I
8 retired before the C really came in. Fixed wing aircraft, I was qualified in the L-19. I was
9 qualified in the L-20. Both on floats and landing gear. I was qualified in the LC-126,
10 which was a Cessna 195. The Army had a few of them around. I never was twin engine
11 qualified in the fixed wing aircraft. The only aircraft I was twin-engine qualified was the
12 Chinook. So I had a pretty wide range. I flew some, I almost qualified in the Beech
13 Barron. I was qualified T-41, which was a Cessna 172, but it was training aircraft the
14 Army had. I almost got qualified in the twin engine Beech Barron. I was swapping time. I
15 was an instructor pilot in rotary wing and a friend of mine was an instructor pilot in fixed
16 wing and he wasn't helicopter qualified, so I was giving him time in the Huey and he was
17 giving me time in the Barron. We were swapping. He would fly with me and I'd fly with
18 him. When it came up time for the qualification check, the flight commander in fixed
19 wing found out that I was taking some of his instructor pilot time up and he wouldn't
20 give me a check ride. So I never did get qualified in the T-42, but I had all of the
21 emergency procedures and I think I had something like 15 or 20 hours in the aircraft. So I
22 was capable of flying a twin engine fixed wing aircraft, but never got it on the records.

23 SM: When did you go through transition from fixed wing to helicopter?

24 JJ: 1958. I think it was '58.

25 SM: What was that like?

26 JJ: I was in the department of tactics as a flight instructor and the department of
27 tactics everyday had helicopters that were given to us for our daily missions. Tactics had
28 to go out and supervise what was going on in the field, so the headquarters had a couple
29 of helicopters that were always available and, again, I was bootlegging time in the
30 helicopter. So when it came time for me to go to school, I could outfly my instructor. I
31 graduated number one in my class and the first day, it was obvious, I had a warrant

1 officer instructor who had gone through and was pretty good and picked up and stayed on
2 as an instructor. Now, the rest of the class didn't have as nearly as many hours in a
3 helicopter as I did, so it was a real piece of cake going through helicopter transition and
4 my poor little warrant officer instructor, it was really fun to kind of torment him. I really
5 could outfly him.

6 SM: Well, when you first started flying helicopters, what was the hardest part of
7 the transition for you from going from a fixed wing? I mean, fixed wing small aircraft,
8 they want to fly, but a helicopter really doesn't.

9 JJ: Oh, the same basic things that everybody else. Hovering and keeping it over
10 one point stationary. Those kinds of things. But again, it wasn't a problem at all. Within
11 an hour or two, I was pretty proficient at hovering. Somewhere or another, I'm not
12 bragging, I think I had a pretty good aptitude for just flying a helicopter. It just came
13 pretty easy.

14 SM: You mentioned before when you were at Ft. Rucker commanding the rotary
15 wing department that it was at that point that the Vietnamese pilots started to filter
16 through. Were there other country forces also filtering through and what were, you
17 mentioned there were some difficulties.

18 JJ: There sure were. I can't recall that there were any other countries that we were
19 doing the training, same kind of training. It was obvious that we had been involved in
20 Vietnam long enough that it was obvious that they needed training in flying helicopters
21 and they were basically Air Force, Vietnamese Air Force people who were being sent to
22 the United States for training. We started out teaching them basic flight training in the H-
23 34. The H-34 was a fairly complex aircraft to fly. In a reciprocating engine and a throttle
24 that had to be hand controlled, no governor systems on it to maintain RPM and to feed
25 more fuel to the engine as you pulled in the need for power and more lift. A big aircraft.
26 An aircraft that was very sensitive. The flight control system on and H-34 is very
27 sensitive and it responded very quickly and if you over controlled it you could do some
28 things. You would worry about the power you were pulling on the engine. For example,
29 the RPM, you had certain RPM settings and then certain maximum manifold pressure
30 settings that you'd pull and if you exceeded one or the other, you could damage the
31 engine through that, so you had to be careful of certain RPMs before you got certain

1 manifold pressure settings, which meant you were coordinating pitch control, throttle
2 control, reading instruments, that kind of stuff, integrating all of this together. We were
3 teaching Vietnamese, basic Vietnamese Air Force people flying this very complex
4 aircraft and the word was or the feeling was, these people, the most complex thing they'd
5 seen was an ox cart and here we are teaching them how to fly an H-34. Now some of
6 their people were just absolutely lost. Some of their people learned very well and later
7 when I saw some of the Vietnamese units, some of the H-34s being flown by Vietnamese
8 pilots, were courageous people. I mean, these guys were tough. They learned well, but it
9 was a real task. It was a real task, a challenge. I really kind of felt sorry for the folks
10 when the first two or three weeks of teaching them the intricacies of starting an H-34 up,
11 just getting that sucker going, it was not an easy thing to do. And the poor instructor
12 pilots, they really worked hard.

13 SM: Were there any language barriers, or did the Vietnamese understand?

14 JJ: No. They spoke pretty good English. They had to be the cream of the crop.
15 They had to be the best of their available VNAF pilots. As I recall, they were pilots. They
16 were able to fly airplanes and so they had some basic understanding of flight and they
17 had to be the cream of the crop, but even at that, it was a pretty complex task.

18 SM: Did you have to make any special adjustments to the aircraft to
19 accommodate the Vietnamese?

20 JJ: I think. Yeah. Most of them carried a couple set of cushions. Even with the
21 seat right up as high as it would go and forward as far as it would go, they were still
22 pretty small people. Listen, I'm not a real big person. I'm only five-foot-six. So I'm not a
23 very big person, but they were smaller than I was. So, you'd seen them carrying a double
24 set of seat cushions. One to sit on and one to put behind them that would push them up
25 forward and get them up higher. But other than that, no. They were expected to do
26 anything that we were requiring of any of our students.

27 SM: How about problems reaching pedals, anything like that?

28 JJ: Again, with the cushions, it slid them forward far enough. The pedals were
29 adjustable. You could move the pedals back, but even with that, you'd need to be pushed
30 forward a little bit. That's why they carried extra seat cushions.

31 SM: Anything else memorable about training Vietnamese pilots?

1 JJ: No. I never got down to where I carried a class of Vietnamese pilots. They
2 were always there in the same areas. I was always associated with the warrant officer and
3 officer pilots that were coming through. We would see them on the stage fields.
4 Obviously, you would interact with them in the operations areas and the snack bar and
5 things like that, but it never really got down where we were dealing on a daily basis with
6 all of the problems they were having.

7 SM: Well, how aware were you of what was occurring in Vietnam and in
8 Southeast Asia, generally, during the time period where you had Vietnamese pilots
9 coming through your training?

10 JJ: More and more and more. This was '62, '62-63 time frame and early '64. First
11 of all, they were starting to send the first American aviation units. Before that, it had been
12 advisors, strictly advisory group action and small aviation detachments. The MAAG
13 aviation attachment had some aircraft, had some helicopters, had some fixed wing
14 aircraft. But we were getting units that were being assembled like the H-21 unit. The first
15 aviation units that were sent over as company-sized unit. In fact, one of my buddies down
16 there, Milt Chernae, was involved. He was a commander of one of the H-21 units that
17 was sent over early. Milt was an instructor with us. Of course, when he was put on orders
18 and was starting to assemble the unit and gathered the assets together and gathered the
19 aircraft together and so forth, we were certainly becoming aware of the fact that we were
20 going to go. It was obvious that we were going to go.

21 SM: Do you recall about what time period the H-21 units were sent out?

22 JJ: Yeah. It was early '62, '61-62. It was just after I got back from Germany. I
23 came back from Germany in '61 and went to the advanced course and nine months later,
24 was back at Rucker. It was like the fall of '61 and early '62.

25 SM: Do you know what their primary role was and mission?

26 JJ: Troop lift.

27 SM: So they would lift South Vietnamese units?

28 JJ: Yes. Great book. Ralph Young has done a great book on Army aviation in
29 1961 and he covers a lot of the early deployments of units in the H-21. In fact, when I got
30 there in '64, we still had H-21s doing troop lifts. In fact, one of the first missions that I
31 flew in the UTT as an armed helicopter pilot was to go down and escort troop lift and H-

1 21s out of the airfield in Can Tho and My Tho which was just south of Saigon and I flew
2 gun escort on some of the last H-21 missions that were flown. We were starting to get
3 UH-1Bs and Ds in the country then as lift ships in '64. But the H-21 was still there. That
4 was fun. An underpowered aircraft in very high humidity and heat conditions, density
5 altitudes. They were doing things like they would take the vertical stabilizers off the back
6 of the H-21s to reduce the weight...they were never going to go fast enough to worry
7 about it. They were pulling that off. They were pulling all of the interior seats out and
8 stripped the inside of it out of seats. Everybody sat on the floor, you didn't need seats to
9 lighten it, to get them as light as possible. Some flight techniques actually changed.
10 Instead of taking off and going straight forward until you got into translational lift, they
11 figured you'd get a little more lift out of two rotor systems so they'd take off and turn
12 them sideways and you'd actually get both rotor systems getting into clean air to get
13 more lift and try to get out of some of the landing zones. I mean, it was just a kind of
14 wild time over there to do anything, to get better performance out of the aircraft.

15 SM: While that was going on, were there technical representatives from the
16 helicopter manufacturers to try to help these types of situations?

17 JJ: Absolutely. Every one of the manufacturers had tech reps in country, and in
18 fact we needed them. We really did need them.

19 SM: Before getting into your time in Vietnam, a couple of quick questions about
20 your perspectives in terms of what the United States was trying to accomplish and what
21 was actually occurring in country and things like that. For instance, what was the
22 coverage and what do you remember about the Diem Kieu, the assassination of President
23 Ngo Dinh Diem?

24 JJ: Oh yeah, I was there.

25 SM: You were there in '63?

26 JJ: Yeah. No, well it happened just before I got there.

27 SM: November '63.

28 JJ: I got there in May of '64. When the Kieu occurred, of course I was still
29 getting ready to come over. I'd been talking to some of the guys that had gotten back and
30 was aware of some of the missions they were flying. Again, didn't have any idea which
31 unit I was going to be going to, but knew some of the things they were doing. When I got

1 there, I reported in. The UTT had been alerted the morning the Kieu started. They had
2 been dispatched out and there was an armored column coming up from the My Tho/Can
3 Tho area, which is part of the force that actually came in and did the Kieu. The guys that
4 I was commanding that were involved in it had been there and were involved in it. We're
5 talking about what happened. The Buddhist monks were immolating themselves at that
6 time. We were having some riots in and around Saigon, not much, but some unrest. I
7 reported in to Tan Son Nhut Airport and was gunship qualified and the UTT needed
8 gunship people. I was a senior captain at the time and there was this platoon that was
9 open, the 2nd Platoon was open. The commander had just rotated home, and I was
10 assigned to the UTT. The first night in country was absolute terror. I was picked up at
11 the airport. I don't even recall where we were hauled, some place. Two guys were there,
12 supposedly a BOQ. They issued me a cot and we slept on the front porch of some place
13 that was completely open, unprotected, and this guy said, 'There's your cot, Captain.
14 There's your poncho liner, I'll see you in the morning.'

15 SM: When you flew over, what was your route?

16 JJ: We went over Pan Am and we left Travis Air Force Base and landed in
17 Okinawa and refueled and went from Okinawa into Tan Son Nhut. It was a Pan Am
18 charter.

19 SM: This is May of '64?

20 JJ: May of '64.

21 SM: What was it like when they opened the doors to that aircraft?

22 JJ: Whoa, like stepping into a steam bath; high humidity, hot. May was dry
23 season and we hadn't gotten into the monsoon...or was it monsoon? I can't remember. I
24 think we were just getting into the monsoon season. We were just getting over the dry
25 season. It was pretty hot and humid. It was starting to get real humid.

26 SM: How were you transported once you got off the aircraft?

27 JJ: Bus with chicken wire over the windows and everybody was wondering,
28 'What in the world have you got chicken wire over the windows?' and it was to keep the
29 grenades from coming through. There'd been killings. There'd been some people in
30 downtown Saigon riding cyclos and they'd chuck a grenade not the front seat and that's
31 when they put chicken wire over the windows. The windows were all open. They didn't

1 have any glass, just chicken wire. I was transported to some repo depot, I'm not sure
2 where it was, and processed through. Like I said, the only thing they were interested in
3 was what aircraft are you qualified in, what was your rank, and all of a sudden I was
4 assigned to the UTT. I didn't know what the UTT was. I didn't know that it was really
5 sort of an amazing unit. It was developing armed gunship tactics. The guys that were
6 there, I was there with a second group of people. The first group brought it in from
7 Okinawa and had been there for about six months or so and then they had been sent back
8 and a new group of people came in, and Pat Delevan was the commander, Patrick N.
9 Delevan. Delevan, you talk about a warrior. He ended up with seven Purple Hearts.
10 He'd already been shot down two or three times when I reported in, and the first mission
11 I flew was with Pat Delevan, and he just scared the devil out of me! In fact, I was down
12 in operations just being oriented and a Special Forces unit in the Tay Ninh area had
13 gotten hit and Delevan was told to scramble a gun team and go up and bail this guy out
14 and I was standing there and Delevan comes roaring up in his jeep and he carried a 12
15 gauge shotgun. That was his personal weapon. He grabbed his shotgun, grabbed his
16 flight jacket and his flight helmet and he says, 'Come on Johnny, you're my copilot,' and
17 we went running out to his aircraft and the crew chief had already headed over and had
18 the blade untied and was ready to crank and we all jumped aboard. We flew off and I had
19 no idea where we were going, what we were getting into. Of course being his copilot, I
20 get the gun system unlimbered get the gun site down, and we get to where the action's
21 going on he's talking to the commander on the ground and he's saying, 'What's going on
22 with the situation?' The guys says, 'I'm pinned down, I'm up against a rice paddy,
23 they're shooting at us from all directions.' Delevan says, 'I can't really tell what's going
24 on. I'm going to go down and talk to him,' so he goes [makes landing noise] and lands
25 right beside this guy. I'm sitting looking through the gun site and Delevan says, 'Johnny,
26 put that thing up! You're going to shoot somebody!' So I put the thing up and get as
27 small as I can in my seat! He goes in and lands beside this guy that's laying there on the
28 ground talking to him on the radio and the audacity of this airplane landing, and the VC
29 just disappeared. They broke off contact and left. That was my first experience, my first
30 mission, and the first flight in country was flying copilot for Pat Delevan and going into
31 Tay Ninh and going Special Forces, a bunch of guys...we supported a lot of Special

1 Forces operations then in the Tay Ninh area which is up in the Cambodian border. It was
2 namely Vietnamese or indigenous troops with two or three Special Forces advisors. It
3 was just wild.

4 SM: Now was this the Charlie Model UH-1?

5 JJ: This is the B Model.

6 SM: This is the Bravo Model?

7 JJ: B Model.

8 SM: What weapons systems were we talking about? Rockets or mini guns?

9 JJ: We had seven rockets on each side and two M-60 machine guns flex on each
10 side. The machine guns were controlled by the flexible site that was on the copilot's side.
11 Anytime you moved the hand left or right or up and down the guns would follow. The
12 rockets were fixed, were not moveable, were fixed, and were bore sighted with the
13 machine guns. So, if you were going to shoot rockets with it, what you do is, there was a
14 little conical switch on the sight link and if you pulled back on that...I mean pushed
15 forward on that, the machine guns would fire and you'd leave them in the stowed
16 position. They were straight ahead where they were bore sighted with the rockets and
17 you'd squeeze off and you'd see the tracers going and if that was where you wanted the
18 rockets to go then you pulled back on it and you fired a pair of rockets. So what you do
19 is there was no gun sight on the right side so the pilot would just kind of aim at where he
20 thought and then he'd pop off a couple of rounds for the guns through the M-60s and you
21 could see the tracer going. If that was about where you want the rockets, then you just
22 pull back on it and you've got a pair of rockets.

23 SM: Did you find that sighting system to be fairly accurate?

24 JJ: No, no. First of all, the rockets weren't very accurate. These were Korea
25 vintage 2.75 folding fin rockets. The motors on them were not what we called scarfed.
26 They were straight. They were supposed to be launched a couple hundred knots off of a
27 jet and we were launching them at 60 knots and so when they'd launch them, many,
28 many times they'd take off and [makes sound of rockets taking off] when the fins would
29 come out a little bit late, well here you've got a couple fins pointing one direction, a
30 couple fins pointing the other direction, and they'd take off. They would go up, down,
31 left, right, pretty inaccurate. Later what they did was they would scarf them or the old

1 muzzle that would fit over the nozzle instrument and you would crimp it and it would put
2 veins into the nozzle and cut a bevel on the nozzle motor and that would spin it. So,
3 when it launched it would actually come out rotating and it was much more accurate. We
4 started scarfing the rocket motors.

5 SM: That had to be done in country, by hand?

6 JJ: It had to be done in country, by hand.

7 SM: Did they eventually start manufacturing them that way?

8 JJ: Yeah, they changed the ordnance and grooved them and cut the flange on the
9 rocket so when it came out, it spun. They got more accurate. We called it shooting a
10 moon ball. You never knew when you'd shoot one and, boy, some of them were moon
11 balls, just [makes shooting sound] there it would go! I almost shot a wingman down one
12 day! Two of us, a fire team, were coming in and the idea was the lead guy would shoot
13 and then when he broke, you would shoot right under him with rockets which would
14 suppress fire so he could clear and then you could clear and so here, it came down and I
15 saw him start to brake and I thought, 'Wow, put it right underneath it!' because that's
16 what everybody said, 'I want those rockets right under my skids!' Off a pair, and one of
17 them was going right for him and I thought, 'Oh Lord, I just shot my wing man down!' I
18 missed him. But, they were unpredictable.

19 SM: That early in the war, they didn't have the Cobra or LOH yet?

20 JJ: Oh no.

21 SM: [Unintelligible] as well. Just out of curiosity, the UTT was formed too late
22 for this, but when the H-21 units went over in Fall of '61, early '62, when you were still
23 at Rucker did you receive any information back from them in terms of lessons learned,
24 things that could be incorporated into training, things like that?

25 JJ: Very, very limited. Very limited.

26 SM: Was that something that was improved upon later as you were involved in
27 the war? Do you think that they started to filter information back?

28 JJ: '64 I was in country, I was wounded in '65, I was in the hospital almost a
29 year. When I was discharged I went back down to Ft. Rucker to get back on flight status
30 and I was only there a very brief time to go through the process of medical reevaluation
31 and requalification and return to flight status and then I was sent to the Command and

1 General Staff College and so I was unable to see really what the training at Rucker was
2 incorporating from lessons learned. Then, when I finished the Command and General
3 Staff College I was back on orders to Vietnam and I went back to Rucker only to qualify
4 in the Chinooks. I went back down to qualify in the Chinook and spent six weeks in
5 Chinook transition, so really I lost track of what was going on at the training base itself,
6 what they were actually incorporating into training in the training base. It's my
7 understanding that the tactics was much more stressed, the formation flying and the basic
8 students, the field training of the basic students. They lived in the field much more than
9 we did. We lived at staged fields, they actually lived in the field. So, I think the training
10 was enhanced and they were trying to emphasize the need for more tactical flying
11 techniques but I was not part of that.

12 SM: When you were with the UTT you mentioned that one of the roles of the
13 UTT was to develop tactics...

14 JJ: Gunship tactics.

15 SM: And to develop tactics for Vietnam. Did you have, after every mission, did
16 you have debriefings? Did you write up reports?

