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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with John McRainey
Conducted by Steve Maxner
June 15, 2001
Transcribed by Christina Witt**

NOTE: 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 SM: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. John McRainey on
2 the fifteenth of June 2001 at approximately ten thirty. I am in Lubbock Texas and Mr.
3 McRainey is in McAllen Texas. Sir I'd like to begin our interview with a brief
4 discussion of your early life and if you would go ahead and tell us where you were born
5 and when you were born.

6 JM: Alright. I was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina May 20, 1935.

7 SM: Now were you living there in a civilian capacity, was your family attached
8 to the military?

9 JM: No. My father at that time was working for my grandfather. My grandfather
10 had a machine shop called the McRainey Iron Works in Fayetteville North Carolina.

11 SM: Okay. Is that still in existence?

12 JM: Oh no. No my grandfather passed away many years ago and he sold the
13 business probably fifteen years before he died.

14 SM: Okay. How long did you live in that part of the country?

15 JM: My father got a civil service job with the department of the Navy in 1940
16 and we moved to Washington D.C. and my dad was working in the Naval yard,
17 Washington Naval yard. He started out as a welder, but he was pretty knowledgeable
18 you now street smart young guy at the time I guess. They had him doing a lot of special
19 work on that first bathysphere you know that dining bell. They sent him to a school on

1 metallurgy and he eventually wound up as inspector of ordinance and transferred out of
2 Washington.

3 SM: How much do you remember about living in Washington during the forties?

4 JM: Well you know I was very young, I remember a little about it. It was an
5 apartment building, we were there before the war and I think yeah we were still there
6 when the war started. So I can remember all of the hubbub of the Japanese attacking
7 Pearl Harbor I was in Washington when that happened.

8 SM: Do you remember at all listening to radio programs?

9 JM: I remember the family listening to radio programs yeah. Everybody was
10 quite intense about it in those days. My dad I guess had mixed emotions. He was then at
11 that time even his job was priority where they wanted him...he was in a job that they felt
12 that he was more important there then he was serving in the military and I think dad
13 would have preferred to have gone in the military at that time, but he was frozen for
14 defense reasons in the job that he was in.

15 SM: In an essential position.

16 JM: Yes.

17 SM: How much do you remember about the Second World War and especially I
18 guess as you got older and the war ended I would imagine you probably remember VE-
19 Day, VJ-Day.

20 JM: Oh yes. I can't tell you where I was or what I was doing in those days, but I
21 can remember. We were in Minneapolis while most of the war was going on. My father
22 was transferred to Northern Ordnance was the name of it and they manufactured big
23 naval guns and my father was sent up there as an ordinance inspector, a naval inspector.
24 He worked there throughout the war in fact he worked there until he retired. He stayed in
25 Minneapolis almost his entire life.

26 SM: Do you remember when you met your wife, the first time you met her?

27 JM: Oh yes!

28 SM: You met her in Minneapolis...

29 JM: I met her in Minneapolis in high school and we started dating. I guess we
30 dated for two or three years through high school and right at the end I had made up my
31 mind I was going to go into the service. I was really caught up in the conflict that the

1 French were having in Dien Bien Phu and of course we were involved in the Korean
2 War. I just felt that I was missing something by missing the Korean War. I enlisted as
3 soon as I was out of school, but I missed any action in the Korean War I wound up going
4 to Germany.

5 SM: When did you graduate, 1952?

6 JM: 1954.

7 SM: '54. As you were in high school and of course there's quite a bit going on
8 around the world with regard for the Cold War. Was this a topic of conversation very
9 much?

10 JM: Well, yes it was. My father of course you know working for the government
11 was keenly interested in it and by that time you know we were talking...of course
12 everyone I think was concerned with the possibility of nuclear war. The Naval ordinance
13 that changed dad I think at that time they were working on missile launching tubes for
14 trident submarines, which was the big thing. The Cold War was on everybody's mind I
15 believe at that time.

16 SM: Oh yeah. Do you recall any of the domestic turmoil that was occurring at
17 the time? The McCarthy hearing, Atoms Spies.

18 JM: Oh yeah. Yeah and I think even at that tender age I wasn't caught up in the
19 McCarthy hearings I thought he was a turkey from the very beginning. (laughing)

20 SM: (laughing) Okay. Well I'm curious also in terms of just your family
21 interaction, did you have much discussion about the great depression? What things were
22 like before the war and how did that affect you?

23 JM: Well it...it didn't affect my immediate family too much because my
24 grandfather was a real entrepreneur he always worked for himself, I don't think my
25 grandfather ever worked for anyone else and he could find an opportunity in almost every
26 disaster. He managed to come through the depression in fact I think he became very
27 wealthy during the depression.

28 SM: Wow!

29 JM: My grandfather specialized during the depression in building water towers
30 for communities that needed water. He would weld through his machine shop and his

1 portable welding machine and everything he'd go out on the sites and literally build them
2 a water tower in the middle of nowhere.