17 JJ: Yes.

18 SM: Were those incorporated into operational lessons learned that might have
19 been transmitted down?

20 JJ: Absolutely. In fact, one of the things we were doing was writing a manual.
21 We tried different things and found things that worked, things that didn't work, and then
22 following every mission we came back, we had to write a report. There was a detailed
23 report of where you went, the number of rounds fired, what were the conditions, who
24 were you communicating with, all of the details of the mission itself. All of those reports
25 were consolidated. We debriefed with the operations officer. We incorporated some of
26 that into our own local training. We had our own IPs. You had to do certain emergency
27 procedures within the company before you were considered qualified. Every so often
28 you'd have to go ride again with a stand pilot just to be sure you were maintaining
29 proficiency. So, we were learning and we were incorporating several lessons learned in
30 our own training. Yes, we had other people that were coming into country that were
31 visiting us. There were other commanders that were coming in, other units that were

1 starting to build up. In '64, late '64 they started to build up and more aviation units came
2 in. We had the 120th Aviation Company, the 145th Battalion was there. We were starting
3 to get more lift ships in. We were starting to get more aviation units as a unit. Pleiku,
4 they had an aviation unit down at Pleiku. Pete Hall was a buddy of mine, he was a
5 commander up there and was wounded and killed during Pleiku when the VC came in
6 and hit the air field and hit the area of Pleiku; in fact, Pete was in the Philippines. I saw
7 him, he was unconscious and uncommunicating, but he was in the hospital in the
8 Philippines when I was in the hospital in the Philippines when I was medevaced out and
9 then he died shortly after that.

10 SM: Did you fly an operational functional mission during that Pleiku incident?

11 JJ: No, we were way down South. I was in Saigon. Our area of operations was
12 Saigon South and was about as far North. During the time that I was in the UTT we had
13 one mission where I flew to Da Nang with the Marines and we supported the Marine
14 squadron HMM365 for 30 some days. We took ten lift ships from the Delta. I don't
15 think they were SAC trained Tigers but I think they were maybe 120th. We took ten lift
16 ships and five armed ships and we went north in I think it was the 52nd Aviation Battalion
17 we were OPCONed to. Essentially what we did, we taught the Marines how to do Eagle
18 fights or combat assaults. The Marines had H-34s and HMM365 was new to country.
19 We took Vietnamese troops and taught them how to load onto the H-34. We taught the
20 Marines; in fact, we bolted on rocket pods onto their H-34s and taught them how to shoot
21 them. We put armament in the doors, in the windows so they had some guns. We
22 swivel-mounted M-60s. They were never armed with machine guns, but only guns
23 mounted in the aircraft. Then we took...the Marines flew in the same vicinity. We never
24 did fly with each other within a cockpit or anything, but we'd take their gunships out as a
25 pair. We'd take their gunships out and pair them up with two of our gunships, and then
26 our gunships would actually go out and do what we called then an Eagle flight, which
27 was just go snoop for somebody to go shoot at you. You'd just go around, fly down,
28 whoa! Pretty soon some fool would take a shot at you, and then if he'd take a shot at you
29 you had ten lift ships sitting back there with Vietnamese troops on board and two
30 gunships with them and we'd launch them, and they'd come in and we'd just pick a field
31 and the gunships would go in and put a prep down and the lift ships would hit the ground

1 and the troops would go where we got shot at. The Vietnamese and the Viet Cong in that
2 area, they were completely unprepared for that kind of reaction and we cleaned their
3 clock for about 30 days. The idea was that the Marines then would pick the mission up
4 and they would use their H-34s as lift ships. They would use their armed H-34s as the
5 gunships and they would go out and do the same thing, and they would snoop until they
6 got shot at and then drop a company of troops in on them and sweep through the area.

7 SM: Were the Marines transporting Marine combat units or Vietnamese combat
8 units?

9 JJ: Vietnamese.

10 SM: Those H-34s, the door guns were man operated?

11 JJ: Yeah.

12 SM: How did you sight in the bolted-down rocket pods?

13 JJ: The rocket pods? An X on the windshield and pull the shoulder harness back
14 tight so you'd get the same perspective all the time. You sit back in your seat, pull your
15 shoulder harness down tight, get an eyeball as to where the rockets would be aimed and
16 put an X on the windshield with a grease pencil. Then when you came in on a rocket run
17 you just sort of sat straight up and got the same position so you got the same perspective
18 and you'd pop off a pair of them and see where they went; pretty good! It worked! They
19 never did have any gun sights at all, so it was just an X on the windshield.

20 SM: With a grease pencil?

21 JJ: With a grease pencil. With a Huey, we could kind of do that with a Huey
22 with the FM homing antenna. The FM homing antenna on the Huey set out in front. It
23 was a vertical antenna that set out on a little snub on the front of the nose and between the
24 homing antenna and an X on the windshield you could line up a relationship between
25 them; it wasn't a straight line relationship, but the tip of the homing antenna and you
26 could put an X and as long as wherever you were shooting kind of had the same
27 relationship, you got pretty accurate with that.

28 SM: The rockets that you would fire were primarily for suppression purposes, or
29 were you...

30 JJ: Early on they were the old six-pound warheads, which were a lot of noise I
31 think more than damage. Later before I was wounded in February we were starting to get

1 the 18-pound warhead, which was pretty good. It was a much bigger warhead and more
2 lethal and we also had the fuse delayed warheads that would actually penetrate the jungle.
3 The early 2.75s would go off in the treetops. If they hit anything, they'd explode. The
4 ones with the delayed fuse in the 18-pound warhead would actually penetrate through the
5 jungle and then go off. They were pretty effective. You could penetrate pretty deep in
6 some stuff before it would go off. We also had white phosphorous. We had white
7 phosphorous warheads.

8 SM: When you arrived in Vietnam, and also I guess before you left, what kind of
9 briefings did you receive in terms of in country briefings, operational briefings, to let you
10 know...

11 JJ: None. When I arrived in '64, like I said, I went through the replacement
12 depot and was assigned to the UTT and next thing I was a platoon leader.

13 SM: How about briefings at the UTT?

14 JJ: Very little.

15 SM: Understanding that your first day there was your mission with Patrick
16 Delevan.

17 JJ: The main thing was radio frequencies, call signs, what to do if you went
18 down, SOP if you went down, if you were able to land the aircraft without crashing it you
19 deployed security. The two door gunners got out. You removed certain radios. You got
20 certain guns off of the aircraft so it could be evacuated without turning over ammunition
21 or equipment to the VC. That was about it.

22 SM: How about interactions with the Vietnamese people? Any briefings on dos
23 and don'ts, yes or no, you can do this, you can't do that?

24 JJ: Not really. We lived in a villa. It was really good living. We were in a villa,
25 two men to a room. As a platoon leader I had my own room. We had our own club
26 within the place we had our own mess hall. We cooked our own food. We had
27 housemaids that took care of our clothing and made our beds and cleaned our rooms and
28 shined our shoes and did your cooking and did the waitressing and those kinds of things.
29 I don't think we had any particular dos or don'ts. Black-marketing, they talked about
30 that, that was discouraged. Use of currency, of course the exchange rate was much better
31 for green dollars than it was for script. We used military script at the time.

1 SM: When you were there early in '64 you could use U.S. dollars?

2 JJ: No, we were not forbidden to use them. We had U.S. dollars, yes. Later that
3 was changed after we got it converted. No, our relationships were pretty good. We had
4 Vietnamese observers. Every time we went out, we had to carry a Vietnamese observer
5 in the aircraft. His task was supposedly to give us clearance that what we were firing at
6 was a safe area or it was an enemy force. I don't think those guys knew where we were.
7 Most of them were airsick most of the time. So, the rules of engagement were if you got
8 shot at, you shot back, and that was pretty much it. Then there were some areas where
9 we knew it was VC dominated or NVA dominated and if you saw suspicious activity,
10 people looked like they were troops, you could engage them. The main thing was getting
11 shot at. If you got shot at, you shot back and that was pretty much it. Supposedly the
12 observers that we had in the back were supposed to say, 'Yeah, it's okay, shoot!' Shoot,
13 they were back there upchucking their rice most of the time. That got serious at times.
14 We had one guy urped up all over the instrument panel and the radio console. He was
15 standing back there hanging on the seat just going, 'Ahhh!'

16 SM: Oh my goodness!

17 JJ: If you understand the Vietnamese diet, you understand what was hitting the
18 radio console. One of the fire team leaders, Jim Dammar, he was cussing over the radio
19 and I said, 'Jim, what's the matter?' and he said, 'I'm wiping gurp off my radio console,
20 it's all up here and this blankety-blank observer just upchucked on my left arm!'

21 SM: Wouldn't that take out the radio?

22 JJ: No, it just covered it up, scrape it off!

23 SM: You mentioned just a moment ago that if you were working in an area that
24 was suspected either VC or NVA control, the rules of engagement were somewhat more
25 flexible. Could you elaborate on what you mean by if there was suspicious activity or
26 people looked like they were NVA or what they were, I guess combatants, that you could
27 engage them?

28 JJ: Yeah, there were areas that were called free fire zones. You could shoot at
29 anything in those zones that moved if you wanted to. Our company philosophy was if it
30 shot at you, you shot back. But, we were also given the authority to do low recons, to
31 look for bunker complexes. You could tell a bunker when you saw it and if you wanted to

1 engage it, you could engage it. Of course we had the observer back there who was
2 supposed to give you the authority. So, we would actually go out and do low recon and a
3 lot of our activity was in support of operations that were already ongoing. There'd be
4 troops on the ground and we would recon ahead of them or we would recon to the flanks
5 or we would interdict suspicious road intersections or junctions. They were following a
6 jungle trail and you could see a jungle trail come across the streambed or something.
7 We'd actually go in and fire on that location before the troops would get up to it, or many
8 times they would say, 'Hey, we're stopped. We see a suspicious area in front of us.
9 We're going to lay smoke down. Fire at a heading and a distance beyond the smoke,'
10 and you'd see the smoke and you'd go in and at a distance and a heading from that
11 location you'd actually hit the ground with the machine gun or put rockets in. The main
12 thing is if you ever got shot at, yes, you shot back.

13 SM: In terms of – get away from operations for just a minute – your interaction
14 yourself with the Vietnamese people, when was your first contact with friendly
15 Vietnamese in the Saigon area?

16 JJ: Probably within a day or two. I went downtown. The villa that we were
17 living in was on Quang Li Street, which was on the main road to Tan Son Nhut Airport
18 from downtown Saigon. The little blue bomber taxi cabs were all over the place, Tudeau
19 Street was well known. Some of the guys said, 'Hey, we're going downtown, want to
20 come along?' 'Sure,' and jump into one of the little cabs downtown. We walked all
21 through the downtown area, through the market, through all the bars and all the
22 restaurants. One of the things we did do, the unit would have going away parties at the
23 Caribell Hotel, which was an excellent French run hotel. In fact, we had dinner parties
24 there for a going away party. Everybody would dress. We had shirts with embroidered
25 patches of our unit on the pockets and we would dress in slacks. I had tan slacks and a
26 white shirt and we'd all go down and we'd give our out going away people a plaque. So,
27 we did social events downtown in the Caribell and excellent food, excellent treatment,
28 excellent hotel.

29 SM: What did you think of the Vietnamese people? What were your impressions
30 of them?

1 JJ: I had no problems with them at all. In fact, also the units that we were
2 supporting, we traditionally worked with Special Forces and then the organized units that
3 we worked with, we would interact with the command headquarters. Colonel Zoo was
4 his name, I can remember that very clearly. Anytime we ever got...we worked with
5 Colonel Zoo who had been trained in the United States, had gone through the Command
6 and General Staff College. When we reported in in the morning, his first...he'd always
7 get on the radio. When we called into his headquarters he'd always respond back and he
8 would say, 'You will land, and we will have breakfast.' Before we would launch any
9 operation we always went in and he always had Chinese soup for breakfast and rice and
10 things like that and we'd always go in and land and we would eat breakfast with him, and
11 a lot of those times early. We'd try to be there right at first light or right after first light,
12 and then very professional briefing. His staff would bring him the situation map with
13 where his units were deployed and where he thought the enemy was and what his
14 operation was going to be. He'd brief us and we would support him. We would go out
15 and his troops on the ground all had American advisors. There were like 1500 other
16 American advisors and then very few other troops in country at that time, early '64, and
17 we would go out and contact the American advisor on the radio and he'd tell them,
18 'Yeah, the operation is doing this,' or, 'They're doing that. We made progress here,' or
19 'We're not making progress there,' and if he needed support we'd fire for them in
20 different areas.

21 SM: Would you interact a lot with the advisors?

22 JJ: On the radio.

23 SM: Just on the radio? How about back when you were...

24 JJ: Because their base camps were so far separated. They were back living with
25 the Vietnamese units and the advisors were...we talked to them on the radio. In fact, we
26 got to recognize all of them by just their voice alone. If I called Blackjack 16 I knew who
27 it was going to be when he answered because their voice became familiar on the radio or
28 they're a radiotelephone operator, the troop that was carrying the radio. Early '64, it was
29 with the advisors on the radio and the troop commanders usually in their headquarters,
30 and we'd go support them.

1 SM: What were your impressions of the commanders on the ground and the
2 Vietnamese units?

3 JJ: Some very good, some not so good. When we were north with the Marines,
4 we worked with General Ty or General To who was then the commander in I Corps. He
5 was a real warrior. We had the best success and the most...like I said, the Vietnamese
6 troops that we were hauling, in conjunction with the Marines, were excellent. I mean,
7 boy, they'd get in and just mix it up like you wouldn't believe. In fact, he had a big
8 celebration party for us. I got it on my video. After the operations were done, he'd call
9 all of his commanders and all of the aviation units and the Marine commanders in and we
10 had a big barbecue and he gave out awards. I got a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry during
11 this thing. He was a tiger. He was a real warrior. Some of the other units that we dealt
12 with from time to time, no. First thing they'd do is squat down and build a fire and cook
13 breakfast. The enemy's there, time to eat lunch. It gave them plenty of time to get away.
14 It just depended on, I think part of it was the political situation that commander found
15 himself in, what was the province chief like? Was the province chief more political, or
16 was he more corrupt? Was he interested in mixing it up? How much was the area
17 dominated by the VC or the NVA? Some of those areas were pretty dominated and the
18 province chief didn't have much to do but try and survive. It just depended upon where
19 you were.

20 SM: Was this something that you learned just as you went along? Or, were there
21 briefings that discussed these types of issues?

22 JJ: You pretty much learned just as you went along. You knew there were times
23 when the advisor himself could pretty well tell you. He'd tell you, 'Hey, we're going to
24 be real aggressive,' and some of the other advisors would say, 'I'm just not getting the
25 kind of response that I'm looking for. They're just not going to be as aggressive.' So,
26 the advisor would be the one that you would work with and you would know.

27 SM: So what did you think we were trying to accomplish during your first year
28 before you were wounded? What was the United States trying to do in South Vietnam,
29 Southeast Asia?

30 JJ: Defeat the NVA or defeat the VC.

31 SM: Pure anti-communist policy, going to get rid of communism?

1 JJ: Yep. That was as far as I knew and as far as I understood, that was what we
2 were there to do was to support the local forces, the Special Forces, the advisors, and the
3 mission was to help them get in there and mix it up and beat the VC.

4 SM: As far as the UTT was concerned, your primary area of operations was
5 around the Saigon region, Tay Ninh?

6 JJ: Yeah, we went all the way north to the Special Forces Camps were in Bu Dop
7 and Bu Ju Mop and up along the Cambodian border, east out to Phan Thiet, south we
8 went all the way south down to Ca Mau; in fact, I was down there when the Airborne
9 jumped into Ca Mau. I also went down to recover a prisoner of war camp. They had
10 located it there and gotten intelligence on the POW compound and it was a Special
11 Forces guy, maybe Nick Rho, maybe Nick Rho that was down there supposedly, the
12 stealth. We went all the way down to Ca Mau to support an assault by Special Forces to
13 try and overrun the camp and they found the camp. It was empty by the time we got into
14 it.

15 SM: How far west usually?

16 JJ: Well, on the Cambodian border, everything down, Tay Ninh, go south out of
17 there just along the Cambodian border all the way down into the Delta.

18 SM: All the way into the Delta?

19 JJ: All the way into the Delta. We got into War Zone D, Phuc Bien and north,
20 went up the coast of Phan Thiet down to Vung Tau, south to Can Tho, Soc Trang, even
21 south down to Rach Gia. One time we went all the way almost into Thailand, the big
22 plain...I can't remember the name of it, where the Vietnamese airborne made a combat
23 jump?

24 SM: The Plain of Reeds?

25 JJ: That's what it was. We went over there to assault them as they made a combat
26 jump.

27 SM: That was near the Cambodian border?

28 JJ: That was the first time I'd ever seen the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade jump.
29 It was an interesting operation.

30 SM: How would you know whether or not you were going up against a Viet
31 Cong unit or PAVN, an NVA unit?

1 JJ: The only way you knew was the fire discipline.

2 SM: So you wouldn't know before hand?

3 JJ: Nah. Fire discipline, weapons that were available, caliber of weapons that
4 were available. If you ran into 12.7-millimeter anti-aircraft, you knew it was an NVA
5 unit. Small arms fire in some limited machine guns and stuff was probably the VC. Fire
6 discipline, the VC would shoot at you when it was obvious they weren't going to hit you.
7 NVA waited until you got in to where you were definitely within kill zone. They opened
8 up with disciplined fire. There wasn't one guy just shooting at you, there was two or
9 three and they knew lead, they knew to lead you.

10 SM: Why don't you describe the first incident where you personally came up
11 against the enemy where he was shooting at you with hostile intention?

12 JJ: All of the time...

13 SM: Do you recall the first time it happened, though? Was it on that first
14 mission?

15 JJ: Yeah, the first time with Delevan. I don't recall if we actually got shot at. In
16 fact, I don't think we did. I think just the audacity of them coming in and just landing in
17 the middle of that, but then later, yeah, I remember we had combat assault very, very
18 soon after I had been in country. I was not the lead fire team on it. I was escorting the lift
19 ships and the lead fire team, which actually went in and prepped the landing zone. Their
20 mission was the artillery prep would come in or the TAC air prep would be put on the
21 landing zone and as soon as that was lifted the armed ships would go in and they would
22 make a visual recon and a recon by fire. They'd actually go in and lay rockets down on
23 either sides of the landing zone and machine gun the landing zone and look to see if we
24 were being fired at. My job on that mission was to be back with the lift ships. The lead
25 fire team, once they got the recon and prep done, then they broke off and they were low
26 on ammunition and we would come in with the lift ships and fly on either side of them
27 escorting them in and as they touched down, we would lay down suppressive fire if it was
28 needed. If it wasn't needed they weren't receiving anything, we'd hold our munitions
29 until they got down on the ground and then cleared. If the troops got into trouble, we still
30 had ammunition and the ability to react. The first mission I can remember, when the lead
31 fire team was down reconing the landing zone a kid named Neal, shot and killed right

1 smack through the rocket site. It was a .50 caliber round, and we knew we were up
2 against some big trouble.

3 SM: Single fire? Single shot?

4 JJ: Well, a single round came through the cockpit but it went right through the
5 rocket site and it hit him right smack in the middle of the chest. Dick Jarrett was flying
6 with him. Dick Jarrett was the platoon leader and I can clearly remember him calling on
7 the radio that he had a serious WIA, wounded in action. The kid's name was Neal, and
8 that was the first person that was killed, the first person in the unit. I was coming in with
9 the second lift and we knew it was going to be a hot LZ and Jim Jaggers was the
10 commander of the UTT at that time. Dollin had gone home and Jim Jaggers was the
11 commander and I remember Jaggers rolling back in. He always rode lead fire team.
12 When he was out with a lift, he, as the commander, we always would go with the lead
13 fire team, recon and clear the landing zone. I remember him calling back and saying,
14 'We're putting down more suppressive fire, but it's going to be a hot landing,' and it was.
15 Boy, we were getting shot at good. We had troops on the ground and once the troops got
16 on the ground then the ones that were shooting at us pretty well gave up and said, 'That's
17 enough. We're going to leave.' It was the first one that I remember getting a guy
18 actually killed.