3 SM: Wow!

4 JM: So he stayed busy and he prospered and of course my dad worked for him so
5 my dad came through it pretty good too.

6 SM: As you were nearing graduation and I guess even in the couple of years
7 before you graduated from high school, how much concern was there about the draft?
8 How much concern was there about going to Korea?

9 JM: Well you know as I recall it all the people that I lived with, my friends were
10 anxious to go. There was nobody there that was looking for deferments or trying to get
11 away from it. We were blue collar worker types that...we felt it was duty and I think
12 almost all of my friends felt that there was no question about the fact that they were going
13 to serve in the military and that they all wanted to get it out of the way sooner rather than
14 later. Many of my friends and myself went in about the same time, we all went in
15 different branches of the service, we all had our ideas of what we wanted to do. Even the
16 ones that intended to go on to college wanted to get the military service out of the way
17 first.

18 SM: Now did you know anyone say in your neighborhood for instance who
19 served in Korea and came back?

20 JM: Well yes my girlfriend at the time. Sandy's sister dated a young man that
21 well she married when he finally came back, but he was in the Korean War. His name
22 was Robert Myers, Bob Myers.

23 SM: Did you ever have opportunity to talk with him about it?

24 JM: Oh yes, yes many, many times.

25 SM: Now was that before you graduated from high school or after that you got to
26 talking?

27 JM: No actually it was after.

28 SM: Okay.

29 JM: It was after.

1 SM: Okay. How about relatives of yours who served either in World War II or in
2 Korea and maybe that you were able to talk to before graduating from high school to
3 learn about what it was like to be in a war?

4 JM: Well my uncle, my dad's brother served in the Air Force and he...let me
5 think what outfit he was in, I can't remember exactly. I know that he was in a B-17
6 group and they flew out of England during World War II. His name was Brown
7 McRainey. First Brown was the type that you know it was all an adventure to him, he
8 never, he wasn't very emotional about the broader aspects of the war to him it was just an
9 adventure.

10 SM: So he did talk to you some about it as you were in high school?

11 JM: Oh sure, sure. Yeah I was very young at the time that I'd talked to Brown
12 about the war, but he...like I say he thought it was a big adventure. A hell of a thing to
13 say anybody would enjoy a war, but I think Brown actually enjoyed going to war.

14 SM: (laughing) Okay. Did he fly?

15 JM: No, no. He was a crewmember.

16 SM: Okay. When did you become interested in flying?

17 JM: I became interested in flying in the service when... I'd made up my mind,
18 I'm trying to think of the actor's name now he was a short guy they always put stilted
19 shows on him, but he was quite an actor. Well he played the Great Gatsby, do you know
20 how that was?

21 SM: Oh, um...

22 JM: Alan Ladd.

23 SM: Yeah, yeah Alan Ladd.

24 JM: Alan Ladd had made a movie while I was in high school called Paratrooper
25 and geEASY that made me decide I had to be in the airborne. I wanted to be a
26 paratrooper. So that's what I enlisted in and while I was in it of course after having made
27 about fifty jumps over a period of three years I decided it'd be nice to land in an airplane.
28 (laughing)

29 SM: (laughing) So that was part of the motivation for you going into the Army
30 versus the other services?

1 JM: Well yes, oh yes absolutely. The airborne thing...that adventure is what I
2 wanted more than anything in the world at that time.

3 SM: Okay. Well how did your father and mother respond to you going straight
4 into the military?

5 JM: Oh they thought I was crazy, both of them.

6 SM: (laughing) Okay. And how about Sandy?

7 JM: No I don't think... Sandy thought it would be nice to get your military
8 obligation behind you and then settle down and then do whatever you're going to do.

9 SM: So when you graduated from high school you went straight to the recruiter
10 and signed up?

11 JM: Yes and went over almost immediately. I went through the basic infantry
12 training first of course and that was at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri and then I went to
13 advanced infantry basic in Fort Dix New Jersey. Then after that I went to the airborne
14 school at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

15 SM: Oh Campbell, okay. And where were you assigned after that?

16 JM: After that I was assigned to the 511th airborne infantry regiment of the 11th
17 airborne division. It was the regular old grunts you know, the light weapons infantry.

18 SM: Yes. What was basic training like for you?

19 JM: Well the infantry training was standard Army training. I think back in those
20 days they trained pretty hard. I think I enjoyed it; as I recall I did!

21 SM: Was...

22 JM: The airborne training was very challenging and again I enjoyed that. I
23 wanted to be there and I knew more or less what to expect from talking to other people
24 and I enjoyed it.

25 SM: When you went through basic training was...there had been quite a few
26 changes over the last fifty years.

27 JM: Oh yeah.

28 SM: In terms of the training regimen and the way that instructors can interact
29 with trainees.

30 JM: That's right.

1 SM: And of course it's pretty common knowledge that there used to be a little bit
2 more physical contact between...

3 JM: Yes there was. A sergeant never gave you an order he couldn't physically
4 back up! (laughing)

5 SM: Okay, okay. Were there incidents like that in your basic training platoon?

6 JM: No there were some people that rebelled and of course the cadre, the NCOs
7 that were leading the training responded.

8 SM: Okay.

9 JM: It was a no nonsense operation.

10 SM: How about blanket parties, G.I. showers, that kind of stuff?

11 JM: Well, no I don't think we had much of that. We were...our discipline was
12 such that we trained hard from very early in the morning until very late in the evening
13 and then we were given things like you'd been out trenching through the mud all day and
14 your boots had to be spit-shined and ready to go for inspection first thing in the morning.
15 So there wasn't much time for nonsense during, particularly the airborne phase of the
16 training. It was 100% focused to the task at hand and there wasn't any extracurricular
17 activities going on.

18 SM: How about your advanced infantry training?

19 JM: Oh yeah there were some games played in that, but nothing really
20 significant, nothing more then boys will be boys type stuff.

21 SM: Well in terms of the training, what was the focus in advanced infantry
22 training versus your basic infantry training?

23 JM: Well it was actually just refining more of the same and bringing the
24 tolerances up a little higher. Of course they tried to give you a cross training in all the
25 weapons you could possibly come in contact with so if you were a light weapons
26 infantrymen you got some training on every single weapon they had in the arsenal as well
27 you actually went out in the field and fired every single weapon in the arsenal. So you
28 fired everything from a M-1 rifle up, you know, the BAR, the 30 caliber machine gun
29 both the light weight and the heavy, water cooled, and the mortars which would be the 60
30 millimeter and the 81 millimeter mortar, and the 3.5 rocket launcher, and the 57
31 millimeter rocket launcher, and the 45 caliber handgun, the M-2 carbine. Everything that

1 you might come across you were supposed to be experienced with. And when I say come
2 across it might not be the weapon that was assigned to you, but in a combat situation you
3 might come across one and that's what you had to use.

4 SM: In terms of the training in addition to weapons training, how much emphasis
5 was placed on patrolling? Patrolling techniques, setting up ambushes, responding to
6 ambush?

7 JM: Oh a lot, quite a bit. We actually had actual field trials then. Of course
8 when... after we got... you know the line companies train constantly. As an airborne
9 company when I was assigned to the 511th we spent I'd say fifty percent of our time in
10 the field and even when we were in garrison we were training everyday, you weren't just
11 sitting around in the barracks passing the time of day. We really got refined in ambushes
12 and patrolling and tactics once we were assigned to an infantry company and that
13 company participated as a whole. They trained everyday and then they trained at
14 battalion level and they trained at regiment level and they trained at division level. We
15 would have an operation on everyone at least once every few months. I mean you know
16 we'd have a division level exercise at least once a year.

17 SM: In the training aspect of basic training and advanced infantry training, did
18 you ever conduct live fire exercise? That's not necessarily range time you know learning
19 to fire the weapons, but actually going out and conducting a patrol where the end result is
20 you end up on a live fire range.

21 JM: No I don't believe we did.

22 SM: Okay. How about night patrol, things like that?

23 JM: Oh yes we did that, particularly on maneuvers of various types. I remember
24 we went to Camp Stewart Georgia during an exercise and we were taken to I believe it
25 was the Okefenokee Swamps and we did some night patrols and forest night marches
26 through the swamps at night. I'll never forget those days. In fact I don't know if you're
27 interested in humorous incidents and those things, but...

28 SM: Oh yeah, yeah, absolutely!

29 JM: We were on a night forest march with you know full equipment, our packs,
30 and everything and we were slogging in water a lot of times almost up to your waist most
31 of the time knee deep. There was a fellow behind me and... I remember I could never

1 understand how he got in the airborne because he was overweight and they were pretty
2 hard on people to stay in shape. I remember he was from New York and he was scared to
3 death of snakes and earlier in the evening before it got dark we saw a couple of snakes,
4 water moccassins and oh god he was panicked to be stomping through the swamp all
5 night with all those snakes around. We were going through some pretty heavy brush and
6 we were single file and branches would hit and flap against you and what have you and
7 we were about knee deep in water. I being a country boy from North Carolina I thought
8 it was appropriate to have a plug of tobacco in my mouth and I had a plug of tobacco in
9 my jaw. I step into a hole and it's like stepping off of a curb stiff legged when you don't
10 know it's there, it was quite a jolt and I swallowed my plug! And oh my god it was... I
11 thought I was dying. It was a terrible experience and I'm gasping for breath. Well the
12 same time I stepped in that whole a big branch flapped back against my leg from the man
13 in front of me and this fellow behind us saw it and thought it was a snake and at that time
14 I went down to my knees and into the water. I went completely into the water. This kid
15 from New York started screaming at the top the lungs, "Snake bite! Snake bite! Medic!
16 Medic!" (laughing) And I couldn't talk and of course the whole company stopped and
17 the company commander came running back and he was a big black gentleman named
18 Ernest V. Martin, really one of the I think the first commanders of a white unit probably
19 in the Army, real early anyway in it to be a full captain. He came back and I can't talk
20 I'm gasping, but I started throwing up at that time. So now they were convinced that I
21 had a bad problem. (laughing)