19 SM: Now this particular operation, was it part of a larger operation?

20 JJ: It was the typical kind of lift that we did. Every day some battalion was going
21 to go somewhere and was going to be combat assaulted in someplace.

22 SM: Did you recall the specific area where this was?

23 JJ: It was north of Saigon, War Zone D, C or D, because that's namely where we
24 were operating in early '64 was mainly north and west of Saigon and it was mainly in the
25 C and D area, and it was Tay Ninh, Loc Ninh, Phuc Binh, and all that area.

26 SM: Well why don't you go ahead and discuss that rescue operation that you
27 were involved in?

28 JJ: Jim Benky? This was a continuation of Ben Gia, December '65. There's a
29 little town on the beach called Ben Gia B-E-N G-I-A. It was a very large Catholic
30 enclave. They were finding all sorts of enemy activity around them and called for help,
31 and the Vietnamese ranger battalion and the Vietnamese Marine battalion were airlifted

1 and were inserted and were going to go in and help the villagers secure the area and clear
2 and sweep around it and pacify and make sure it was clear. We were escorted...we
3 escorted the lift ships in. They put them in on the South end of the village as I recall and
4 immediately started running into trouble. The rangers got hit pretty hard. Jim Benky was
5 the advisor to the Rangers. I think it was the 30th Rangers. The Marines really got into it.
6 They were almost annihilated. They called for a raider reaction force and the raider
7 reaction force started down the highway to Ben Gia and got ambushed, and they were in
8 APCs. They were coming down the road in armored personnel carriers, and really got
9 hit. So, we knew we were up against a pretty tough outfit at that point. Jim Benky and
10 the Rangers got into town and he said, 'Holy cow,' he said, 'We've got wire
11 communications. We're running into bunkers. We're running into wire communications
12 laid out on the ground, telephone lines,' and that was the first time we'd ever seen
13 telephone lines connecting positions together. I mean, VC never had...radios, yeah, they
14 had radios, but they had wire. Then all of a sudden we started running into .50 caliber
15 machine guns in triangular positions, anti-aircraft weapons deployed in triangular
16 positions which was the typical defensive position for anti-aircraft. Within the first day
17 one of our ships was shot down immediately, killed the whole crew. Steve Asbelt, Baker,
18 I can't remember the crew chief and gunner. They were shot down and we lost the
19 aircraft. We had other aircraft shot up. The Marines were really getting wiped out and
20 the Rangers were holding their own pretty well. They were doing okay. About the
21 second or third day that they were in there and we were supporting them they were trying
22 to maneuver around and get through town, we were getting air support, A1-Es,
23 supposedly Vietnamese A1-Es, but they were American. We called them blue-eyed
24 VNAF. You'd call up the FAC and he'd say, 'I got blue eyed VNAF for you.' It was
25 American pilots, it was not Vietnamese pilots. We'd say, 'Good!' I can remember one
26 of them, we were receiving some .50-caliber fire and I said, 'We've got to get out there in
27 this one area and put another lift in. We're going to bring some more troops in,' and the
28 guy said, 'Just tell me where you want them,' so we said, 'Okay,' and we marked it with
29 a couple of rockets and this guy rolls in with this A1-E and he starts shooting 20
30 millimeter cannon and some .50 caliber tracers coming down and then here come .50
31 caliber tracers coming back up the other way and the two of them are getting nose to nose

1 and these guys just kept rolling in. You could see the stuff coming up at them and they
2 kept piling it on until they finally knocked them out. Then we were going to do an insert
3 later and we picked out a spot on the west side of the village and we got on short final
4 and all hell broke loose. What they'd done is they had ambushed the landing zone and
5 spider holes opened up and all sorts of stuff so we couldn't even make a landing. We just
6 pulled out, made a go-around with the lift ships, brought them around and landed back in
7 the South end of the village again where we'd gone in and passed and it was pretty safe
8 and secure, and that's when Benke I think got out with the Rangers and he actually was
9 on the east side of the village moving through a big old banana palm plantation and he'd
10 been moving along pretty good and then all of a sudden he was on the radio and he said,
11 'We're getting hit from all sides! I've been ambushed! We've gotten into the middle of
12 a bunker complex or something,' and he said, 'I'm cut off! I'm surrounded, and they're
13 going to take me,' and I was on the radio and I said, 'Where are you? Mark with smoke,'
14 and he said, 'Marking with green,' and he threw green smoke out and nothing happened.
15 It was a dud. I saw a little puff of white, a little ignition thing and I said, 'Don't see your
16 smoke,' and he said, 'Marking second,' and he threw another green smoke grenade and
17 green smoke grenades came up in about four places. They were monitoring our radio and
18 the VC had tossed out, or the NVA, had tossed out green smoke. I said, 'Did you have a
19 dud with your first smoke?' and he said, 'Yes,' and I said, 'I've got your position, I'm
20 coming in.' I was flying in an XM-3, which was a Hog, 48 rockets, B Model. The 48
21 rockets had jettison bolts that would blow. They had a little red switch on the console,
22 you could pop that, and the bolts would explode and the rocket pods would be jettisoned.
23 So, you could convert that into a Slick real fast. I told my fire team, I had four gunships
24 with me and I told the fire team, 'Cover me, I'm going in and getting him,' and I thought
25 I was only going to get Jim. So, where the smoke was I went in and made a landing into
26 the banana palms, just crash landing almost, boom, hit the ground, and six people are on
27 board; I've got five Vietnamese plus Jim! I thought, 'Well, should we try and jettison the
28 rockets and lighten this thing up a little bit, or should we try to get her out?' This was
29 done instantaneously almost. I said, 'We'll try to fly it out.' So, I started pulling in
30 power and with a UH-1 when you pull in power the governor feeds in gas and you keep
31 the RPM up until it can't keep up. Well, it started bleeding off RPM. The thing's

1 supposed to fly at I think a minimum of 6200 RPMs, the bottom RPM. It bled down to
2 about 6200 and we were just starting to lift off and then you get an oral warning. It starts
3 telling you, 'Whoop! Whoop!' There's this thing that comes on your headset and it says,
4 'Low RPM Warning, whoop, whoop, whoop,' and a warning light on your dash board
5 comes on and says, 'RPM low.' Beep, it comes on, whoop, whoop, whoop coming on
6 your ears, and we're starting to lift off the ground, get light, and said, 'We're going.
7 We're going to get out of here,' and I said, 'If we can, we'll jettison but we'll shoot the
8 rockets first, use them for some useful purpose.' So, the minute you start to lift off and I
9 got a little bit of flight control, and the tail rotor was turning so slow that it was almost
10 without torque control. It was one of these things where it's almost wallowing, and
11 there's a banana palm and we fly right through it, bap, and hit this banana palm and my
12 little crew chief or my copilot, the warrant officer, he's sitting over there with eyes about
13 this big and I said, 'Keep your hand on the jettison switch.' So, we armed up the rockets
14 and I started shooting them off a pair at a time and just shot them right in front of us. I
15 was going, 'Boom, boom, boom,' and as the aircraft was coming up I was picking up just
16 enough speed to get going and a pair of rockets were going out and just shooting a path
17 out so everybody that was in front of it was kind of ducking. As we picked up speed, I
18 looked up to my right and here came a fire team. Two of my gunships were getting on
19 my side and I said, 'Okay, start giving me fire down beside me,' so they start shooting
20 right beside me, so I'm coming up shooting a pair and I'm getting machine gun fire down
21 the side and I look up and the ship on the right front was trailing smoke. It had a big trail
22 of smoke coming out and I said, I think it was Raider 21, Paul Murray and Dan Sullivan,
23 and I said, 'You've been hit, you're on fire. You're trailing smoke,' and he said, 'Roger
24 that, we got a warning light,' and so he started to turn and I just followed because by then
25 I was getting air speed up and he was starting to turn and we just turned and went back to
26 the village which was safe. It was off to our left. As we turned and went back to the
27 village and just got south of that, he goes, 'Whooo,' and hits a tree and inverts. I see him
28 hit the trees. He's coming in and by then the aircraft's not flying, it's just going down,
29 and he hits the top of the tree and the tree goes out and he inverts and goes in upside
30 down. I thought, 'Damn, you lost them all,' and a big cloud of black smoke and fire and
31 everything. He'd inverted and the transmission and rotor had gone into the basement of

1 an old, abandoned French house and all the heavy stuff went down into the basement and
2 all the fuselage stayed above ground. Of course they're in upside down. As soon as I get
3 around them and can get around on the outside of land, there's a road there. I land down
4 and jump out and grab of all things a fire extinguisher and I run back and I'm going to
5 squirt this little five pound fire extinguisher, and when I get back there, Danny Sullivan,
6 the copilot, has got Paul Murray, the platoon leader, out of the aircraft and he's on the
7 ground with him and another aircraft from the battalion, that was with the airlift battalion,
8 comes in and he's lined at the...I forgot the name, it's got a picture in that book. He's
9 there helping put out a defensive perimeter while Benky and his guys, he had five
10 ARVN, they put a defensive perimeter around our aircraft that landed. We're in a hostile
11 zone. We get Paul out and we get Danny out and we get the gunner and the crew chief
12 out and we load them into a couple of the other lift ships that were sitting there and
13 Benky said, 'Take me back to the village.' He wants to go back to his headquarters was
14 in the village, and I said, 'Jim, are you okay, buddy?' So we pulled him out and flew him
15 back to where his headquarters was. He rejoined his unit, what was left of it; they were
16 wiped out. We get Danny off. He's okay. Paul has to be Medevaced out. He's gone,
17 he's shipped out back to the States. I didn't get a round, not a round in that aircraft; can't
18 understand why. We cleared the banana palms; when we came out, we followed the
19 gunship right until it crashed.

20 SM: Not a single hit on your aircraft?

21 JJ: Not a single hit.

22 SM: Do you know how many friendly Vietnamese were killed in that action?

23 JJ: Oh yeah, I think it was something like 70%. We were there the next day. We
24 came back and were supporting them again the next day. We brought more troops. We
25 brought the Red Hats in, we brought the Vietnamese Red Hat Airborne Brigade and they
26 became part of the backup force that went in. Once they got deployed we were in the
27 village. I've got a picture in my scrapbook of our aircraft sitting in the village. They
28 brought through six or seven deuce and a half trucks with bodies laying in the beds of
29 those trucks, full, like cordwood. They just policed up the battlefield and they were just
30 laying them in there like cordwood. There were six or seven trucks full of bodies, just
31 stacked up as much as they could put into a truck.

1 SM: How about American casualties?

2 JJ: I don't think we had any. There were only advisors there. The advisor had an
3 RTO, had a radiotelephone operator with him, and the advisor.

4 SM: How about the guys that were wounded?

5 JJ: Yeah, we had aircraft hit later. We lost a crew of the aircraft, one of my
6 gunships that went in. I can't recall that we had anybody else. That operation went on,
7 now...that's when I got wounded later on. It was a continuation of this operation. This
8 was in December and in February and we were still chasing that same unit. Again,
9 during another combat assault there were several aircrafts shot down including another
10 one of my gunships and when I was trying to go in and rescue the crew of that downed
11 ship was when I got hit because there were just too many wounded on the ground. The
12 Medevacs were already filled and they were calling for help and again I thought, 'Well,
13 I'll go in and if I need to I can jettison the rockets and make it a Slick,' and I got within
14 about 100 yards of them and got ate alive. That's what I was going to do.

15 SM: What about the guy that got hit in the chest?

16 JJ: Neal?

17 SM: Yes.

18 JJ: He was dead.

19 SM: I was curious, did you think that time or was it ever discussed that perhaps
20 that was a sniper?

21 JJ: No, it was .50 caliber. There was no question it was an entrenched gun
22 position that was in that landing zone. They had ambushed the landing zone. Their
23 intention was that when we came in we had a .50 caliber set up at the end of the landing
24 zone and they were going to eat us alive. They got the first ship and then with the rest of
25 the prep that we put on them we either discouraged them, got them, or something because
26 when the rest of the lift came in they got hit from both sides when Neal was killed but
27 there was no more .50 caliber out of the front of the landing zone. That's where it was
28 because Jared was marking, he was really marking the landing zone. He was going right
29 down the middle of it and his mission was go right through the middle of the landing
30 zone and when it came to the touch down point he dropped a smoke grenade at them, and
31 as he hit the middle of the landing zone he hit one and that's when that .50 took them

1 under fire and hit him head on, and Mack was in the right seat and took the round right
2 through the chest and I can remember looking at that aircraft sitting back on a ramp that
3 afternoon when we got back, looking at the size of that hole and that gun mount. I mean,
4 if you look at that gun sight it's a solid piece of...it's channel steel bolted on the front of
5 the cockpit, and that round came through that piece of steel about that thick. A .50 is a
6 big hole, it's a big hole.

7 SM: This will end CD 1 of the interview with Jack Johnson.

8 SM: This is CD number 2 of the interview with Jack Johnson on the 1st of
9 November, year 2000. All right, Kim, do you have any questions you'd like to ask Mr.
10 Johnson?

11 Kim Sawyer: Yes. You mentioned earlier about the free fire zones and rules of
12 engagement?

13 JJ: Yes.

14 KS: I was just wondering who made the designation that that was a free fire zone
15 and how did that change depending upon the activity?

16 JJ: Generally that came down through our operations and it came down through
17 the advisory group activity. The advisors that were in the field fed back through their
18 chain of command areas that they felt were totally dominated by NVA or VC and then
19 areas that they were not getting into. So, they would designate these areas as being in
20 enemy hands, and activity that was suspicious or were fired upon that was free to fire
21 back. There was no restrictions on it, including a lot of the canals where there was
22 Sampan traffic, and some of it was if you saw any activity movement in some of those
23 areas it was either sympathetic with or involved in movement of NVA/VC equipment in
24 the Sampans. So, some of the times if you were out and you saw Sampans, you had free
25 fire to shoot at them. The no fire zones, again, were designated through operations.
26 Before we'd go on a mission we were briefed and the operations officer would have the
27 operations situation map and he'd say, 'This is an area you're working in. The ARVN 1st
28 Division is over there. You can't shoot over there. This area is a free fire zone,' and
29 you'd mark it on your map. We all carried maps with us. There wasn't a time that we
30 didn't carry a map with us.

1 KS: Were there any instances where mistakes were made, or was that, again,
2 pretty...

3 JJ: Yes, we know there were because one of the things that happened was when
4 friendlies were killed there was solation pay, and this was handled again by the advisory
5 group and the MAG. If someone was inadvertently killed, the family was given some
6 pay. They were compensated for it. They were paid it was called solation pay, and we
7 would be informed. That would usually happen later. It would be a week or so later
8 somebody would say, 'During that operation so and so, you were firing in this area. It
9 was recording that someone was killed in there and we've paid solation pay.' That
10 happened all the way through. It still was happening in '67-'68. I can't say what
11 happened after '68, I wasn't there, but I'm sure it was pretty common practice if for some
12 reason or another your fire resulted in the death of a friendly, they were given some sort
13 of compensation.

14 SM: Any other questions?

15 KS: You mentioned the province chief, Vietnamese province chief?

16 JJ: Yes.

17 KS: Could you tell me a little bit more about that? That was their commander?

18 JJ: Yeah, every province had an infrastructure that was militarily sort of oriented.
19 Each village had a chief. He, in turn, reported to the province chief. The province chiefs
20 as I recall were appointed by the government, so there was some politics involved in
21 being a province chief. I think in the true democratic sense it would be somewhat akin to
22 maybe a governor or mayor. The village had a headman, the province had a headman. It
23 was sort of that relationship. Province chiefs were involved in CORDS and AID. A lot
24 of the province chiefs were involved in distribution of housing materials, building
25 materials, food, clothing, medicines, so forth that were given out through AID and
26 thorough the CORDS activities where they were pacifying areas and pacifying villages.
27 So, they would go in and work with province chiefs. Some of the province chiefs were
28 pretty honest. Some of them were pretty corrupt. Some of the material came in, and we
29 built lots and lot and lots of metal roofed buildings, galvanized steel. Rather than provide
30 that to the villages for their own use they were selling it to them, things like that. So,
31 there was some corruption and some distribution, stealing materials and reselling it,

1 things like that. Some of the province chiefs were just straight on and others were just
2 feathering their own nest. That happens wherever you go. Again, that's kind of the way
3 of doing business in Southeast Asia, where you pay a little bit and give a little favor.
4 There's always a little kickback for the person who has the power and the authority.
5 That's the way it worked.

6 KS: That's it.

7 SM: Speaking of the AID and the later the CORDS project, how much civic
8 action did your UTT unit engage in while you were there? Do you recall?

9 JJ: Not a whole lot. Occasionally, this is certainly a funny way to do it, but
10 occasionally some of the pacified villages where they actually had all our RF/PF,
11 Regional Force/Popular Force troops that were involved in some of these little outposts,
12 they had four or five villages where the outposts were set up and the village was
13 supposedly secure. Occasionally at night we'd get called out and we'd go out and just
14 shoot around the perimeter just to show that we were able to respond to their needs, had
15 they been hit or were they to be hit. We'd get a mission and they'd say, 'Go out and
16 make contact with people in the village,' or they'd say, 'Make a circle around the north
17 end of the village and just hose down the area out there where the barbed wire and stuff
18 is,' to show that the fire power was available. That was sort of a morale factor for the
19 village that people are here that will help us if we do get under attack, and if we do resist
20 the VC efforts to take over our area. That was kind of what we were involved in.

21 SM: No building activities, schools, roads?

22 JJ: Per se, we didn't. The only activity as a unit was that we were supporting an
23 orphanage in downtown Saigon and that was strictly a volunteer thing. A couple of our
24 guys were downtown and ran into this thing, this orphanage, and decided that they were
25 going to just become helpers. So what we would do is we would take C-rations down.
26 We always held C-rations. We carried them in the aircraft with us all the time, and a lot
27 of times we were supporting lift ships in the field that had more C-rations left over at the
28 end of the day than they needed, if they were coming back in. So what we'd do is we'd
29 load any excess that we could get our hands on and we'd take them down and we gave
30 them to the nuns. It was a Catholic orphanage and we'd give them to the nuns and they
31 would feed the children. They were in need...the babies, I've got pictures in my photo

1 albums. These poor little kids were just in terrible conditions; malnourished, and of
2 course the C-rations were so rich in food value that you can start feeding them that stuff
3 and it would do wonders. It was almost as good as medicine. We liberated plywood to
4 rebuild their roof. It caved in. I've got a picture of us rebuilding their roof. One or two
5 of my guys were talking about adopting some children to take them home. Gary Ramage
6 was going to do that. He was talking about adopting a Vietnamese child and taking it
7 home. I don't know whether he did or not. He very well may have as I recall. I think
8 when he did depart he had made arrangements to take a Vietnamese baby back with him.
9 So, from that standpoint, I guess that was one of the neat things we were engaged in,
10 building a relationship with the Vietnamese.

11 SM: How many men from your unit volunteered for that activity, do you recall?

12 JJ: Well, my whole platoon, three fire teams, 15-20 of us. We wrote letters home
13 and asked churches and individuals to send clothing. We got several big boxes of
14 clothing, baby clothing that had been used. We had some new stuff, too. But, mainly we
15 just needed anything. We had several boxes come in of clothing that was mailed from
16 the States that we took down there. In fact, the video that I gave to you, it's got a shot of
17 the orphanage and some of the people down there. Then I saw on another video later
18 something about this, and again, it was pictures of our unit that another independent
19 organization, I think it was on the History Channel that I saw a piece on this orphanage.
20 It was a pretty well known orphanage in downtown Saigon. But, I think we were the
21 only American unit that was doing anything directly with it at the time.