22 SM: (laughing) Yeah.

23 JM: So they got the medic back and they cut my pants leg open and I was afraid
24 they're going to start cutting me with that knife and I'm trying to stop them. Finally I
25 guess that figured out that had swallowed my tobacco. (laughing) You could hear
26 expletives deleted going up the ranks. (laughing)

27 SM: I would imagine.

28 JM: Thank god the captain was madder at the fellow from New York that...
29 Aggot was telling how big the snake was and what it was. (laughing)

30 SM: (laughing) Oh no. So after that were there rules against having plugs on
31 patrol? (laughing)

1 JM: (laughing) No he never said anything about it, but I never put another plug of
2 tobacco in my life that was the end of my tobacco chewing.

3 SM: Really!

4 JM: Oh absolutely the end!

5 SM: Okay, wow! How about other humorous incidences at basic training or at
6 any of your advance course?

7 JM: Well I...we...I cant remember any in basic training or the advanced course,
8 once we got into a line company of course there was always something going on like that.

9 SM: How about airborne training, anything funny happen there?

10 JM: Oh gosh. Airborne training was pretty intense in those days. We had a
11 number of people, actually they always take more in, they want people to quit that's the
12 idea. So they'll put well say, I don't remember how big the classes were they were pretty
13 large, but the idea was a significant percentage were going to drop out and they kept
14 asking... And you could quit that was the thing about he airborne in those days. You
15 could quit anytime you wanted, but then you just went into a regular infantry company.
16 So if you didn't have the desire to be there and do the work you were out. And of course
17 if you didn't measure up, if you couldn't meet the standards they'd wash you out. But
18 there were a lot of people that quit when the training got rough, they just you now throw
19 up they're hands and say, "I've had it!" Fine they're gone.

20 SM: Now in airborne that was... What time of year was that? Was that still '54
21 or was that '55?

22 JM: Pardon.

23 SM: What year was that?

24 JM: That would have been 1954 that I went through all the training.

25 SM: Okay. Do you remember what time of year you went to jump school?

26 JM: Well let's see. The jump school was in the fall of the year I think because I
27 went through the summer months... let's see, two months of basic and went in in June, so
28 say June and July basic; August and September advanced basic; and probably October
29 that I was in jump school in Fort Campbell. Nice time of the year to be doing that kind of
30 stuff.

31 SM: Yeah it sure is. In jump school was it a three-week program at that time?

1 JM: Four weeks.

2 SM: Four weeks? So you had zero week, ground week, tower week, jump week?

3 JM: Yeah. There was... I think the first week was more physical training type
4 and then... of course we started learning basic parachute, PLF parachute landing falls and
5 we had the wind speed slide trainer. While we were there they shut that trainer down,
6 they got some many people with broke arms and legs and what have you on it they
7 decided it was a bit much.

8 SM: Wow.

9 JM: But we had the thirty-four foot tower and then we had oh gosh... any
10 platforms they could jump of for PLF training and what have you. The wings smith slide
11 trainer was a cable that went from a platform about twenty or thirty feet in the air, about
12 twenty feet I'd guess. It would go down to the ground maybe fifty or a hundred yards
13 down. The idea was they put you on a regular parachute harness and hooked you on this
14 thing with a quick release and a rope on the quick release. You never knew when you
15 were going to be released you just start sliding down it, which was like you were landing
16 with the wind. You know as the wind was blowing ten miles an hour you were going ten
17 miles an hour when you hit the ground on a parachute. The idea was always to try to land
18 on your side you know, you'd hit with your legs and then roll on your back and then back
19 on your feet. Of course you couldn't always do that unless you position yourself properly
20 by adjusting yourself in the harness, grabbing the harnesses and twisting yourself. You
21 didn't want to land going backwards that was the feet, bottom and head. (laughing) It
22 really didn't like straight ahead either that wasn't much good either. You wanted it on
23 your side; I always preferred it on my right side.

24 SM: Okay.

25 JM: They would position you. On this trainer they could twist the harness and
26 get you anyway they wanted. They could get you going backwards or forward and turn
27 you lose. Boy you'd get some pretty rough bumps on that one!

28 SM: How about the 250-foot tower, did they have that operating there at Fort
29 Campbell?

1 JM: No our big tower was the thirty four foot tower, but when you were in the
2 door of the thirty four foot tower you thought you were on the top of the Empire State
3 building. It looked a long ways down!

4 SM: What do you remember most about your first jump?

5 JM: Well it was pretty dramatic as I recall! You know they tapped you out
6 individually. You'd stand in the door and then they'd tap you out. It was a long ways
7 down! I remember the most significant thing about it was you know that we were using
8 119s in those days and very, very noisy. They had the doors open and it was a deafening
9 noise. You stepped out and the thing that hit you more then anything else was the
10 silence, the gentle swishing of the air! (laughing) It was quite dramatic. That's what got
11 me the most is how quite it got all of a sudden.