22 SM: Did that program that you saw on television discuss your unit?

23 JJ: No, didn't discuss our unit, but our people were there. I recognized our people
24 in the picture.

25 SM: Why don't you go ahead and discuss the circumstances surrounding the
26 operation when you were injured.

27 JJ: It was a Red Hat Brigade, a continuation of the Ben Gia operation. As things
28 started to quiet down, we were still going hot and heavy, the Red Hats were finally
29 committed, the Airborne Brigade out of Saigon which was then the paddle scared and
30 they were really an elite outfit and mainly they did not go much out of the Saigon area.
31 But, they committed them and we were landing them, putting them into a landing zone

1 and it had been burned off two or three days before. We put some fire down and caught
2 the grass on fire and it had burned the entire landing zone up, so it was all dark, black,
3 sooty. The first lift that came in just almost went on instrument flight rules, just dust and
4 dirt and stuff was flying up. It was ambushed. There was heavy forces around it and on
5 the first lift we lost two aircraft. Bang, bang, two lift ships were shot down. A friend of
6 mine who was commanding the 57th Medevac Unit, Howard Huntsman was the lead
7 dustoff pilot and Howard was on the radio and we were escorting him in. We were trying
8 to get the medevacs in and Howard was on the ground and one of my gunships got shot
9 down while they were covering the medevac. I saw the ship go down and John Urban
10 and Jim Rice, the pilot and aircraft commander, and Jim was on the radio and he said,
11 'John's been hit bad,' and I said, 'I'll see if I can't get in to help you,' and so again, I had
12 the rocket ship and so rather than keep the rockets on I just made another firing run. I
13 said, 'Well they're still shooting at us. I'll just go back and make another run and maybe
14 that'll give me enough time to get in,' so I came back around the LZ and I just laid all the
15 rockets I had out along the tree line and just as I came around I made another turn and
16 went right were the aircraft was on the ground. I could see it laying on the ground. I got
17 within about 100 yards of it or so and as I started to flare the aircraft up to decelerate the
18 land, a stream of tracers came across the nose and we could hear firing and we knew we
19 were being fired at and I said, 'As long as he's out there leading it we're okay,' we could
20 see the rounds going by. Then all of a sudden, they disappeared. When they
21 disappeared, bap, they were in the...he quickly, he got back in the cockpit. I took one
22 through the door, it came right up through the right side of the door, missed the shielding
23 that we put down, the bulletproof shielding that was there, came underneath it, and I was
24 holding on to the cyclic with my right hand and it hit my right arm. It took a half an inch
25 of this bone out of the radius, just blew it out, and the bullet went right out through the
26 windshield in front of me. We were in a steep deceleration at that point, about 25-30 feet
27 in the air, and my copilot Jack Saint was already unstrapping. He'd pulled his safety
28 harness and he was getting ready to go jump out to go load folks in, help them, when we
29 touched down. I stepped on the...we had a mic button with our foot and I reached over
30 with my left foot because my right arm came off the cyclic and went up in the air and
31 came back in my lap and I looked down and I knew I'd been hit. So I grabbed the cyclic

1 left handed, and pulled the pitch up, stuck my knee under it, so that meant we were
2 getting power and starting to climb, grabbed cyclic left handed and pushed it forward to
3 go leave the landing zone, stepped on the mic button with my left foot and I told Jack, I
4 said, 'Jack, take over, I've been hit.' Well, I broadcast it so everybody heard it, and
5 started saying, '[Two Sects?] been hit! Where are you hit? Are you all right? Are you
6 coming out?' so Jack took over and we cleared the landing zone and there was a staging
7 area where the medevacs were also gathering up all of the area. As they would bring
8 them out they would consolidate them in one spot and then load them and take them back
9 to Saigon. We flew clear of the landing zone, put a tourniquet around, put a bandage
10 around, Jack flew us down, I got out of my ship, walked over to the medevac ship that
11 was there. By that time they had gotten to the downed gunship that I was trying to get to
12 and John Urban was killed. John Urban was the copilot and they had him already loaded
13 on board. I crawled in and John and I flew back to Saigon together, John dead and me
14 wounded. Anyway, when I got back later maintenance officer came in and took one look
15 at the ship and says, 'This thing ain't flying anywhere.' He said, 'I'm surprised you even
16 got out of the landing zone with it.' The rotor head had taken a round right up through
17 the main spar. The main spar is a big beam, it's like an I-beam that runs right down the
18 middle of the rotor head and it bolts onto the rotor head itself and it is the structural
19 member that keeps the rotor head stiff and gives it lifting power. The round had gone
20 right up through that beam and you could have folded it just as easy [?]. I had taken
21 another round right through the door, right behind my ear, and it missed my head about
22 that much. Had I not been leaning forward, I would have probably gotten it right in the
23 ear. They found four more hits back in the fuselage in the tail and one back by the tail
24 rotor gearbox. They had eaten it alive. I had a camera hanging on an emergency release
25 knob on the door, a little yellow handle up there, a 35 millimeter camera that always hung
26 there and I could reach up and grab it and take pictures, and one of the guys took my
27 camera and took pictures of the ship after I was gone. I got pictures of my bloody
28 cockpit and the holes and all of the rest of the aircraft, and when my stuff got home after I
29 was Medevaced out, here came my camera. I looked in it and I said, 'Some son of a gun
30 took my film out of the camera!' What he had done is he had run all the film through and
31 the completed role was still in it so I took it out and developed it and there were all the

1 pictures of the downed aircraft and what was left of it after I got out. They flew me off to
2 the Navy hospital in Saigon which is the only real operating facility so we had some of
3 the MASH units out and around the true hospital with the capability of doing major work
4 was in Saigon, the Navy hospital. I arrived at the same time that a bunch of the other Red
5 Hats arrived out of the landing zone. They were bringing in all the wounded. Mine was
6 not a very serious injury. Your arm is a long way from your heart, so they were taking
7 care of the really seriously wounded guys first. They bandaged me up, and I wasn't in
8 shock, and he gave me a shot of morphine and they set me off in a corner and I sat there
9 and enjoyed the afternoon until they were able to get in there and do some surgery. They
10 did surgery there. I stayed overnight in the hospital. The next morning I was taken to
11 Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base and was on a C-130 and was Medevaced to Clark Air
12 Force Base in the Philippines. I arrived at Clark in the evening, about ten or 11 o'clock
13 in the evening. We left that morning and flew up to Clark and by the time we got to
14 Clark it was late afternoon/evening. I went back into surgery again that night. They did
15 some more cleaning and put a cast on it, and then the next day about a day I think, these
16 are kind of fuzzy because I was under sedation some of it, I was Medevaced back to
17 Travis Air Force Base. I arrived at Travis...I was wounded on the 9th, I was in Travis on
18 the 14th, which was Easter...no, maybe it was Easter. Anyway, I came back and it was a
19 holiday, I don't remember, and I arrived at Travis. I stayed overnight there. I didn't do
20 any more real work. I was Medevaced again to Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver and
21 arrived in Denver on the 15th or 16th of February in a short sleeved khaki uniform with
22 about 12 inches of snow on the ground. Eight and a half months in Vietnam in hot,
23 humid weather, and the only thing I'd left with was what I was in hand, and then the guys
24 brought me down a shaving kit, a gym bag, and a short sleeved khaki uniform which all
25 the stuff I had there when I was Medevaced and they said, 'This ought to get you home!'
26 and I arrived at Denver in a short sleeved khaki uniform with snow on the ground and
27 went to Fitz. I was almost a year, I was almost 11 months at Fitz in recovery.

28 SM: Now was your wife at Denver when you arrived?

29 JJ: No. She flew in and my folks flew in, both my folks were still alive then, they
30 flew in the next day. I had a four-year-old daughter and she was not able to travel but she
31 was staying with her grandparents in Des Moines so the wife flew in, my folks flew in,

1 and they saw me the next day. I was ambulatory. I could walk around. I was not injured
2 to the point that I couldn't walk around. It took about a year in Denver. The difficulty
3 was that the long extensors, all of the stuff that works the top of your hand were cut off.
4 They were amputated. They were gone. They were just blown away. In order to fix
5 them they had to take a graft off the front of my thigh and put a graft on it and then the
6 blood circulation was so poor, when you're all scarred up, [?] time for the bone to heal
7 and the bone took a long time to heal. So, after about a month the hospital said, 'Hey, go
8 on, get yourself an apartment and check in every Monday morning. We want to see you
9 once a week,' so my wife and I, we brought our daughter out and we went down and
10 rented a little apartment. I bought a Volkswagen Carmangia convertible. I could steer it
11 left-handed. It had a short enough turning radius that I could drive it left-handed. I could
12 grab a hold of the gearshift knob with my right arm in a cast and I could shift that four-
13 speed gearbox, so we went to the mountains and camped out. We drove down to
14 Colorado Springs. We went to the Broadmore Hotel, led the tourist life for about nine
15 months, just had a lot of fun.

16 SM: When did you find out your next duty assignment in terms of leaving the
17 hospital and actually getting back into the...

18 JJ: When I was wounded I was on orders for Command General Staff College.
19 When I was wounded, the orders were cancelled. When I was in the hospital during the
20 summer of '66 it was obvious that I would be able to get out and probably be eligible for
21 the next class. So, they told me yeah, I'd be enrolled in the next class starting the next
22 summer, so in June of '66. When I got out of the hospital, which I think was in May or
23 something like that I went down to Ft. Rucker and was requalified. It was very short,
24 only six weeks that I was down there. Then I went back down because I'd been taken off
25 flight status and I had to requalify and at that time to requalify you had to have a
26 complete physical with a flight surgeon. You had to go out and fly in all the aircraft that
27 you were qualified to fly with a flight surgeon and an instructor pilot and they would put
28 you through all of the emergency procedures that you would be expected to perform in
29 and the flight surgeon would evaluate your physical capability to do that and the
30 instructor pilot would evaluate your flying capability to do that and then you went before
31 a board, and then the board would either reinstate you to flying status or not. I went

1 before the board and was reinstated to flying status. So, we got through that. They sent
2 me back to Leavenworth to school and I completed Command and General Staff School
3 in June of '67 or July of '67 and was back in Vietnam in September. My wife's comment
4 was, 'You've already been there once and been shot; why are they sending you back?'
5 And the obvious answer was, 'Everybody is going back.' It didn't matter if you'd been
6 there once, you were going back.

7 SM: What did they focus on at the Command and General Staff College?

8 JJ: We did get some counterinsurgency training. We did get some advisory duty
9 training. We had some people who had been over there already. Some of our classmates
10 had been advisors and were back and some of our people had been on the...what's the
11 White Star Operation in Laos, the classified operation where we had advisors that had
12 already been in Laos a couple of years, a couple of our guys had been on that and it was a
13 classified mission. They couldn't talk about it. But we did get counterinsurgency and
14 Special Forces briefings and some theory about how the war would be fought in
15 counterinsurgency conditions. But, it wasn't all that much practical because things were
16 changing so fast then because '65 to '66 the first big American units started to be
17 inserted, I mean the organized American units. The 173rd Airborne Brigade went in and
18 then some of the divisional units were starting to come in and they were fighting a
19 completely different war than we were with the Vietnamese. They were so much more
20 aggressive and so much more in field and deeply involved.

21 SM: Well at the CGSC, did they talk about the large battalion sweep operations
22 that were currently underway in Vietnam?

23 JJ: Yes.

24 SM: In terms of counterinsurgency policy and theory, wasn't there a...

25 JJ: Sort of a disconnect, they were starting to run into more big, organized NVA
26 units also. It was clear that we were not now just fighting little local Vietnamese, Viet
27 Cong kinds of cells. They were running into regimental sized units, battalion sized units,
28 well equipped units, so it was obvious this was turning for more of a counterinsurgency
29 and a head on war, a war of attrition. That was going to be the outcome was going to be
30 a war of attrition and it was a war, 'Let's go find them and fight them.' It turned into
31 more body count kind of stuff later on.

1 SM: Was that discussed at CGSC, the attrition war that was developed and the
2 body count mentality?

3 JJ: No, not that I can recall. It was more, 'Gee whiz, that division is getting in
4 there fighting a battalion, I'm telling you, fighting a battalion!' kind of thing, because we
5 were used to ten, 12, 15 folks that fight, disappear, disengage, and these guys were
6 standing and fighting. They were going nose to nose with some of the division size units
7 with all of the assets that the division had, I mean aviation and field artillery and so forth.

8 SM: And what about at CGSC, the emphasis on joint operations and also
9 multinational operations? Was that a heavy component?

10 JJ: No, because the only thing that happened then was we had the Yom Kippur
11 War, and other than our focus on Vietnam, other than the basic, divisional kinds of unit
12 training that everybody received in CGSC, we did not focus on much other than Vietnam
13 and kind of what was happening in the Yom Kippur War. CGSC is really plain vanilla
14 divisional tactics. You learn how to write an ops order. You learned what a division is
15 made of, what the discom is. You have to worry about supplies. A lot of that is just plain
16 learning what everything else is involved...you get out of a small unit and all of us grow
17 up and become battery commanders and do things as a battery, well, now you're talking a
18 division. Beyond learning the intricacies of what a staff officer in a division would do,
19 we weren't focusing on any other wars that were going on or any joint operations that
20 might happen in the future. Nobody was fighting the battle of Russia and Germany. That
21 would be the setting for some of our tactical scenarios. But, you weren't judged on your
22 theory of how to beat the Russians. You were judged on whether you had the right
23 supply information down to support an armored operation. If you were thinking of
24 supplying an armored division, you had to think of how much POL and how much
25 ammunition and how much food and that kind of stuff and that was what they were
26 looking for was were you aware of those kinds of operational levels.

27 SM: Now when you went back to Vietnam, you took over the 188th AHC?

28 JJ: Yes.

29 SM: That was an assault helicopter company?

30 JJ: Yes.

1 SM: What was there from CGSC that you took with you that was most important
2 as a field commander in Vietnam? Was there anything?

3 JJ: Probably not other than as a commander talking to other guys that have been
4 involved, it was the amount of effort that it took just to take care of your people; not to
5 just fight them, just to take care of them. How do you house them, feed them, clothe
6 them, keep them happy, deal with their personal problems? That was as much a job or
7 more than fighting. Fighting was fairly easy, but everything else that came to a
8 commander's desk was what you didn't get much training in. When I got in country, I
9 had two choices; I was Chinook qualified in the 205th Assault Support Helicopter
10 Company was available. The commander was leaving. That job was open, I was
11 qualified to fill in. I'd been promoted to major. I was promoted to major when I was in
12 the hospital. The 269th Battalion, which was in Cu Chi, had three assault helicopter
13 companies, the 116th, the 188th, and the 187th. They had had a terrible safety record.
14 They had many, many accidents. They had lost crews through accidents. They'd lost
15 aircraft through accidents, and Jim Merriman was bound and determined that he was
16 going to do something that was going to stop the unnecessary and just plain stupid losses.
17 I was a safety officer. I was qualified. I'd gone through USC, the safety school at the
18 University of Southern California, and so Jim grabbed me off from the 12th Aviation
19 Group. When I processed in I went to the 12th Aviation Group. Nick Sackey was the
20 commander and Nick was saying, 'You're probably going to be a commander here and
21 the 205th is open, but Jim Merriman wants you and I've known Jim since we were
22 captains,' and I knew Jim was a hard charging, hard fighting air guy, and a guy who was
23 going places. He was moving. So, I said, 'I will go work for Jim Merriman if that's
24 alright with you.' So, I went up for three months as Jim Merriman's safety officer and he
25 sent me out through every one of the units that was under his command. We had a
26 Chinook outfit, we had a 242nd, we had a Birddog Company, the 21st and we had three
27 Combat Aviation guys, Assault Helicopter Companies. 188th was by far the worst
28 condition. We had lost two aircraft through a midair collision, lost all the crew. We'd
29 dumped another one in the river and drown half the crew. The maintenance officer, he
30 killed himself in the rain in the middle of the night doing an autorotation right in front of
31 all the maintenance crew. I mean, they're all out there working away and all of a sudden

1 this airplane goes [makes driving noise] crash, and kills him and the crew that was on
2 board right in the runway, right beside the maintenance hanger. So, morale was down,
3 operations were down. It was just an outfit that was in deep, deep trouble. I was doing
4 my safety officer thing and we got some other things going that stopped some of the
5 accidents or at least got them thinking more of operating in a safe manner rather than just
6 a wild, hairy young flier doing things to hurt themselves and aircraft. When I got that
7 kind of settled down Jim said, 'What do you want to do? Do you want to go over and
8 take that Chinook outfit, or do you want to go with an Assault Helicopter Company?' and
9 I said, 'Jim, I'll take the Assault Helicopter Company,' and he said, 'Which one do you
10 want?' and I said, 'The 188th.' That's how I got it.

11 SM: What were the primary reasons the accident level in the 188th was so high.
12 Do you remember?

13 JJ: Lack of training, lack of experience, lack of discipline. Young pilots sticking
14 their neck out further than they could recover from, and when I'd gone around and looked
15 at the unit the discipline in the unit was not what I would have expected it to be. It was a
16 loosey-goosey bunch of guys. Come to an operational briefing, come dragging in,
17 shower shoes and flip-flops and shorts and chewing on a steak bone or something
18 carrying a beer. 'Guys, this ain't the way you prepare for an operation. You bring your
19 map. You come ready to go. You come sober; that helps!' The commander was
20 allowing things like that to happen and I said, 'It ain't going to happen on my watch.'

21 SM: So the problem was leadership or a vacuum in the leadership?

22 JJ: Yes. The first commander who'd formed the unit at Ft. Campbell, nice guy,
23 brought the unit over as a cohesive unit, trained together in the States, had never flown
24 with infused combat experienced pilots, parked all the aircraft on the runway one night in
25 close proximity and they got mortared for about an hour. 31 aircraft, 27 of them were
26 knocked out of action that night, with several people wounded. First day in country they
27 lost a guy, killed at the port. He was sitting under a trailer and the trailer collapsed on
28 him and killed him. Three nights later they had moved into their base camp in Dau
29 Tieng, they got hit and took a round in the back of the main bunker, and four more guys
30 killed. It wasn't within three or four weeks later we had the mid-air collision. We had the
31 one ducked into the Nha Be River. We had a maintenance officer kill himself. Guys

1 were just killing themselves right and left, and the unit was just not performing. He was
2 relieved.

3 SM: That commander was?

4 JJ: Yes, he was relieved and another guy came in and took over. He really didn't
5 want to be a commander of an Assault Helicopter Company but he took the job and he
6 did the best he could, but he just never would...he didn't require any kind of professional
7 performance.

8 SM: What was the biggest difference your second tour compared to when you
9 first arrived? Maybe something that sticks out in your mind as the biggest immediate
10 difference that you noticed?

11 JJ: I think maybe the big base camp secure area to the outlying in the firefight all
12 the time units. Saigon, Long Binh, Bien Hoa, it was almost like being at home. Huge
13 depots, night clubs, just everything going on in those areas and then 60 miles away we're
14 sitting out in the middle of the road in Plantation getting mortared every night, fighting
15 all day long; just a dichotomy. The first tour we lived almost like tourists. We were in a
16 villa, the Rex Hotel was the Officer's Club downtown. You could sit on the roof at night
17 and watch the firefights around the outside, drinking a martini! This time, Long Binh had
18 kind of taken over that whole atmosphere of here's almost living in a safe, secure,
19 touristy area and we're sticking out there on the outside getting shot at every time you
20 moved. It's just a difference, a whole difference in the intensity of the war if you will, an
21 intensity in the actions and number of units that were involved. We were supporting the
22 25th Division and I was living with the 2nd Brigade of the 25th, 2nd or 3rd Brigade. We
23 were their direct support. I knew every battalion commander because I worked with
24 them daily. As the commander of the assault helicopter company, my job was every
25 morning to have...if you wanted to lose your job, you did not come up with ten flyable
26 lift ships, three gunships, and a C&C, command and control. If you didn't have that
27 flyable, ready to go every morning, your job was on the line because that was your
28 requirements to support that division every day. Every day we would go out and I would
29 pick up a battalion commander somewhere and he'd brief me on his operations and I
30 would fly him in my command and control ship and I would put my ten lift ships and my
31 gunships at his disposal. That was the daily routine. We were involved every day with

1 that battalion commander and the battalion commanders of the brigade. We became
2 friends with them, they were our buddies. We put their troops in, we defended their
3 troops, we fed their troops, we medevaced their troops. We did everything for them.

4 SM: What was your authorized strength in helicopters?

5 JJ: 31.

6 SM: So out of those 31, you at least had to have 14 operational every morning?

7 JJ: Every morning. You had to have ten lift ships and three guns. I think I had
8 eight gunships, I had one C&C, and the rest were all lift ships. One other was a
9 maintenance officer's aircraft. I grabbed his maintenance ship whenever I needed to haul
10 troops.

11 SM: Were there ever any incidents where you had a hard time having 14
12 operational?

13 JJ: Absolutely.

14 SM: What were the biggest causes of not having an aircraft operational while you
15 were there?

16 JJ: Maintenance, repair of damaged aircraft and operation before, whether it be
17 hit or parts would wear out. Gee whiz, the day before the change of command ceremony,
18 I went down to the unit to play Peter Pilot. I went down just to fly with them because I
19 was going to be their commander the next day. So, we were going on a combat assault
20 and I was flying left seat...no, I was flying right seat with a young warrant officer who
21 was my superior at that time. He was the aircraft commander so he was my superior,
22 really. Ten ship lift, we were coming out of a landing zone, a quiet landing zone, no fire
23 or anything and something gave loose in the rear and it was a tail rotor gear box or the
24 tail rotor drive shaft or the 42 degree gear box or something terrible ripping, tearing,
25 crunching sound and the airplane pitches up and starts to invert this way and we get it
26 back under control and I'm in the tenth ship in the formation and I get out a quick
27 mayday, 'Mayday, mayday, number ten's going in,' and I look down and there's nothing
28 but jungle, 250 foot of jungle, and there's one little green patch of bamboo. I said,
29 'That's where we're going!' We did a big flare autorotation down into that stuff and just
30 before we get into it I flared the aircraft up, zeroed the air speed complete stop, leveled it,
31 and we start down into the bamboo and the bamboo goes up beside the aircraft until I

1 can't wait any longer and I pull every pitch that we had and it went, 'Pop!' and we were
2 about two feet in the air and we landed. The nose bubble went, 'Pop!' because there was
3 a big old anthill that popped the chin bubble out. That's the only damage that was done
4 to the aircraft. The gearbox was gone and the nose bubble was out. I get that sucker out
5 of 200-foot jungle and back to be flyable the next day! We had stuff like that happen on
6 a daily basis. We'd had aircraft come back with things that need to be repaired and
7 getting parts and getting her flyable again was the tough job. The crew chiefs flew all
8 day, maintained at night. So, these guys are working around the clock. Maintenance
9 people could really only work at night because the ships were out during the daytime.
10 So, a maintenance officer would try to anticipate what he needed in the way of engines or
11 gearboxes or quill shafts or what was ever wearing out. He'd try to have them on hand
12 and then at night when we came back in he would work all night long to try to repair and
13 get things flying again the next morning. It was just a daily fight to maintain ten, three
14 and one

15 SM: What kind of recovery equipment did you have readily at your disposal?
16 Did you have a crane?

17 JJ: No, Pipe Smoke. Pipe Smoke was the call sign for the recovery unit. They
18 were out of Chieu Lai, or Phu Loi, they were out of Phu Loi Air Field. It was a CH-47
19 outfit and they had a ground recovery crew of guys who were able to train to secure a
20 downed aircraft and rig it for lift. What they would do is we would remove the guns and
21 the radios. Crew responsibility on downed aircraft was to take guns and radios out,
22 anything that the enemy could recover and use. So, we pull the guns and radios out. This
23 downed aircraft that I was on, climbed up on the roof, got up on the roof and put all the
24 radios and stuff up there and then another aircraft hovered down into the hole and we
25 handed off all this gear and then crawled up onto the aircraft, climbed up and then they
26 pulled us out. They brought the recovery crew in the same way. The recovery crew
27 hovered in and then jumped and put a double sling. The sling lift was about 50-75 feet
28 long I think it was. They put two of them together so they'd get on the rotor head and
29 they got the Chinook down in there low enough that they could hook on the Chinook and
30 they picked the aircraft up and hauled it straight up out of the jungle with a double sling

1 on it to get it out. Then they pulled it back and pulled it back to the airfield and set it
2 down where it could get back and repair it. That was the day before change of command.

3 SM: What was the turn around time for getting a recovery ship in there, from the
4 time you had made a...

5 JJ: If it was secure, if the area was secure, an hour. They were on standby. They
6 would be on standby at Phu Loi. They had a recovery kit that they carried with them, the
7 tie downs, all the necessary equipment had been measured and put together in the form of
8 a kit. Then they had usually a gun crew, a couple of gunships that would be standing by
9 to go in with them and provide gun cover and normally if they could we would get
10 ground troops to surround the aircraft. Now, when we parked that one in the jungle the
11 troops that we had just put in the landing zone were only a few hundred yards away. Just
12 as I came out of the landing zone is when he gave up, so I went right down in the jungle
13 right beside him. So, they hotfooted it across and before we were actually crawling up
14 into the recovery ship we were getting security guys on the downed aircraft so it was
15 secured. So, men came round and just went right on in and rigged it for lift and pulled it
16 out.

17 SM: During either your first or your second tours did you ever witness yourself
18 Operation RANCH HAND Missions, defoliation missions?

19 JJ: Yes.

20 SM: Could you discuss those a little bit?

21 JJ: We flew gun cover for them.

22 SM: Wow, okay.

23 JJ: Yeah, when they defoliated the Bolo Woods north of Saigon in '64, we flew
24 gun cover. We were personal friends of a lot of the Ranch Hand guys. They refueled
25 fuel off Saigon, Tan Son Nhut. The operation, they would go out, usually four C-123s
26 would fly in formation. They had A1-Es that would lay down suppressive fire in front of
27 usually four. What they'd do is they'd make cartwheel approaches on either side of the
28 formation and the Ranch Hands would fly through and the A1-Es would lay down 20
29 millimeter cannon fire and machine gun fire and then the Ranch Hands would come
30 through with the defoliators going full blast and we would trail in our armed helicopters
31 in case any one of them went down. Our mission then was to put suppressive fire around

1 and go in and pick up the crew if there was any way we could get a helicopter in to pick
2 the crew up. So, we trailed them. We've had Agent Orange all over us. It was flying all
3 over the cockpit. It was like in a rainstorm with windshield wipers going at times when
4 the stuff was hitting so hard.

5 SM: And this was '64?

6 JJ: Yes. Then they defoliated later on when we were in Dau Tieng and some of
7 the other outlying bases they defoliated around us and it would spray on us.

8 SM: And how close were your gunships usually to...they were flying 123s
9 weren't they?

10 JJ: C-123s.

11 SM: How close were you usually in the formation to the 123?

12 JJ: 100 yards, we'd fly off to the side. We'd trail them. We could fly almost as
13 fast as the 123 when they were on a defoliating run.

14 SM: Yeah, because they would have to slow down?

15 JJ: Yeah, they slowed them down and flew in formation. They were in a tight
16 four-ship formation. When they went through and laid a strip of it down, well we'd just
17 trail along beside.

18 SM: Was it normal for you to get the defoliant spray/mist on your aircraft? That
19 was pretty typical?

20 JJ: Sure.

21 SM: Do you recall how many missions you were on where you were supporting
22 them?

23 JJ: Four or five. They laid down a pretty wide trail when they went through.
24 They sprayed a lot of Agent Orange and it covered a wide area. It was usually one or two
25 or three trips through at a time and then they were done, that would be their run. They
26 also were limited by the amount of suppressive fire the A1-Es could put down who were
27 escorting also. They'd have a FAC there and the A1-Es would do a daisy chain in front
28 of them and one would just rake the area that they were going through with fire and that
29 would keep somebody's head down until the aircraft would pass over head and they were
30 just in a circle, sort of daisy chain for an A1-E usually. They'd come down and lay a
31 strip through. If they were going to lay two strips they'd come down and they'd go on in

1 and come back and that would be it usually. They could lay a strip down a couple three
2 or four miles long and a thousand yards wide, a couple thousand yards wide.

3 SM: Do you have any concerns about that in terms of potential...

4 JJ: Not really.

5 SM: You haven't had any of the problems that are listed by the Veteran's
6 Administration as potentially...

7 JJ: No, I haven't had any of the problems. I did not see...on my second tour I
8 was in areas that were defoliated and I didn't see any kind of response to the Vietnamese
9 population with the same kinds of diseases, rashes, malformed children or anything that I
10 was seeing. I'm a skeptical kind of a person anyway. It's got to be more than just being
11 exposed. That's not to say that there might not be something, I'm not saying, and there
12 may be people that are genetically built different than I am or something that it has more
13 of an effect on them, and yes, there may be some complications but I could not see it to
14 make a judgment I guess that there's some definite cause/effect relationship. '67-'68
15 after I got back to the Pentagon, several guys that were in the Ranch Hands were in the
16 Pentagon on duty in the Air Force. I played handball in the Pentagon athletic center with
17 one of the guys who was the commander of the Ranch Hands that I knew, and he was
18 perfectly healthy. If there was anybody that was going to be exposed to it, he was. He
19 flew those missions daily. He was, as far as I knew, fine and never had any adverse
20 reactions.

21 SM: So you're skeptical of current VA policy or current...

22 JJ: I'm not really sure either way. I don't discount that there are people who
23 definitely did respond to exposure to it and do suffer. I don't see that it is maybe that
24 great a problem, or as great a problem as a lot of people who want to get benefits,
25 handouts, and whatever. I would think maybe their background ought to be looked into
26 as to other things in their lifestyles that had gone on in the years that might have caused
27 just as many of their problems as Agent Orange, pointing it out and being specifically
28 oriented is the problem. There may be some other contributing factor that's guilty of it.

29 SM: Now when you would fly those missions, did you ever go back into those
30 areas and were we ever on missions where you were near those areas to see the results of
31 that defoliation?

1 JJ: Oh yes, yes.

2 SM: Was it effective from your perspective?

3 JJ: You bet! I've seen the Hobo Woods and the Bolo Woods disappear!

4 SM: Did that have an effect on enemy activity in those regions?

5 JJ: It was sure a lot easier to see into the areas where troops had been. You could
6 see trails that had been used that were prominent then when the foliage was taken away.
7 They did one other thing; they tried to set the whole thing on fire one time after it was
8 defoliated. They waited until everything turned brown and crispy and then they went in
9 and laid some napalm and were going to burn the whole thing down. It created such heat
10 that it created a thunderstorm. The air got vertical currents going so strong that a big old
11 thunderhead popped up over it and it rained on it and put the fire out! The same areas
12 were roamed plowed in '67-'68 when I came back. They were in there with roamed plows
13 and went back through a lot of the defoliated areas and roamed plowed a lot of the dead
14 trees and just cleaned acres and acres and acres of ground. They found all sorts of
15 bunkers and things when they went through. So, I've seen it when it was green, I saw it
16 when it was brown, I saw it when it was on fire and I saw it when it was roamed plowed. A
17 lot of the area that we operated in in the 188th was from Tay Ninh towards Saigon and
18 when I was in Saigon with the UTT it was Saigon towards Tay Ninh, and that was the
19 same area.

20 SM: Let's go ahead and talk about your time as commander of the 188th. What
21 were the biggest command challenges for you?

22 JJ: Taking care of the troops, housing, feeding, cleaning, entertaining, just
23 sanitary conditions, bathing, just setting up showers and keeping people clean and having
24 the water to drink. We didn't have potable water. We had to haul it all in.

25 SM: Where would you get your drinking water?

26 JJ: Water points. They had engineers that set up water points and we'd send
27 these big blivets, big rubber bladders, down that would be filled or tank trucks that were
28 filled and bring them back there. I mean, when we moved north there was nothing,
29 absolutely nothing, at LZ Sally when we arrived and I'd made a trip up. We had an
30 advance party. We went up about three days before we moved or four days and when I
31 came back we put everybody to work building showers, building latrines, because we had

1 none of that. Pretty soon we were going to have a brigade full of 2nd Brigade, 101st
2 Troops in there and a whole aviation company which is about 390 people and I mean just
3 think of the problem of trying to give someone a shower to clean them up and a place for
4 them to go to the bathroom. There was nothing. So, I came back and we secured
5 plywood. I mean, we cut toilet boxes, hack sawed them out so we had a place to go to
6 the bathroom. We put together showers and we took PCP pipe kind of stuff and
7 assembled it and then took it apart so that we could reassemble it and have a place for
8 guys to clean up. Feeding, water to wash pots and pans and utensils and latrines and so
9 forth, you couldn't. I mean, that was probably as big a challenge as...fighting the unit
10 wasn't anything. I mean, after a while everybody knew how to fight. They knew how to
11 do a combat assault, they knew how to fly their aircraft, they knew how to protect their
12 aircraft, they knew how to escort their aircraft. But, come back and house them and
13 clothe them and feed them, that was probably as big a challenge as any, and get their mail
14 through.

15 SM: In terms of support that you received from the higher headquarters or your
16 own devices, what did you have that was...what helped you the most?

17 JJ: Probably just being a good scrounger and using your head. A lot of times
18 we'd make a PX run, we'd haul the mail down. If you mail stuff within the 101st
19 Airborne, 2nd Brigade it had to go through the brigade of the division to some higher
20 headquarters and so forth. Well we were flying daily in and out of the major
21 headquarters in Da Nang and so forth, so just taking the mail down, delivering it to the
22 postal unit direct would save two to three to four weeks of man time because by the time
23 we consolidated one place and somebody could get it together to haul it to another place
24 to get it together to haul it to another place, two or three or four or five days has gone by.
25 So, just doing that was...we were talking earlier about food. When I got to Dau Tieng,
26 we were at the end of the supply line. Nothing got through to us that was fresh. It either
27 came in a can, or we didn't get it. So, I took a lieutenant and a jeep and a trailer and a
28 radio and put him in Saigon where they were forced issuing fresh fruit and vegetables and
29 stuff because they couldn't get it up the roads. It was that scarce. So, I had him everyday
30 make the rounds of all the support commands and anything that was left over, he'd pick
31 up. At the end of the day when we'd finish a flight we'd call him on the radio and if he

1 had anything for us to pick up we'd just dispatch one of our aircraft back. I mean, shoot,
2 it was 15 minute's flying time to Saigon and he could fly down there and 35 more
3 minutes up the road to where we were living and just swing by and he'd have cases of
4 lettuce or fresh vegetables or potatoes or something that you wouldn't see normally.
5 We'd load it up and haul it back, and that way we were getting fresh fruit and food that
6 we just weren't getting otherwise.

7 SM: Dau Tieng, that's where the unit was when you first arrived, correct?

8 JJ: Yeah, the headquarters for the 188th Assault Helicopter Company was at the
9 Dau Tieng Michelin Plantation, the 2nd Brigade of the 25th Division was there. That was
10 their headquarters and we were co-located with them in the Michelin Plantation.

11 SM: Now when you arrived, given the accident record and everything else,
12 morale must have been...

13 JJ: Pretty bad.

14 SM: Yeah, not very good. After you helped increase the safety record of the unit
15 and were able to secure this type of food and things like that, was there a noticeable
16 difference?

17 JJ: Yeah, I'd like to think so. Yeah, I think so. We scheduled the USO troop to
18 come in and do a Christmas show. I've got that on tape. You guys have seen that. It's on
19 tape.

20 SM: This is the Filipino USO show?

21 JJ: The Filipino USO show that came in. I convinced Jim Merriman to let us
22 stand down half a day. All the units were required to be on alert and each of the other
23 assault companies in the 269th Battalion were given some time down, so I convinced him
24 to give us a half a day stand down on Christmas and we had a big Christmas party. We
25 had the Red Cross come in and they gave us little goody bags, red and green with shaving
26 gear and a razor and toothbrush, things like that. Every one of the unit members had a
27 gift that day. We had the USO show, we had a good meal, we had a little recognition of
28 Christmas, and then we went to work again on Christmas afternoon. Things like that
29 would just pick up the morale of the unit, make people feel like someone cared about
30 them.

31 SM: What about other activities or other services like Army services, libraries?

1 JJ: USO is the only one that would come in and I think maybe because they were
2 contract entertainment troops. The Red Cross girls refused to come to Dau Tieng. They
3 came up one time and they had a place, a trailer, where they were housed and kept during
4 the daytime and during one of the mortar attacks it had received a whole bunch of
5 shrapnel damage and they took a look at all the holes in their trailer and said, 'We ain't
6 coming back!' I never did see any of the Red Cross girls there. They were at Cu Chi, but
7 never did I see them in Dau Tieng. There was no other...occasionally some of the VIPs
8 would come through, but we were never in a position much to see them. Anytime
9 anybody came through to visit we were usually out doing something. We flew every day.
10 We did combat assaults generally two or three days in a row and then we would get
11 division support which meant that we hauled resupply and mail and stuff out to the
12 division units which was nothing but just single ship missions to haul stuff back and
13 forth. It was called ash and trash day. You'd fly combat three or four days, and then
14 you'd do an ash and trash day which meant that we kind of got a little bit of relief. We
15 weren't getting shot at all the time and enduring combat assaults. The rest of the time it
16 was 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

17 SM: How frequently would people get R&R?

18 JJ: We tried to give R&R...we did two things. We would give them an out of
19 country R&R at least once during their tour, usually after six months or something. We'd
20 try to get them a full out of country R&R and that usually meant Hawaii for most of the
21 folks. They wanted to go back and meet their family or something in Hawaii. We did
22 have R&R opportunities to Hong Kong, to Bangkok, and to Singapore and Panang.
23 Those were generally ones the enlisted men wanted to go on. They were the more rowdy
24 kinds of cities. They were the more party it up kinds of cities. If they were not married
25 and didn't want to go to Hawaii, then they would want to go to Bangkok or Singapore or
26 one of the Malaysian countries and we tried to get as many of those as we could. There
27 were usually plenty of those available, and if a guy went on one in six months and three
28 months later another opportunity came up and we could spare him, I'd try to get him a
29 second R&R and get him out a couple of times. We had our own in country R&R. I had
30 a place in Vung Tau, and what we'd do is we would send a crew down. We'd take one
31 airplane and we'd load a crew on it and it would fly down and land and the crew that was

1 already down there would get on the aircraft and fly it back and leave the crew there.
2 We'd leave them there like two days or three days. There was a swimming beach and
3 there was some other facilities that the Army had, a secure compound, so it wasn't like
4 they were on the economy anywhere. But they could get a couple of three days, a couple
5 of days in Vung Tau and go to the beach and swim and just sit around and sleep and it
6 was done just crew by crew. We could haul maybe four crew members plus a couple of
7 passengers, so I could maybe send six guys at a time, and we'd usually rotate back about
8 every three or four days, maybe ship in a route back and forth so I could get five or six
9 guys a day or two or three off that way. That was not authorized by anybody. I stuck my
10 neck out on that one.

11 SM: And your commanders never commented to you about it?

12 JJ: Never asked me. I'm sure they knew. I'm sure they knew.

13 SM: But as long as you were meeting the mission requirements, why should
14 they...

15 JJ: That was the key. If we met our mission requirements every day, that's the
16 way Jim Merriman worked. If you met your mission requirements every day and wasn't
17 a reportable offense, the MPs or somebody didn't come in and you'd done something that
18 was reportable and disciplinable by court-martial, you were the commander and he would
19 let you run your command, and he knew that that was an option I had.