12 SM: At what altitude did you jump?

13 JM: Most training jumps are maybe between a thousand- twelve hundred feet.

14 SM: These were all static line of course?

15 JM: These were all static line, yeah. While we were in they were just changing
16 over from T-7s to the T-30... what the heck was it? T-7 and T-12 I guess or T-10.

17 SM: You're talking about the parachute?

18 JM: Yeah. I can't remember what the heck the other parachute was that we
19 stayed with, but the early one was the 7 and it had a real fast opening. The later
20 parachute that became the standard for many, many years was a parabolic chute that the
21 canopy kind of curved in and all of the suspensions lines came out first and the canopy
22 came out last. In fact the canopy was tied to the deployment bag.

23 SM: Okay.

24 JM: It was a much slower, smoother opening. The T-7 the first thing they jerked
25 out of the bag was the canopy and then all the lines came out and it was a WHAM! Boy
26 it opened with a jolt! The thing about it was [there was] no question the parachute was
27 open. (laughing) The darn later parachute opened so much slower it scared the devil out
28 of you and if you'd made a couple of jumps with the T-7 you were prone to pull the
29 reserve a little early. (laughing)

30 SM: Oh! Well what was your count at that...?

31 JM: Four thousand was what they were trying to get out.

1 SM: It was four thousand, okay. The latter parachute...

2 JM: Oh that's four, you know one thousand, two thousand...

3 SM: Right. The latter parachute that you used, did it have an opening in the back
4 of the parachute so you'd have to look at a forward movement in this chute or was it a
5 completely closed canopy?

6 JM: No, no, no. The only movement you could get... You could get movement
7 in any direction by slipping the parachute, by pulling down on the suspension lines until
8 you actually spilled air out of it. You could actually steer it fairly well, but it wasn't like
9 the later parachutes with slits in them that you could really steer around. Over the years
10 I've managed to always land where I wanted to or close to where I wanted to depending
11 upon how strong the wind is. You know when the wind starts getting up I think ten knots
12 I believe was the maximum they'd jump us in during training. When you get up close to
13 ten knots an hour you're pretty much going where that dad gum wind is taking you.

14 SM: During your jump school jumps where there any may west, cigar rolls, or
15 anything like that?

16 JM: During the training no, but on one of my very first jumps in an easy
17 company of the 511th there was a total malfunction.

18 SM: Oh no!

19 JM: and it brought home that 'it' could happen.

20 SM: Yeah. I take it it was someone you knew?

21 JM: Well I didn't know him well he was in a different platoon from me, but he
22 was in the same company. You're only talking about 250 men I think in a full strength
23 company. So I had seen him. I'd only been in it a couple of weeks when that happened.

24 SM: You mentioned earlier that some guys would deploy their reserves I take it
25 that he...?

26 JM: Well when they were using the... I cannot believe that I can't remember the
27 name of that darn parachute, but I guess it was the T-10, it was a T-7 and T-10 I believe.
28 But anyway...it opened so much slower and you know they didn't feel the jolt and by the
29 time they got to about three they're "Holy mackerel!" and they'd just pull the reserves
30 thinking they had a streamer on and of course then they had two canopies out, which is
31 not good. (laughing)

1 SM: (laughing) No.

2 JM: They had to pull the one back in before it deployed.

3 SM: Yeah, okay. The incident in the 11th Airborne Division, I guess he didn't get
4 his reserve deployed in time?

5 JM: What actually... he wound up, I don't know how he managed to do it, maybe
6 a horrible body position or horrible exit from the airplane, but he got tangled up in the
7 suspension lines and it was just a... the chute never deployed. They just went all the way
8 in, he never pulled the reserve.

9 SM: Whoa.

10 JM: We had about the first division jumps that we went on, the company was
11 split in three regiments. One went to Alaska, one went to I believe Puerto Rico and one
12 went to Fort Bragg for this major operation. They found that the nylon webbing that they
13 were using in the T-10 was defective because in cold weather, you know they'd bend
14 them back and forth and back and forth and tie them with a rubber band. They were
15 taking a set up there in the unheated hangers where they were storing them and they had
16 several that when they jumped and the static line was deployed it would slap against the
17 side of the airplane and break.

18 SM: Oh boy.

19 JM: Just broke. So they had numerous malfunctions where they had to pull
20 reserves and a few of them went all the way in because they just didn't realize that they
21 didn't have anything above them. Then they modified the nylon. I don't know whether
22 they put cotton with it or what they did, but they solved that problem.