20 SM: Why don't you go ahead and explain, speaking of Merriman, explain the
21 potato incident with General Abrams?

22 JJ: Okay, yeah, one night we completed a mission, called in, and Lieutenant
23 down there said, 'Yeah, we had several sacks of fresh potatoes that are ready to be picked
24 up.' So, we sent an aircraft in and we usually landed at H-2. Hotel 2 was the VIP
25 helipad in Saigon and that was the same on that General Abrams came in and out of when
26 he flew. My aircraft was sitting there on the ground and they were loading sacks of
27 potatoes in and General Abrams came in and landed, and he looked over and saw this
28 aircraft sitting there and they saw the jeep trailer and he saw the guys loading potato
29 sacks in and he came over and looked over the shoulder of the crew chief or something
30 and said, 'What are you doing, son?' and the crew chief, without looking over his
31 shoulder, said, 'Loading potatoes!' and Abrams said, 'What are you doing that for?' and

1 the kid told him that we were at Dau Tieng and we didn't get potatoes very often. That
2 airplane had not gotten home before I got a call from Jim Merriman who had gotten a call
3 from Abrams chief of staff, 'Why were two 69th assets to the 188th down loading potatoes
4 at Hotel 2?' So, I was on Merriman's carpet at attention, heels locked, explaining why I
5 was loading potatoes on Hotel 2 and Merriman said, 'Don't you do that anymore!' and I
6 said, 'Yes, sir, I will not load potatoes at Hotel 2!' Well, I moved over to another
7 heliport. I just went down a ways from Hotel 2 and went to one of the other heliports in
8 town where it wasn't as possible of being caught again and we continued to haul fresh
9 fruit and potatoes and lettuce and everything else we could get back.

10 SM: You never got caught again?

11 JJ: I never got caught again. I never went down to Hotel 2 again! Jim Merriman
12 and I had talked about this afterward, so I don't think I disobeyed a direct order per se,
13 but we've talked about it and he chuckled about it afterwards. I said, 'No sir, I will no
14 longer haul potatoes out of Hotel 2,' but I kept hauling them out of someplace else.

15 SM: Did you ever have an opportunity to meet General Abrams yourself?

16 JJ: No.

17 SM: Why don't you go ahead and talk about some of the operations that the 188th
18 was involved in, some of the more significant operations out of Dau Tieng?

19 JJ: Okay, probably two stick out the most in my mind, maybe three. Within two
20 days or three days after I had taken command, we were assigned the mission of
21 supporting the B-36 special forces group that was Captain Bo Grite's, the mobile
22 reconnaissance team. The mission was to fly out of Tay Ninh East Air Field and do one-
23 man insertions into Cambodia. These were across the border missions. They were totally
24 covert missions. We flew without identification, no dog tags, no ID cards. Of course if
25 we went down over there they knew we were Americans. We flew an American
26 helicopter and so forth. But, it was Special Forces that hired H'mong tribesmen and the
27 idea was to go over and interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the supply office from
28 Cambodia. For 32 or 33 days, that's what we did everyday. We would get up and go out
29 in the evening and recon along the border single ship, find landing zones that were
30 suitable for one aircraft insertions. We would go out at first light and before first light so
31 when we went in it was still just barely light enough to see the holes in the woods.

1 Working insertions, pattern where first aircraft would go into the hole, second aircraft
2 would fly over the top of the hole, he would unload the troops then, come out of the hole,
3 third aircraft would go into the hole, let off his troops, fourth aircraft would fly over, and
4 then he would fly out. So, it looked like a daisy chain of helicopters going by; never a
5 break of noise overhead and a trail of aircraft and supposedly was to not let them know
6 that we were actually landing and putting troops in. So, it was kind of deceiving in a
7 way. Once we'd insert the patrols there'd be probably eight or ten men patrols. They
8 would make radio contact with us and let us know if they were in contact or if they
9 looked like they'd gotten in undetected, and if they were undetected we would back out
10 of the area right away. As soon as the daisy chain went by the aircraft would depart the
11 area and the only thing we had left was two gunships and an overhead FAC, and as soon
12 as they could make radio contact from the ground and tell us if they were on the ground
13 secure then a C&C ship would move out of the area and the FAC would stay overhead
14 and the guns would move out, and then from then on they would do their mission until
15 they got in trouble. If they got in trouble, they would radio back to the forward air
16 controller or the observer that was overhead and tell us we need to come back and get
17 them. They would be in for usually a day or two or three and then they would try to work
18 their way into a secure landing zone for a pick up and then we'd go back in and pick
19 them up and extract them. Many times we'd put them in and the minute they got in on
20 the ground they were in contact within ten minutes they'd be in a firefight, and then the
21 idea was they would have to fight their way back to someplace where we could get them
22 out. We made a lot of extractions under heavy fire in Cambodia. Lots of times they got
23 into some complexes where they got documents and prisoners and information that was
24 unbelievably valuable. Grites and that crew, they were just careless. I don't understand
25 how they could do that, just do it day after day after day. That was their mode of
26 operation and they just loved it. They were a tough bunch.

27 SM: What month and year is this?

28 JJ: January of '68.

29 SM: Of '68, just before TET.

30 JJ: Yep, and then immediately after we got through working with Grites and they
31 terminated their mission over there we got involved in TET '68. I mean, Dau Tieng was

1 one of the many...we should have known things were happening because it got so bad at
2 Dau Tieng that every time we would come back in and land on the refueling pad, we
3 would get mortared. The Michelin River Plantation was one of those secured areas
4 between Cu Chi and the border and the Viet Cong came in and the NVA came back in
5 and had rest and relaxation sites and regrouped and retrofitted and had storage areas, and
6 the French wouldn't let us go out into the plantation and really go out and recon in force
7 because the French were still...it was still a producing rubber plantation. They were paid
8 off and they were protecting the NVA. So, we should have known something was
9 happening because it got to the point that you couldn't hardly move without getting shot
10 at on base camp. Anytime you lined up more than two or three aircraft at a time, you get
11 mortared. I mean, they're just waiting out there until they got a lucrative target and
12 they'd shoot us and there was a little hill that they were shooting up on top of and we
13 knew they were there. In fact, one night we got RPG rounds into our maintenance
14 operation. About one o'clock in the morning I got three aircraft destroyed that came right
15 up to the perimeter of the fence and bang, bang, bang, shot three of my aircraft RPGs.
16 The 25th Infantry Division had a bunker there that was supposed to be providing security.
17 The first RPG round went off and all the guys in the bunker hit the ground. They were in
18 the bottom of the bunker and didn't return not one round of fire. So, they knocked off
19 three of my airplanes right on the maintenance ramp.

20 SM: What kind of radio reaction force did you have on hand to try to deal with
21 that type of a situation?

22 JJ: 25th Division.

23 SM: They were the ones that were supposed to handle it?

24 JJ: 25th Division were supposed to do this. They had a mortar ship that was
25 supposed to get up and then the 25th had a rare reaction...always a force reserve. Usually
26 it was the one that was held back in the base camp. The rest were relaxation and retrofit.
27 They were supposedly the base camp defenders. We had our own defensive positions
28 around the perimeter that we manned, and all my crew chiefs and gunners would bring
29 their M-60 machine guns in every night and I had over 60 M-60 machine guns, 31
30 aircraft, each with two of them in the door, so I had a bunch of machine guns. We were
31 putting machine guns out on the perimeter and one night we cut loose with every

1 machine gun we had. It was just deafening, the sound, and then the VC never came
2 around that part of our perimeter again. They said, 'Whoa, we're not going to go down
3 there. They've got too many automatic weapons,' so they never came around the corner
4 of the base camp where the 188th was housed. We were right up against the fence. Our
5 housing area was right up against the fence. They could sit in the village and lob hand
6 grenades into us, and did. So, we were probed day and night we would get incoming
7 rounds. They'd snipe at us and shoot at us and throw grenades in during the daytime and
8 at night.

9 SM: How many casualties as a result of that type of activity?

10 JJ: Not too many. First of all, all our tents were sandbagged. I made sure that
11 every one of them had sandbags at least up to chest high. The biggest problem was the
12 rubber trees themselves because when mortar rounds came in they'd hit the top of the
13 rubber trees and go off and so the shrapnel would come down and you had more chance
14 of getting shrapnel damage by the rounds going off in the trees. Luckily we never really
15 got mortared enough that we had a whole bunch of casualties that were significant, little
16 nicks here and there with shrapnel but nobody really got hurt.

17 SM: How about sniper activity?

18 JJ: Not too much; again, if a sniper would start to shoot at you or something we
19 had enough fire power to discourage him real quick. Then we had gunships around.
20 During TET '68 I got a beautiful picture that I gave to y'all of one of my gunships
21 making a gun run right down the South perimeter of the base camp. We were getting fire
22 at night and we ran a gunship down and that shut it off real quick.

23 SM: Before we talk about TET, let me just ask one last question about the B-36
24 Special Forces Group activities. What was the average size of the teams you then
25 served?

26 JJ: Ten men.

27 SM: Ten?

28 JJ: Usually two Special Forces guys and eight mercenaries or H'mong
29 Tribesmen.

30 SM: How long would they generally stay in the field if they didn't make heavy
31 contact initially?

1 JJ: Three or four days. Before TET '68 we took part in what was called
2 Operation Yellowstone. Operation Yellowstone was the biggest heliborne troop move
3 that was done in Vietnam, at least up until '68. It happened between Christmas and New
4 Years, somewhere in that time frame, '67 and first of January. What we did was we took
5 the 25th Division North up in the Kontum area and inserted them and then they went into
6 a big Operation Fishhook in the Parrot's Beak area, all along the Cambodian border up
7 there at Loc Ninh and Bu Dap, the Special Forces camp and so forth. One of the big fire
8 support bases that they established was called Fire Support Base Bert. It was called Suey
9 Cut, the handle was Suey Cut. On 1 January, '68 at 1:30 in the morning we got a tactical
10 emergency call to launch all aircraft that were flyable, all aircraft and crews that were
11 flyable, and Fire Support Base Bert was about to be overrun. We launched every aircraft
12 that I had in the unit and every crew that was flyable. The gunships went out first. They
13 were quick and we got them off quick and they were gone. Then I had at least ten lift
14 ships that were with me. As we were flying up to Bert we could see that there was a big,
15 huge fire at Kontum, and there was all sorts of fire going on at Bert. Since we'd been
16 supporting them up there we knew kind of where everybody was in the division. I called
17 Kontum which was the division operations and I said, 'Black Widows are inbound. What
18 do you want us to do?' We just had two aircraft run together on the runway. That's what
19 the fire is, and they were burning. They said, 'We need resupply of ammunition into Fire
20 Support Base Bert. They're about to be overrun and we've got to get ammunition into
21 them. Do you know where the log pad is?' and I did. We knew where the logistics pad
22 was. He said, 'Switch the log frequency and work with the log pad,' and I said, 'Got
23 that.' We went to the log pad and it was small enough that we had to break down in
24 flights of two aircraft at a time. Two of us went in, landed, they loaded on ammunition,
25 and gave us the frequency to contact inside Fire Support Base Bert. Well, I got up in the
26 air and I was in the lead ship with a wing man and the next two went in and started
27 loading. We were in route to Bert and man, I've never seen so much tracer inbound,
28 outbound, everything. They were already in a big fight. I called a guy on the radio, it
29 was as log guy, and I said, 'We're inbound with resupply ammunition. Where do we
30 land?' and he said, 'I'll flash my flashlight and try and give you a place to land with the
31 flashlight,' and there was so much fire we couldn't see. I said, 'Have you got any other

1 things?" He said, 'I've got a survival strobe light.' I said, 'Okay, flash it,' because they
2 were pretty bright and you could see they were different colored tracers. So, he turned on
3 his strobe light and we found him. I said, 'Okay, we're coming in, the first flight of two.'
4 We made our approach into the area that we had. He was laying on the ground flat on his
5 back talking to me on the radio and I landed to his strobe light and he was right in front of
6 my chin bubble. I'm sitting there and I'm talking to him on the radio and he's laying on
7 the ground. I don't blame him for not getting up because it was getting...it looked like
8 logs when we were landing. It looked like the area was covered with logs and I didn't
9 know what it was it was so dark. We went in no lights. We dumped all the ammunition
10 out, loaded all the wounded on that we could, and took off and beat it out there and went
11 back to Tay Ninh to the Medevac hospital and dropped the wounded off, turned around
12 and went back to the log base and we kept that daisy chain going through the rest of the
13 night until about five in the morning it started to get light and we went back in. What the
14 logs were were VC bodies. They had penetrated all the way into the middle of the base
15 camp and they had turned the artillery weapons down at ground level and were shooting
16 direct fire flechettes and it cleaned out this force that had penetrated and that's why we
17 were resupplying and picking up the wounded and hauling them out. I talked to Colonel
18 Gains who was the brigade commander afterward and I've talked to one of the infantry
19 company commanders who was involved in it. We have talked to people who were
20 involved in Fire Support Base Bert, and it's by their words we kept them alive that night,
21 bringing in resupply and hauling wounded out. Gains gave me a Letter of
22 Commendation from it. I don't know how many people got awards and decorations. We
23 gave a bunch of them out that night. The unit had broken down into flights of two and it
24 would have been very easy for any one of those guys to say, 'Hey, I ain't going in there,'
25 and bug out, or have something go wrong. Plexi glass and aluminum ain't much of a
26 shield. We've talked to several of the guys and they said, 'Yeah, Black Widows.'

27 SM: How many enemy casualties?

28 JJ: Good grief, before that thing was all over...well, the 2nd of the 22nd Infantry
29 could tell you a lot better than I could, but four or five hundred, regimental sized attack.
30 They brought in the Cav, this Cav squadron, the armored squadron, Norris, I think his
31 name was, he came charging in and he said man, it was the biggest fight that he had ever

1 been in. They were serious. They wanted to wipe out Bert and they were willing to pay
2 the price to wipe it out and they just darn near did. We've corresponded with Aubrey
3 Norris who is the Cav commander. I've talked to Hemphill, Bob Hemphill who was one
4 of the company commanders in the 22nd Infantry, and in fact he's written a book about it
5 and sent me a very nicely endorsed copy.

6 SM: What's the name of the book? Do you recall?

7 JJ: *B Company*, Bravo Company...damn. I think it's *Platoon Bravo Company*.
8 It's supposedly the genesis of Oliver Stone. Oliver Stone, by the way, was in that unit.
9 He was a Spec 4. This is supposedly Fire Support Base Bert is *Platoon*, the movie;
10 exaggerated, but that supposedly was the basis for his writing *Platoon* and making a
11 movie was the attack in Fire Support Base Bert.

12 SM: How about friendly casualties? How many Americans?

13 JJ: I don't know. There were a bunch.

14 SM: Just out of curiosity, do you know the U.S. strength that was on Bert?

15 JJ: The artillery battalion?

16 SM: Yes.

17 JJ: I think they had two or three companies.

18 SM: Infantry companies?

19 JJ: Infantry companies, 25th Division Infantry Companies, yes. There's a lot of
20 documentation on the battle of Fire Support B. 25th Division has written it up because it
21 was a significant battle that they were in during Operation YELLOWSTONE.

22 SM: This is just before TET?

23 JJ: This is the nights of 1 and 2 January of '68 because we got through with that,
24 and then February 28th we got in with TET. TET was something else. I had my flight
25 records from that period and there were days when I flew 15 and 16 and 17 hours in a
26 row. I know one time I had something like 156 lifts in of troops that we had put in in
27 various different locations where we were moving battalion and company sized units
28 around and put all of the runs that the company had put in like each aircraft with one
29 load, I call it a lift, and we had like 156 troop lifts that we had done. The way we kept
30 track of that was whenever we inserted troops I would write on the windshield with a
31 grease pencil the coordinates where the lift went in and the number of ships and the

1 number of troops that were on the actual load, because if was an ACL of 8 and then there
2 were eight troops that were on each ship, so I knew how many troops were on the ground
3 and how many it would take to get them out. And, we did different loads for sometimes
4 different locations. I think that night there was one time I had 156 loads that we had
5 delivered somewhere, troops had been moved here and there. In the middle of extracting
6 them when we started to pull some of the troops out I had one of my aircraft crash right
7 in the middle of a landing zone and it was inside of a little compound, and we were
8 landing on a little dirt road and it came in five ships at a time and one of them crashed
9 and rolled the ship over in the ditch. Then we had to go back and refigure all the loads to
10 get them out without an extra ship. The idea was to leave the biggest number of troops
11 on the ground for the last lift, if possible, so you had a maximum force on the ground.
12 You didn't want to get in there and all of a sudden you've got one aircraft loading, eight
13 guys standing there on the ground by themselves. So, refigure that and figure, 'Now if
14 I've lost this ship, how am I going to get the rest of them out?'

15 SM: What was the cause of the crash?

16 JJ: I think he stuck a tail rotor into a communication line. As he was coming
17 down there were some communication lines there and got a tail rotor hooked in.

18 SM: What about activities around Dau Tieng? You mentioned that you had to
19 do some strafing runs?

20 JJ: We were getting hit at Dau Tieng around the clock. We were moving the 25th
21 Division constantly. We'd do two or three battalion operations every day.

22 SM: This is before, during, and after TET?

23 JJ: During TET.

24 SM: During TET?

25 JJ: During TET, after the initial bombardment. I mean, good grief, when they
26 started the thing off we were just getting hit everywhere. Then it sort of let up, and after
27 it let up then we started moving the division trying to put them in the position where they
28 could go into areas and search for them and get into a fight with them because part of it
29 was they were coming back out of Saigon and Cu Chi and coming back up toward
30 Cambodia. They had gone down through the rubber plantation, down by Cu Chi, and
31 then down into Saigon. Then they were reversing it and they were coming back and there

1 were some areas down around Cu Chi where it was very, very fierce fighting and that's
2 mainly where we were moving the division. The division headquarters was in Cu Chi but
3 the brigade headquarters was in Dau Tieng and so we moved a lot of the people down
4 there. There was a big fight that we had right outside of Cu Chi town. There was a place
5 called Hoc Manh I think. That's also written up in Hemphill's book where the Black
6 Widows are again, by name, talked about. We were moving troops around as fast as we
7 could pick them up and get them in, and whenever a fight developed we'd go find
8 somebody that wasn't engaged and move them in, really get involved. It was just...I was
9 exhausted. Everybody was exhausted. We'd hit the ground and it was just fall into bed
10 and get back up and go at it again first light. That's the first times we'd done night
11 extractions and night moves. We did several night extractions and night moves.

12 SM: That was the first time?

13 JJ: That was the first time I had done it as a commander. I'm not sure that others
14 hadn't done it, but that was the first time that I had where we actually had to use
15 pathfinders to go in and mark LZs for night landings and night extractions, and we used a
16 brigade division pathfinders out of the brigade and haul them in and they would organize
17 the landing zones, put lights up for us as best we could. We did some without
18 illumination and we did some with flare illumination. That's always scary, though,
19 because the darn parachute flares, once the flare goes out you can't see the parachutes
20 and you don't want to be flying helicopters around where there's big old canopies coming
21 down with big steel wires on the flares!

22 SM: Were there any accidents during this time period regarding that type of
23 stuff?

24 JJ: We didn't have any; at least we never ran into any flares.

25 SM: How about during TET generally? Was this a time of increased casualties
26 for your unit?

27 JJ: We got people wounded, but again it was minor kind of stuff. It was stuff
28 where you'd get a nick and you were able to patch them up and they were able to...we
29 did not Medevac. I don't think I ever had to move anybody, Medevac out to a hospital.
30 We did with B-36 one day. We got two aircraft shot down with Grites and his bunch and
31 I lost a captain that had to be Medevaced to the States. He got hit in the cheek and it took

1 an eye out. It went in the cheek and out his eye and came out his forehead. He's okay. I
2 talked to him a year ago. He's fine. But, had some serious wounded on that one. And B-
3 36 lost a lot of people on that one. They really got in. They lost six or eight. They lost
4 some Americans on that one, some of the advisors. It was just one of those things. We
5 put them into an area and they really got in the middle of a bad area and before we could
6 get them out, a bunch of people got shot up.

7 SM: What kind of intelligence briefings did you receive before operations like
8 the B-36 and also some of the other operations? Did you find them to be effective?

9 JJ: Sometimes, and sometimes not. The division was our main source of
10 intelligence. They were the main source of our missions. We responded to whatever
11 they wanted to do. They were the ones that set up the operations. They designated the
12 areas they wanted to go into. Our only concern was, from a helicopter support
13 standpoint, did we have artillery fire? Did we have FACs up? Did we have aviation
14 support, TAC air? Who was the unit we were going to haul? Did they think it was a hot
15 or cold LZ, things like that. I mean, they were in charge of the operation, and we were
16 there to support. I don't think I could have gone against them and said, 'I don't like the
17 way this area looks.' If the commander wanted to go in, we'd go in.

18 SM: How about the presence of AAA fire or at least heavy machine guns, 12.7s?

19 JJ: It moved around. You could get information one day that says, 'Boy, 12.7 in
20 this area,' and you go over there and there wasn't anything. They were either laying low,
21 or they were there to get moved. Another day you might get a briefing, 'This area is
22 completely secured, nothing going on,' and go over there and just get killed! It was just
23 never any consistency to it.

24 SM: Was that difficult for you as a commander, sometimes not getting accurate
25 intelligence?

26 JJ: Yeah. We did what the unit that we were supporting wanted. Our job was not
27 to outguess them or to out-tactician them. It was to go do what they wanted for support;
28 get them in, get them out, resupply them, take care of their wounded, give them gun
29 support.

30 SM: Any other missions that you flew out of Dau Tieng that you want to talk
31 about?

1 JJ: Well we did B-36, we did Suey Cut. Gee, most of the time it was just the
2 same kind of thing over and over again, a battalion mission is a battalion mission. You
3 find the LZ, line the troop ships up, you haul the troops, you land them. You protect
4 them with the guns and hopefully they're successful; crazy missions. Nuey Ba Dinh, we
5 supplied the top of Nuey Ba Dinh. They had a communications station up there. In 1964
6 we landed the first Special Forces group that took the top of Nuey Ba Dinh and set up an
7 outpost. Then we resupplied them and we took a rocket. We took a rocket and the
8 aircraft battery and they rigged it up to where we'd shoot rockets out of one of the big,
9 round, 18 rocket pod holders. They found it on a tripod of some sort and with an electric
10 battery you could fire off those rockets. So we took a barometer longer and the rocket
11 pod and the battery up there to them and they rigged it up to where they could shoot
12 rockets off the top into Nuey Ba Dinh down on the sides on the slopes because when they
13 were probed from down below they just lob out some of the grenades and the 2.75
14 rockets. That was kind of funny.

15 SM: Is it like a field improvised MORS?

16 JJ: Yeah, one of our normal, standard aircraft rocket pods.

17 SM: Did they have MORS?

18 JJ: No. The biggest thing they had over there was one 75 millimeter, eight inch
19 155s. When I was in UTT we put the first base on the top of Nuey Ba Dinh. In '67 when
20 I went back there was still a big communications set up and the 25th Division had
21 established it, and we used to resupply it. We would fly resupply, gasoline and food,
22 generators, that kind of stuff up to the top of Nuey Ba Dinh. In fact, I've got a picture of
23 it in the video.

24 SM: Speaking of UTT, I was wondering, you talked about the daisy chain system
25 that you set up with the Special Forces groups going in? Was that something that was
26 developed by UTT, the development of tactics that you engaged in while you were there?
27 Was it that type of stuff as well?

28 JJ: I don't really know. There were several different ways of inserting LRRP
29 teams and Special Forces guys. I can't say. It's what we did, and others did the same
30 thing. It was one of those things that you tried to be sneaky and get them in without
31 being caught, and that just seemed like kind of a way to do it. Just looked like a line of

1 helicopters went by. You could get down into one of those little old one ship LZs and
2 eight folks...when they're all standing on the skids, when you start hovering down in that
3 hole, they're out on the skids and the minute you get down to where the ground is,
4 they're gone and you're out. So, you could get eight to ten guys in pretty quick. It just
5 looked like a line of helicopters flew by and nobody stopped. I don't know if it worked
6 or not!

7 SM: Well apparently it did sometimes. But, when they went in and made heavy
8 contact immediately, that must not have been planned?

9 JJ: No. Then, the idea was they had to make their way back to a ship, to a
10 landing zone where we could pick them all up at once. It wasn't you could go in one ship
11 at a time and get them out. We had to find a big enough area where we could actually lay
12 down enough fire that they could retreat. They were prepared for that kind of stuff. They
13 had claymores and they had M-79 grenade launchers and they knew the land. They knew
14 generally where the biggest open area was before they went in. That was part of their
15 preparation. There were times when they got into contact fairly rapidly and would have
16 to back their way out. We picked them up where they would be backing down a trail
17 blowing claymores as they backed out. They'd back up 50 yards and blow a claymore off
18 and that would keep anybody that was chasing them back far enough. 1500 yards is all
19 we needed. Once they got into the open, then we could come in pretty quick and you
20 could load eight folks pretty fast. We could be in and out in seconds. As long as they
21 were blowing the mines and keeping people back from it...the other thing, once they got
22 into the clear, once they made it into the clearing and got radios they got the last man in
23 the clear and we could let gunship support right into the tree line and we could keep
24 raking the tree line until they got to the center of an open area and then we landed the
25 slicks into the open area and got them loading on board and get them out. It would never
26 be more than like two ships at a time so it didn't have to be a whole huge big area. But, it
27 had to be big enough to get two ships in and far enough back that we could put some
28 cover fire down to get them out.

29 SM: How much longer were you at Dau Tieng after TET?

30 JJ: We fought all the way through February and then March, it was the 4th or 5th
31 of March we got orders to move to I Corps.

1 SM: This is when you went to LZ Sally?

2 JJ: Went to LZ Sally. The idea was the 101st Airborne Division was going to
3 move into I Corps and was going to take over responsibility. The 1st Cav then was north
4 of Camp Evans and the 101st was going to take over Hue and the idea was that after TET
5 was over in Hue the fear was that there would be a cross DMZ invasion and the idea was
6 to cut North Vietnam in half somewhere down the coast but the first thing they were
7 going to do was knock out Hue and all of that area. So, the 101st was moved in as a
8 Division unit and was stationed at Camp Eagle which was just South of Hue and part of
9 them was at Hue-Phu Bai Air Field and LZ Sally was the 2nd Brigade base and it was
10 North of Hue. LZ Sally was nothing but a dirt runway, an old French garrison but there
11 was no permanent buildings. There was one big old graveyard and a dirt strip and that
12 was it.

13 SM: Did you meet a lot of resistance on your way to LZ Sally?

14 JJ: No. The way it worked for us, we were given the alert to move. The
15 commanders from the 17th Assault Helicopter Company, the 200 Assault Support
16 Helicopter Company, the Pacaderms, the Chinook Unit, the 188th and the 208th Combat
17 Aviation Battalion were flown up from Bien Hoa. We went down to Bien Hoa and got a
18 U-21 and flew up to Hue-Phu Bai. That was the advance party. We were picked up by
19 helicopter and flown out to Camp Eagle and they showed us where the 308th Battalion
20 was going to be situated in Camp Eagle. They flew us up by LZ Sally and nothing was
21 there except the airstrip. Nothing had even been landed there yet. They said, ‘One of
22 you is going to be stationed here. One of the assault helicopter companies will be
23 stationed at Eagle and the other, the assault support helicopter company will be at Phu
24 Bai, 200th Support Unit would be at the airfield at Phu Bai. That was it. They said, ‘Get
25 your company ready to move and do it as quickly as possible!’ Four days, we had ceased
26 operations. I did the last operation at noon, I think it was the 13th of April, and by the
27 next morning I had five aircraft. My operations officer and five aircraft were already on
28 their way North. 24 hours later, the next ten aircraft were gone and I think within two
29 weeks I got the operational report home. Every aircraft that was flyable was repaired and
30 had been flown north and all of the unit equipment had been packed and was picked up
31 by C-130 and moved north. I think it took us 63 C-130 sorties, 63 loads to get us there,

1 and one LST because we had 13 maintenance vans that were too big to go in a C-130.
2 They were too big to get up there any other way than by sealift and so we put them
3 together and convoyed them down the road from Dau Tieng through Cu Chi down to the
4 port of Saigon and put them on an LST and they convoyed them up to Hue. The LST
5 arrived I think within three weeks and the LST we convoyed all our maintenance unit
6 into Sally. When we arrived at Hue, Hue was still under siege. The Citadel was still
7 under VC control. We received sniper fire when we flew by the Citadel on our way up.
8 We landed at LZ Sally. The brigade had already landed, the 2nd Brigade and who
9 commanded them was Colonel John Cushman who retired as a lieutenant general. Jack
10 Cushman was there. I flew in with the second group. I flew in with the second group. I
11 think we had all ten aircraft in that flight. I met Cushman in the middle of the road,
12 middle of a rice paddy and reported to them and said, 'Major Johnson reporting, 188th,
13 sir,' and he said, 'Your company goes here,' and I looked at the area he had and it was
14 about a third of the size we needed. He was thinking Infantry Company, he wasn't
15 thinking Aviation Company. I told him, I said, 'Colonel, this ain't going to do,' and he
16 said, 'Extend the perimeter as much as you want.' So we went out and looked at the
17 perimeter and all we had was about four strands of barbed wire out there and that was our
18 perimeter at that point. We asked the engineers to come down and help us. We laid new
19 barbed wire and moved the perimeter out and we moved back into a rice paddy as best
20 we could and drained it, asked them to help drain some of the water out so we would
21 have a place to live. We started setting up and it took 35 GP medium tents to house me.
22 I mean, we had 300 men, 31 aircraft, 300 men, 13 or 15 deuce and a half...well vans, 18-
23 wheeler sized vans for the maintenance and avionics and that kind of stuff. Anyway, we
24 made LZ Sally a pretty big place and the evening of the second day we were there we got
25 mortared for about 30 minutes, 60 millimeter mortars. Some poor little NVA or VC
26 carried his little 60-millimeter mortar and he must have been a few hundred yards outside
27 of the base. You could hear him drop the rounds in the tube, [makes noise] and then
28 about 20 seconds later, 'Plop!' and he sat out there and dropped everything he had
29 because he only had about enough for 30 minutes and I think we got a couple shrapnel
30 holes in some aircraft and that was about it. That was our welcome to LZ Sally, you get
31 mortared for 30 minutes. Then we got serious about digging in. We dug holes. Every

1 tent had a fighting hole dug beside it. All of our aircraft, we put revetments; we
2 sandbagged revetments on both sides of them up at least windshield level. We tried to
3 protect as much as we could of the aircraft. The aircraft were scattered all around the
4 perimeter. We moved them out and dispersed them as far as we could. We moved as
5 many inboard as far as we could within the perimeter and then we fortified the perimeter.
6 We built a huge, huge fighting bunker and on top of the fighting bunker we put a mini
7 gun. I took one of my mini guns off the aircraft. We had spare mini guns because I had a
8 detachment there, an armament detachment and we rigged it up with, again, an aircraft
9 battery and brought in the ammunition carriers out of a gunship, an extra set of them, and
10 we hooked them up and put it on top of that bunker. Then every so often at night we'd
11 fire that thing, just go around that whole perimeter within the range of travel. We'd shoot
12 it at 3,000 rounds a minute. So, you'd sit there and go [makes machine gun sound] and
13 cover as much of an area to let Charlie know that if he ever came up there, he was going
14 to go against that. So, we never did really get probed much. We also put fu gas all
15 around our perimeter area. Fu gas is napalm, a 55-gallon drum of napalm, jelly gasoline.
16 You dig a hole in, you put behind the drum a claymore mine and two thermite grenades
17 and then when you shoot the thing off the claymore mine goes off, it blows the 55 gallon
18 drum apart and throws all that jelly gas out in a great big fan and then the thermite
19 grenades, as soon as they're up in the air they start burning. So, you get a huge whoosh
20 of fire. We'd fire one of those every so often at night just to let Charlie know we had fu
21 gas on our perimeter, and we never got probed. We never did get an infantry probe
22 against that side. The other side of the camp did, but we never did. I don't know why
23 they didn't ever put fu gas out. I guess they were infantry and figured they'd just go out
24 and fight them anyway.

25 SM: You mentioned earlier that you had to drain a rice paddy in order to
26 accommodate your men. Was that an occupied area by Vietnamese people, Vietnamese
27 civilians? Was there a village nearby?

28 JJ: There was a village but it was down on the river, and the area that the rice
29 paddy that we were in, it didn't have a rice crop growing in it at that time. It had been a
30 rice patch in the past but it wasn't growing at the time we moved in. There was nothing
31 around that area. There were no indigenous people.

1 SM: So it wasn't like Dau Tieng which had a village right beside it?

2 JJ: No, no. The village was a little bit further out. It must have been somebody's
3 land because there was this huge graveyard and these big Cau Dai graves, the great, big,
4 circular...we were right adjacent to it. So, it had to be an area but I think it was because
5 the village was over on the Song Bo River. I can't remember the river. There was a river
6 that ran right by there and that was our water point. So, there must have been people that
7 came in and farmed it but when the brigade moved in, that was it. They were gone.

8 Sorry, they were out of luck.

9 SM: Absolutely. What about civic action during your second tour? You
10 mentioned the orphanage during your days with the UTT. How about when you were
11 either at Dau Tieng or later at LZ Sally?

12 JJ: Our doctor...since I had a medical detachment I had a doctor and I had 11
13 medics. Lyle Parker was his name, Lyle A. Parker would go out and would do MedCAPs
14 with the brigade. The main thing we did was go down to the village where a water point
15 was and again treat people who had wounds, treat people who had something wrong. We
16 were truly out in the boondocks at that point. We were away from all civilization. I
17 didn't see...we did have some people who came into the camp to fill sandbags, but at
18 Dau Tieng we had indigenous labor. They would come in and wash the clothes for you
19 and clean up your area and things like that. When we were at LZ Sally, from now on we
20 were on our own. You washed your own clothes. The only thing we hired people for
21 was to fill sandbags. So, we had no connection at all. The division did not allow any
22 indigenous personnel within the compound, within the brigade perimeters.

23 SM: What about either captured VC and NVA or Chieu Hois? Did you ever have
24 anybody?

25 JJ: I wouldn't know because if they were, they were over with the division.

26 SM: I guess your unit never captured anybody?

27 JJ: If we did, if we picked anybody up we always brought them over to the
28 brigade and turned them immediately over to the MI folks that were in the brigade, the
29 MPs and the military intelligence folks. Everybody went to them whenever we
30 brought...now we'd bring people back, yeah, I guess when we'd go out on long supply
31 we would haul rations and ammo and stuff out and we brought back some prisoners and

1 captured folks, but again, immediately they went to the military intelligence folks and we
2 never had any other relationships with them.

3 SM: Well Kim, do you have any questions that you'd like to ask Mr. Johnson?

4 KS: When you were talking about defoliation, how long did it take from the time
5 the Agent was deployed for it actually to work?

6 JJ: A lot of it would depend on weather conditions. If it was hot and dry, fairly
7 quickly. If it was during the rainy season, wet, it took a little longer. The stuff, as I
8 understand it, would cause plants to grow quickly and that's what killed them; the stress
9 of accelerated growth was what would defoliate. So, if it was nice and hot and dry, they
10 would absorb the material very quickly and it would cause the plants to try and grow
11 faster and it would kill them. So, sometimes days, a week, seven days after a place
12 would be defoliated or streamered, everything would be brown! In fact, in Tay Ninh one
13 time there was a little orchard beside the airfield, and the runway there was PSP and they
14 came in with hand sprayers and sprayed the PSP to kill the grass that was growing up
15 through it and the drift of the spray from the PSP killed the orchard. They were just
16 spraying the PSP to try to get the grass out of it to keep the runway clear and the little
17 over spray drifted off in the wind. Nobody thought they were spraying...this whole
18 orchard turned brown! It was potent stuff.

19 SM: Why don't you go ahead and discuss some of the operations you conducted
20 out of LZ Sally?

21 JJ: The 101st was a very aggressive division, particularly the 2nd Brigade.
22 Cushman was a warrior. He wanted to find them and kill them faster than anybody that I
23 knew. He was just indefatigable. Is that a good word?

24 SM: Indefatigable?

25 JJ: Yeah, indefatigable. Two or three hours of sleep a night is all he ever took.
26 He was up almost 24 hours a day, he would be in the area. He almost wore us out. But,
27 man, he was a warrior and he fought smart. He would jump on it with big troops
28 whenever he could and he would surround them as quickly as possible. In fact, he was
29 named the cordon in Operation CORDON. He'd cordon off anytime he'd get a unit that
30 he thought was of any size. He'd cordon off anytime he'd get a unit that he thought was
31 of any size. He'd cordon them, put a circle around them, and then just paddle them to

1 death with artillery and gunships and everything else. So, he was very successful. But,
2 like I said, he almost wore us out supporting him. But, it's the kind of thing you do every
3 day; just loved the guy. First big operation that we did for the division I think was
4 Operation Delaware. Operation Delaware was when the 101st went into the A Shau
5 Valley. The A Shau Valley hadn't been in for some time. 1st Cav was going to go in on
6 the North end of the valley, we were going to go in on the South end of the valley. Our
7 unit was going to be the second lift. We established Fire Support Base Vagel and Fire
8 Support Base Bastone which were two fire support bases down the road that went from
9 Hue into the A Shau Valley. We broke down into individual company lifts because the
10 LZ we were going into was very small. 17th was lead company that day so they were
11 going to be the first ones in. We were second ones in. So, aircraft went out. We got our
12 troops on board. We loaded up, got in the air, and got spread out. So, we broke down
13 into flights of five. The first five from the 17th, the Kingsmen, went in without any
14 problems. They landed, everybody was unloaded. 75 started going in and started
15 receiving some pretty heavy fire. I was flying lead ship on the first flight on the first of
16 the 188th aircraft. We had five aircraft in that flight. When I got about 100 yards or 200
17 yards on final the 17th was just getting ready to touch down and one of the aircraft in their
18 formation was going [makes landing sounds] right in front of me. Been shot down; the
19 fire was coming from inside. I went in and landed right beside the aircraft that was
20 down. It was laying on its side. I dumped my troops off, pulled the crew off of it. The
21 next flight that was behind me, the next Black Widows, one of the lead ships Bob
22 Spraglen was playing combat photographer that day and he's taking pictures of the whole
23 thing. At the Ft. Worth reunion, this is in '97-'98, Bob hands me a picture of my aircraft
24 sitting on the ground with two guys running from a bomb crater to jump into it from crew
25 on this aircraft and this aircraft laying on it's side! What a way to start operations with
26 the 101st. But anyway, we got in and out that day. We continued to resupply and bring
27 more troops in and they got the area secured and then later in the day the maintenance
28 ship in the 17th, the weather set in and had clouds that covered the mountaintops. We got
29 back to Eagle and we were counting noses and the maintenance ship was missing, and we
30 couldn't find it. So, we started to search and we never did find the ship. Years later they
31 did find the tail boom in the jungle. I don't know that they ever recovered the remains of

1 the guys that were missing. There's Captain Allen I know is one of them. It's in the
2 VHPA directory that day in the loss of that aircraft. That's one of the first operations that
3 we had gotten involved in with the division. That was the same day that the 1st Cav went
4 in at the North end of the valley and they got eaten alive. They lost two or three
5 Chinooks that day, they lost a crane, a CH-54 crane. They lost a whole bunch of aircraft
6 and people, and we were going in from the South end of the valley. The operation is to
7 put the Cav in at the North and the 101st in at the South and that worked together. That
8 was a pretty hairy deal.