23 SM: Let's go ahead and talk about your time at Fort Campbell.

24 JM: Okay.

25 SM: Unless...is there anything else that you want to talk about with regards to
26 training?

27 JM: No, no.

28 SM: Okay. At what point did you get married?

29 JM: I got married on leave, on my first leave between my first eight weeks basic
30 and my second eight weeks basic they gave me two weeks. We corresponded back and

1 forth and Sandy and my parents had everything arranged and when I came back we were
2 married during that leave.

3 SM: Okay. I guess it was probably just after you'd finished airborne training that
4 you and Sandy moved to Clarksville together?

5 JM: Yes, yes. As soon as I had finished the training and been assigned to EASY
6 Company the 511th then I could live off post and Sandy came down and we lived in
7 Clarksville Tennessee.

8 SM: Okay. What was the morale of your company?

9 JM: Excellent! Absolutely excellent!

10 SM: Okay.

11 JM: We're all gung ho young guys, we wanted to be there, we were fortunate that
12 we had some excellent officers. This Ernest V. Martin was a highly decorated Korean
13 War veteran. He had never missed a single rank from private E-1 up through Captain.
14 He'd gone all the way through the enlisted ranks, he got a battlefield commission as a
15 second lieutenant then after the Korean War he came back to the states, went through the
16 OCS and got his regular commission and was first lieutenant and captain. So at the time
17 that he was our commanding officer he had done through every single one of the ranks
18 and he was an excellent officer, he was a good soldier. Years, years later, I can tell you
19 when we were with Air America I ran into two people from that company that I was in
20 Vietnam.

21 SM: Wow!

22 JM: The executive officer was a fellow named William Carlson and Carlson was
23 a West Point grad and when he was a second lieutenant his first assignment was the
24 executive officer of easy of the 511th working under Captain Ernest V. Martin.

25 SM: Wow!

26 JM: I ran into him oh about 1968. I was flying a VIP air-conditioned DC-3 in
27 Bangkok and as we were taxi out across the airport the cockpit door opened and this guy
28 stuck his head in and said, "Do you mind if I sit in the jump seat?" and I turned around
29 and I could see...the first thing I saw was the nametag 'Carlson' then I looked at his face
30 and sure enough. I said, "Well certainly Colonel Carlson. Do you remember me?"

1 (laughing) He said, "Um, you look vaguely familiar." I was a sergeant when he was a
2 second lieutenant.

3 SM: Wow! Who else did you run into?

4 JM: I ran into one of the NCOs and I can't remember his name. He was a
5 sergeant first class, he was a master sergeant when I ran into him. But I ran into him
6 downtown in a restaurant in Saigon. I recognized him right off and he recognized me and
7 we had dinner together, but that was the end of it. He was back...he told me though that
8 Ernest V. Martin that time was the full colonel and he was special forces and he was over
9 in Okinawa and they went back and forth, in-country and back to Okinawa.

10 SM: Wow! Do you know about how old he was when he was your CO, Captain
11 Martin?

12 JM: Oh he was young, I'm gonna say... let's see he'd gone in just before the
13 Korean War so he'd probably in the service about what 1949 and at that time... '54... I'm
14 gonna say he was probably 27, 28 years old.

15 SM: Okay. Young man. You mentioned that you jumped out of 119s in jump
16 school, did you also use fly out of those in the easy 511th?

17 JM: Yes, yes. That was the mainstay for the airborne in those days. They
18 grounded all the 119s. Remember during operation Flash Burn in Fort Bragg, North
19 Carolina a 119 lost an engine and went down through a number of paratroops. Killed
20 them and then crashed in a mess hall and killed a bunch of people. And they ground all
21 the 119s. I don't remember what the problem was, but it was it was some airworthiness
22 in its directive. It took several months before they put them back in service. During that
23 period of time we jumped anything we could get and I did make one drop in a C-46 and
24 one or two in 124.

25 SM: Your airborne status that lasted through your time at Fort Campbell. How
26 about when you went to Europe?

27 JM: Yeah I was still airborne in Europe, we made jumps in Europe.

28 SM: Okay. A couple of questions about life there in Clarksville and service in
29 Fort Campbell, of course at the time you're in the military it's become a completely
30 integrated institution.

31 JM: Yes.

1 SM: It is all...

2 JM: Yeah, the military was yeah.

3 SM: But of course in the United States and especially areas of the south...

4 JM: Ah yeah it was very bad.

5 SM: significant amount of segregation still.

6 JM: Yes.

7 SM: So I was what life was like there in Clarksville.

8 JM: Well it a... I felt sorry for the black soldiers. They were second class

9 citizens unfortunately and it was you know, they went to the balcony at movie theaters

10 and they had their own waiting rooms and bus tunnels and they just... They were

11 segregated. You know having been raised in the north I found it very offensive. I'd

12 made some very good friends who were black in the Army. Actually within our unit I

13 never saw a hint of racial discrimination, either in the states or when we went to Europe.

14 SM: And of course your company commander was black.

15 JM: Yes, yes. That was the thing that black soldiers thought that it'd be great to

16 be in a company with a black commanding officer, but he seemed to be a lot harder on

17 the blacks then he was the whites. (laughing)

18 SM: Really?

19 JM: In that he insisted you know 'you aren't in here for fun and games, you're

20 going to measure up or else,' I think. He was a soldier first and foremost. He had his job

21 to do and he did it. He was a good man.

22 SM: How did your NCOs enforce discipline in this team/squad/platoon level?

23 JM: Discipline was not a problem because everybody wanted to be there. That's

24 one of the things about an elite unit I think where all of the people want to be there. You

25 don't have the problems you do, I don't think you have the malcontent that you do in a

26 regular Army unit or a regular Marine unit or a regular Air Force unit. Like I talk about

27 the esprit de corps in the Marines, but you can't quite as a Marine you know. (laughing)

28 If you're a malcontent you're still there where in the airborne if you're a malcontent they

29 throw you out and you're in the Army!

30 SM: They throw you to a leg unit.

31 JM: Yep, that's exactly right. Back in those days they sure did.

1 SM: Yeah. What was it like for you to bring your wife there to Fort Campbell, to
2 Clarksville and what was the transition like for you as a couple?

3 JM: Oh it was tough because of money quite frankly. We were very poorly paid
4 and the cheapest place you could get was expensive in those days. We lived in a, the first
5 place was a converted garage apartment and it was pretty grim. Another member of my
6 company who lived in a basement apartment that had an outside entrance to a private
7 residence, they just rented out this little one room and a bathroom type deal and it was in
8 their basement. He was transferred to another unit and that unit came open, he told me
9 about it, and I managed to get in there and life got a whole lot better when we got in
10 there. It was small, but it was in a fairly decent neighborhood and we could come and go
11 as we wanted we had our own private entrance. So it wasn't bad, but money was always
12 a problem. I had a car, but we couldn't afford to drive it or anything so my buddies
13 would borrow my car and always bring it back full of gas that's how we managed to
14 drive the car. (laughing)

15 SM: (laughing) Okay. How long did you stay at Fort Campbell?

16 JM: Well we were there about, I'm going to say about six months probably
17 before we transferred over. They transferred the entire division to Germany.

18 SM: Oh okay.

19 JM: That was back when the Cold War was really fierce and the U.S. had five
20 divisions in Germany. I think it was kind of a show to the Soviet Union that they were
21 really committed because they sent you know, one of their very best units. Back in those
22 days the 11th airborne division was one of the top units in the military so to send an
23 airborne over there was making a statement.

24 SM: Yes sir. What do you think was the primary motivator for most of the men
25 who served with you in the company? Why did they decide to join the Army?

26 JM: Well back in those days you know everybody was going to go in the Army
27 sooner or later I mean you were eligible for the draft and they got just about everybody at
28 one time or another. Most of the people thought that 'well I've got three years of military
29 service to do and I'm going to do it and put it behind me.' The people that were in our
30 unit of course that was what they really wanted to be in so I think that to get a feel of
31 what the regular Army was like would be considerably different then what the 11th

1 Airborne was like. We had our military obligation that we wanted to fulfill but we were
2 doing it the way we wanted to. To me it was an adventure! I wouldn't have traded it for
3 anything. It was a valuable part of my life experience.

4 SM: In terms of the focus of training, what were you preparing for?

5 JM: Well in Europe we were preparing for a major land battle you know. We
6 were deploying divisions against what we thought would be superior divisions on the
7 other side as far as being out numbered and out tactics were more or less conventional, in
8 the early days they were anyway. Towards the end they got into the concept of
9 dispersing the troops you know, they didn't want any large units in a relatively small area
10 because they were afraid of atomic weapon. But the first year I spent in Europe it was
11 conventional, conventional warfare training. We were real concerned with tanks, we
12 knew the Soviet Union had lots of tanks so there was lots of anti-tank training you know
13 and how to use that 57 recoilless rifle and the 3.5 rocket launchers and defending yourself
14 against tanks. Like if you see a tank stand up you know. In our training missions they'd
15 always say that when we would train with tanks, "If you see it stand up! It's a lot easier
16 to run that way!" (laughing) First they can see you and second it's easier to run that
17 way.

18 SM: (laughing) So that was the ground infantrymen's defense against a tank?

19 JM: Yeah well in training anyway. When they were friendly tanks you wanted
20 them to see you. (laughing)

21 SM: Right. (laughing) Okay. The relationship between the military and the
22 civilian communities at both Fort Campbell and in Europe, what was it like?

23 JM: Well we were accepted I thought very well in Europe. Fort Campbell I think
24 you know there was an awful a lot of money [that] came from that post so I think they
25 appreciated the fact that they had that captive audience. I didn't notice any real
26 animosity, but I didn't notice any real rigorous friendship either. In Europe on the other
27 hand we were welcomed with open arms into all these restaurants and when we did get
28 passes, which was infrequent to get out on the town, when we'd go out on the local
29 economy we were treated very well.