9 SM: How many total losses did you guys have?

10 JJ: We didn't take any losses on our aircraft that day. We had some shot up, but
11 no losses. The 17th aircraft that hit the ground, none of their people were hurt. I pulled
12 them out. We didn't lose any crew other than the maintenance ship we lost that day.

13 SM: Do you know what unit of the 17th that ship was?

14 JJ: It was the 17th Assault Helicopter Company. The 17th Assault Helicopter
15 Company was our sister company. The 17th was at Camp Eagle, the 188th was at LZ
16 Sally, and we were the two Assault Helicopter Companies that then were supporting the
17 101st. The 200th Pacaderms were the CH-47 company. We were all part of the 308th
18 Division, the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion. I think the next big operation we got into
19 was...I'm trying to remember the name of it. It was after...we were still cleaning up
20 after TET. Delaware was April. We were still cleaning up after TET in March and April
21 and we got into a fight out on the plain out by the ocean, *Street Without Joy* area and that
22 was the one where there's a bend in the river just east of Sally that looks like a sock and
23 that was what it was called, the Battle of the Sock, and again, 2nd Brigade was involved in
24 that. We'd surrounded...we put down a lift. I put a lift in early one morning. Jim Hunt
25 was the commander. I know he was the new battalion commander in the 101st, new guy,
26 sitting in this C&C ship and I was almost being as much a battalion commander that
27 morning as I was doing the C&C because he was a brand new guy and we lifted him in,
28 we lifted in some Black Cats, the Vietnamese what was called Black Cat battalion and
29 they ran into a big unit in this little village that was surrounded by the river. The minute
30 we had them in there, we knew we had them trapped because the river surrounded them
31 and without crossing the river they weren't getting out. So, immediately Cushman

1 jumped on that one. Every asset we had, we moved troops and got that place surrounded.
2 It was just one heck of a fight. That was three or four days that we just pounded them.
3 When we finally got in there there were three or four hundred that we got in that
4 operation. It was like a battalion-sized operation where they were wiped out.

5 SM: Any captured?

6 JJ: Yeah, there were some that tried to swim out and they caught them swimming
7 across the river and got them. It was an NVA unit that had been involved in the
8 occupation of Hue during TET and then backed out, trying to get back over to Cambodia
9 and trying to get back toward the DMZ. That was a heck of an operation. What else was
10 there? I can't remember right now.

11 SM: Do you remember working much with the Cav?

12 JJ: 1st Cav?

13 SM: Yes.

14 JJ: Didn't work with them at all.

15 SM: You didn't?

16 JJ: No.

17 SM: They were part of the forces?

18 JJ: Yeah, they were part of I Corps. They were part of just the I Corps tactical
19 zone operations. The Cav's mission was to go in the north end of the valley and we went
20 in the South. Our work was strictly with the 101st Airborne at that time, which was 101st
21 Air Mobile.

22 SM: How about joint operations with the Marines, because there's a lot of
23 Marines in I Corps, too?

24 JJ: The only thing we did with them was to do occasional logistics mission. If we
25 had to pick something up, we'd get single ship...we got a lot of single ship missions.
26 Again, some of our days were like they were down South. You'd do combat assaults and
27 then one day your mission was going to be ash and trash. They'd call you down and say,
28 'The only thing you're going to do today is log missions,' so you'd just spread your
29 people out and they'd go everywhere, and that was all single ship stuff. The aircraft
30 commander was on his own. You report to the log pad, you load up whatever they had to
31 haul, and you hauled it out and dropped it off. It took a lot of judgment on the parts of

1 those young men to fly safely, to do the mission as they were supposed to, to not get
2 themselves in trouble, not to hurt the aircraft, and so forth. A lot of times they were on
3 their own to do pretty complex things.

4 SM: What about problems with men in your unit? One of the things I'm curious
5 about, did you have problems with enlisted men; that is draftees versus guys that
6 volunteered? Were there any conflicts, any issues? You mention that one time you were
7 almost...someone wanted to frag you.

8 JJ: No, I couldn't perceive any difference between them, whether they were
9 enlisted, whether they were volunteer, whether they were drafted. We were all in it
10 together and we were all surviving together and after a while it didn't matter how you got
11 there, you were there and you better be part of what was happening. We tried...like I
12 said, the biggest thing that we had was housing and feeding and entertaining and things
13 like that. There's a funny story about Cushman. I had a 16-millimeter movie projector. I
14 could get film from the USO in Da Nang and have current movies to show. So, every so
15 often we'd send a ship down to pick up the films that were illegal in Da Nang and bring
16 them back up. So, for light discipline at night in the center of my 35 GP medium tents I
17 had a screen set up and it would show movies while everyone around was surrounded in
18 tents. You couldn't see the light, and the VC knew where we were. Good grief, that map
19 had the airstrip on it. Colonel Cushman flew by one night and saw a light down there and
20 saw the movie projector and the screen! He called me and said, 'What are you doing
21 down there showing movies? That's light discipline!' 'Yes sir! Yes sir!' So we just
22 rolled the side of one of our GP tents up and set the screen up inside the tent! You could
23 show it through. You couldn't see it from the tree sides around. Unless you were low
24 enough, you couldn't even see it underneath the tents. So, we had movies at night. I had
25 a club and I could fly beer in and we would limit the amount that they drank but they had
26 beer, they had refrigerators, again I could fly with the assets of helicopters. I could go to
27 different places and get that kind of stuff. So, we had beer, cold beer, we had
28 entertainment as much as we could. We gave guys R&R whenever we could. We tried
29 to bring in as much food as we could. We tried to have hot showers and so forth. We
30 rigged the bladders so that they would get the heat of the sun in the daytime and the
31 evening when troops were going back in we had hot water for showers. We did things

1 like that to make everybody part of the unit. We all wore patches that identified who we
2 were, which platoon and which unit we were. We gave out plaques and certificates when
3 people went, just things like that to make people feel part of a unit.

4 SM: Why don't you discuss the circumstances surrounding that frag?

5 JJ: When I got fragged? One of the things I'm most proud about of my command
6 was that I never lost a man killed in action. I had people wounded, but I never had a
7 death from hostile action or anything. I was within three or four days of change of
8 command. This was the early part of June of '68 and I'd been in command for six
9 months, had fought through TET, had moved the unit North and gone through all of that
10 and was about ready to change command and I was going to switch positions with Hank
11 Greer who was the executive officer of the 159th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion
12 which the 308th had been redesignated. The 308th Battalion was going to be redesignated
13 the 159th. Hank was the XO and we were going to switch positions. Hank was going to
14 come down and take command of the 188th, I was going to go to Camp Eagle and the last
15 three months of my tour I was going to be the XO of the battalion. I asked Charlie
16 Steam, Charles Steam was the commander who was later killed in Washington D.C. after
17 he got home from his tour in an automobile accident. I asked Charlie if I could go on
18 R&R. I'd been in command for six months. I was dead tired, and he said, 'Absolutely.'
19 I got a commitment to go to Bangkok. The morning that I was getting ready to leave, I'd
20 changed clothes, got into my khaki uniform to travel, I was sitting in my little tent, my
21 orderly room, and I looked out across my rice paddy where we were living and a deuce
22 and a half was going, 'Kabunk, kabunk, kabunk,' across the rice paddy dykes. Well
23 trucks were gold; you did not abuse trucks. Some kid whose name was...anyway, he was
24 driving this truck. Well I sent somebody out to grab him and bring him in and chewed
25 him out, reamed him for abusing this truck out there. I told him that if I ever saw
26 anything like that again I was going to take stripes away from him, I'll court-martial him,
27 whatever. I threatened him bad. Within 15 or 20 minutes I left on R&R, went and a
28 helicopter came by and went out and got on it and was out of there. McKeever was his
29 name. Key went back out for his unit. He was in the 603rd Motor Maintenance and
30 started to drink, and got into some sergeant and had a bottle and drank it, and then he
31 went out on the bunker line, armed himself, got an M-16 loaded, got him about four

1 grenades, and he was going to come get me. He was angry and he figured that I was
2 giving him a hard time so he was going to come after me. They tried to stop him a
3 couple of times from the bunker line coming in. People tried to talk with him and he
4 wouldn't listen to them. He finally got into where he was standing in the road in front of
5 our orderly room and his platoon sergeant Joe Helvey came up to him and was talking to
6 him. Well I was gone. Everybody in the orderly room heard the commotion out there
7 but didn't know what it was and McKeever had a grenade in his hand that he was going
8 to toss at me. They'd gotten the M-16 away from him and Joe Helvey, his platoon
9 sergeant, was trying to talk him into giving him the grenade. He'd pulled the pin on it
10 and Helvey was a little hard of hearing and McKeever was shaking his fist around and he
11 opened his hand up far enough that the grenade popped when they arm themselves.
12 There's about a four second delay. Well, everybody in the orderly room heard the pop
13 and Helvey didn't because he was a little hard of hearing. McKeever put the grenade
14 down by his leg at that time and it went off. The fuse block came out of the grenade and
15 hit Helvey right in the throat. It didn't kill him immediately, but it fatally injured him
16 eventually. It blew McKeever's leg off, blew his arm off, peppered the tent with
17 shrapnel. Of course I'm gone, I didn't know about it. I'd already flown out by the time
18 that happened. I was already on the R&R plane and was in Bangkok. I come back from
19 Bangkok and report into the 16th group, 16th Aviation Group which is our senior
20 headquarters of the 308th and the 188th and I walk in and back from R&R and going back
21 for change of command and the guy said, 'You don't know what happened?' and I said,
22 'No, what happened?' and he said, 'McKeever killed himself, killed your platoon
23 sergeant. Dick Adansky has gone down there to take command of the company.' My
24 XO had ended up on the hospital ship with hepatitis. He was feeling like he had flu the
25 day I was leaving. He said, 'I'm not feeling real good. I'm okay, I've just got a little
26 case of the flu. I'll be okay in a couple of days. Go on, Captain. Go on, Chief, have
27 your R&R.' So when I come back I've got Dick Adansky running the company, my XO
28 is gone, I've got two people that had been killed; I didn't know what was going to
29 happen, whether I was going to be relieved or what. Everybody knew what happened.
30 Then I find out later that McKeever has been involved in several incidents where he's
31 drawn down on people, even when we were in Dau Tieng before we moved north he had

1 drawn down on several people and threatened to kill them. My maintenance officer Tom
2 Castro had never told me about it. That all came out in the CID investigation afterward. I
3 said, 'Golly, guys, if somebody would have told me something like this we would have
4 gotten the kid help.' The kid was not stable. He was not one that we needed to do
5 something to punish, he was one that was something we need to get out of there. As a
6 result of people not telling you everything that was going on, we lost Joe Halvey was just
7 a great guy. McKeever needed not to be there, so he was gone. I don't know. That
8 really set the mood in the unit for me to come back to a change of command. Then
9 worse, even, was part of McKeever's arm blew off and they didn't find it all week. We
10 had a couple of dogs, mascots, and one of our dogs found the arm and was carrying it
11 around the company. When one of the guys saw that, they dispatched the dog, too. So, So,
12 we lost our dog mascot, we lost two guys. All of that came out in the investigation. By
13 the time I flew back down to the 308th Battalion Headquarters the change of command
14 was the next day or day after so I just came back down and made arrangements for the
15 change of command and Hank came down and we did the change of command. Hank
16 had a problem. He had to do all the morale building and I went on back to the 308th.

17 SM: How much time did you spend there?

18 JJ: Three months.

19 SM: You were XO?

20 JJ: Yeah, July-August-September I was the XO in the 308th.

21 SM: What were your primary responsibilities there?

22 JJ: We had three Chinook companies. We had the 200th which had come in with
23 the unit from down South, the 272nd had come in from the United States, brand new unit,
24 brand new aircraft, brand new parts, brand new everything, including enough
25 equipment...they were very smart. It had some veterans that had been over there before
26 coming back for their second tour, so when they came into the States they had everything
27 pre-engineered. They had showers, they brought washing machines, wringer washing
28 machines believe it or not! So, we had clean clothes. They had nice sidewalls built up
29 for their tents and they shipped all that stuff over. Essentially what I did was saw the
30 development of two base camps. We left the 200th at Hue-Phu Bai and then the two
31 Chinook companies would move into Eagle with us. We developed two base camps for

1 them to live in and put them in an area that was surrounded by Camp Eagle so they were
2 pretty well secured. We never had to worry about being probed directly, worried about
3 getting mortared and things rocketed. We built some pretty secure base camps and some
4 very comfortable base camps for the Chinook units.

5 SM: Did that happen very often at Camp Eagle, getting rocketed and mortared?

6 JJ: Daily.

7 SM: Daily?

8 JJ: Daily, somewhere, someplace. Camp Eagle is a pretty good-sized facility.

9 Division is a big operation and it covered a pretty big area.

10 SM: Were there elements of the Cav there?

11 JJ: No, they were further north. They were at Evans.

12 SM: Evans?

13 JJ: We were at Eagle, Evans was up toward Khe Sanh and Kontum.

14 SM: Any interesting events occur while you were there at Eagle?

15 JJ: Change of command from General Barsadi to General Zice. Just the normal
16 kind of daily operations. Division was still fighting hard. Really, by the time I got ready
17 to come on in September we had really quieted the area down. I mean, the Cav, between
18 the Cav and the 101st they were really aggressive. The only place where there really was
19 any trouble was out in the A Shau Valley and they lowered those in 1970 when they went
20 out and the 101st went in and took Hamburger Hill. So, everything up to the lip of the
21 valley, from the coast into the valley was pretty quiet. When I got ready to come home, a
22 typhoon hit and I was all packed and ready to leave and we got word that the typhoon
23 was going to hit so I wrapped up my big footlocker full of my personal gear, wrapped it
24 up in plastic like a big Christmas package, all sealed so it was waterproof and I put it in
25 my tent and I retired to the command bunker and conex containers all dug in under big
26 sandbag thing to let the typhoon go through. Plus, I didn't want to get rocketed on my
27 last day or two. We had 16 inches of rain in about six or eight hours and the airfield at
28 Phu Bai went under water and everything else went under water so the day of my DROS
29 I couldn't even get to the airfield. My tent disappeared. We had 55 mile an hour winds
30 and my tent disappeared and I went out and there was my bed laying there completely
31 sopped, my fall locker was empty, and my footlocker dry! I said, 'Thank heavens for

1 having my footlocker!' Finally when we could get out to the airfield, they took me out in
2 a deuce and a half truck. The runway came above water first and they landed the C-130,
3 it landed, taxied down, stopped, turned around. We convoyed the people out in a truck
4 through the water. We unloaded our stuff on the runway, loaded onboard the C-130, took
5 off for Bien Hoa. We got down to Bien Hoa and they put me in a trailer, air-conditioned!
6 I liked to froze to death! I wasn't used to anything air-conditioned! I was going to be
7 shipped out the next day and I'm laying in bed at night and Bien Hoa gets mortared and
8 the other half of the trailer, there was me in one end of it and there were a couple of
9 rooms in the other end, new guys were there, and as soon as the sirens went off and as
10 soon as the mortars started popping I was laying in bed and I was listening to them, it was
11 clear on the other side of the base. You can tell when they're close. These other guys are
12 going crazy, these new guys! They almost killed each other trying to get out of the room
13 and I'm laying there listening to them, and I'm thinking, 'They're on the other side of the
14 base. They ain't going to get near us. I'm not going to jump up in my skivvies and run
15 outside and get in a hole. I'm an old trooper.' Then, 'Crack! Crack!' There's some
16 coming on our side! So all I could do was just roll out of bed and roll up against the side
17 of the trailer where the sandbagging was, and I'm laying there hearing this thing going,
18 'Crack! Crack!' and I said, 'I'm going to get killed on the last day in country!' It
19 missed. It went by and nothing hit the trailer or anything. I turned the air conditioning
20 off and I said, 'This is crazy. You guys are going to die of pneumonia in here.' But, I
21 got mortared on my last night in country and laid up against the wall in a house trailer
22 and listened to the mortars go off, and thought I was going to die of pneumonia it was so
23 bloody cold with that air conditioning going. Then I got on an airplane and went home.

24 SM: Where did you arrive in country, in the United States?

25 JJ: San Francisco.

26 SM: San Francisco?

27 JJ: Travis Air Force Base. I went through in civilian clothing and did not go
28 through in uniform because when I got off there were people all over the airport with
29 beads and signs.

30 SM: Had you heard much about that when you were in Vietnam?

1 JJ: Yeah, we were pretty well aware of the difficulties. Strange, after I went
2 through the airport my next assignment was with the Pentagon. I went DASPO
3 Pentagon. The job, everything is desk oriented there. You have a desk that is very
4 concentrated. My desk was the uniform and appearance desk. I had to go back to Travis
5 Air Force Base because everybody that was coming back was being issued a uniform, in
6 '68-'69-'70 when they were returning. They would fit them with a uniform, put their
7 medals on, put their patches on it, send them down to the airport ready to travel, class A
8 uniform. The airport kept calling us and saying, 'What do you want us to do with these
9 tons of uniforms that we're getting down here in our trash cans?' and so from the
10 Pentagon as an action officer I had to go out and help make a decision, do we want to
11 continue to outfit people in uniforms one day later from Oakland Army Base to San
12 Francisco Airport? They're dropping their entire uniform to include a raincoat or
13 overcoat in the wintertime. It was either a raincoat in the summer or overcoat in the
14 winter, and here are class A uniforms, brand new, just been tailored to fit these guys and
15 dumped in these dumpsters. So, I got to go back as a DA Staff Action Officer and go
16 through the Oakland Army Terminal Base and watch the processing of guys coming back
17 and the issuing of uniforms and go to the airport and decide what we were going to do.
18 The decision was made to continue to operate by putting them in uniform. They felt it
19 was better to have...they were still World War II when the kid came home and came to
20 his hometown in uniform he was greeted by his family as a hero. Well shoot, those guys
21 were dropping uniforms as fast as they could. They were getting into jeans and t-shirts
22 and tennis shoes as fast as they could. The old mentality of being welcomed home by
23 your family in uniform was just...that was Norman Rockwell. It was not the United
24 States of 1970, '68-'69-'70.

25 SM: But given your position, did you make the recommendation or stop?

26 JJ: No, no, that was about four levels above my...I was a lieutenant colonel
27 action officer in DASPO and that was the Chief of Staff of the Army decision. I had a
28 guy from logistics was with me, I had a guy from G-4, the logistics database log. There
29 were two or three of us that went out there and looked through it all and looked at
30 everything. Another thing that was happening, as the guys were coming out of the field
31 in Vietnam to send them home, they didn't have any clothing. The stuff that they had put

1 in storage when they went over the year before was moldy and unwearable. It had been
2 sitting in a warehouse being rained on for a year. So, they were issuing them brand new
3 fatigues and brand new jungle boots and 24 hours old, they'd process out of Saigon, get
4 on the airplane in Bien Hoa, fly to Travis, get off, go to Oakland Army Terminal, and
5 then what do you do with the fatigues and jungle boots? They wore them for 24 hours.
6 You couldn't do anything with them. They were dumping them, so it was a double
7 compound problem. Here we were dumping all of these good, serviceable fatigues and
8 boots and they were dumping good, serviceable brand new uniforms at the airport. I
9 don't know whatever happened. We couldn't send them back. The hygiene people
10 would say, 'No, you don't send back uniforms that have been worn!' I said, 'Send them
11 back! They'll wear them. Those guys out in the field will wear anything after you've
12 been in the same suit for a week in the field.' Give them anything and they'd put it on if
13 it was clean and dry. So, I don't know what happened to them. I think they probably
14 ended up selling them for scrap.

15 SM: This will end the first interview with Mr. Jack Johnson. Thank you very
16 much, sir.