30 SM: What was your position in EASY?

1 JM: Well I worked my way through the ranks I for the bulk of my time I
2 managed to go up through the ranks fairly fast. Thanks goodness Ernest V. Martin liked
3 me! (laughing)

4 SM: Okay.

5 JM: I made staff sergeant and we were a little light on rank in the company so as
6 the staff sergeant I was the platoon sergeant and I was that for most of my, almost all of
7 my time in Europe. I was... the way I think I got up through the ranks they... We were
8 normally the first in the division in all of our training and inspection and our arms room
9 failed an inspection and Ernest V. Martin went ballistic and he just grabbed me out of the
10 ranks one day. At that time I was a corporal and he said, "McRaney you're the company
11 armor." And is started to protest and I could see by the look in his face that wasn't the
12 right way to go! (laughing) So I became the company armory and I was very unhappy
13 with it because I liked the fact of training with the troops and the armor was down there
14 everyday all day in that god darn arms room. But we got it shaped up and the next
15 inspection we did very well and then he put somebody else in there and made me a
16 platoon sergeant. (laughing) So it was worthwhile for my few months of service as the
17 company armorer.

18 SM: You were rewarded. While you were in Europe you said you were basically
19 platoon sergeant for pretty much your whole time.

20 JM: Oh almost my whole time, yeah.

21 SM: How many jumps did you make in Europe?

22 JM: Oh we jumped about once a month the whole time we were there. There was
23 a part of our company, a part of our division had a function in training German
24 paratroopers. They were starting to train the Germans and they call themselves the
25 Fallschirmjaggers I believe, parachutist. So we had jumps where we would take a
26 platoon of 11th Airborne and jump with a platoon or company of Germans on training
27 exercises.

28 SM: Was there any kind of residual well I guess animosity or concern... In the
29 American ranks in the units that were serving over there there had to have been young
30 men who's fathers were perhaps killed in World War II...

1 JM: Very strange...we actually had German citizens who joined the U.S. Army
2 and they had a program that you could, I don't think they would make you a citizen, but
3 you became eligible to be a citizen and we had several Germans in our company. No,
4 they didn't seem to have any animosity at all, at least the ones that I meet. They were...
5 in fact we all like them, we got along fine with them.

6 SM: How about Americans who didn't like being in Germany because maybe
7 their parents, their father, their uncles were killed?

8 JM: You know I didn't see that either in our unit anyway. Most of our people in
9 our company anyway were Korean War and they had just been through hell. We had
10 several highly decorated, in fact almost all of our senior NCOs and officers with the
11 exception of Carlson were Korean War veterans who saw a lot of combat in the 187th
12 Airborne Infantry regiment in Korea. So I think Korea was the big focus with us rather
13 than World War II.

14 SM: Okay. Well is there anything else that you wanted to discuss regarding your
15 time with either the EASY company 5-11 at Campbell or in Europe?

16 JM: No not particularly.

17 SM: Well let's go ahead and look at some of the larger political events that were
18 going on and how maybe they impacted you as [not] just an American citizen, but also an
19 American soldier.

20 JM: Okay.

21 SM: Or course an awful lot of Cold War activity occurring.

22 JM: Oh yeah.

23 SM: and let's see when you were in Europe had the Hungarian Uprising
24 occurred?

25 JM: Oh yeah, in fact they put us on full alert and they were...all of our senior
26 officers were planning who was going to do what to whom. We really thought we were
27 going to be air dropped in and we'd led them on you know. We were listening to radio
28 where the freedom fighters were begging for the Americans to come in because the
29 Americans more or less led them to believe that if they rebelled they would support them.
30 And Old Eisenhower never did so they just went down the tubes, but that would have
31 probably World War III right there if he had. I don't know whether he made the right

1 decision or the wrong decision, but never the less we were ready to go to war. When we
2 had exercises they would...and we went on them frequently at least once a month, but
3 they were as close to the actual deployment as they could get. What they would do is we
4 would empty out...every company and station in these various Kasernes, which were
5 little military establishments nestled into villages and cities that we were in...had all the
6 supplies they needed to go to war. They had C-rations; they had ammunition; and they
7 had them you know stored, they had ordinance lockers and they had food lockers and
8 what have you. When we would deploy our company...the trucks that were assigned to
9 us soldiers would load all the ammunition into the trucks you know and the Krait, they'd
10 load all the C-rations in and then we would take off out into the boon docks and deploy
11 where we supposed to deploy. But it was never break open the boxes of ammunition and
12 break open the C-rations. And we were never issued parachutes on any of those that I
13 recall. But on the temporary deployment or the exercise that we went through for the
14 Hungarian Uprising they broke open the boxes and issued the standard bandoliers of
15 ammunition and they broke open the C-rations and issued the basic supply of C-rations.
16 Took us out to the airport and we went through the parachute loft and everybody was
17 issued their parachute and hey, we'd been through it at that time a lot of maneuvers and
18 we knew this was no ordinary maneuver. So we were ready to go, I think they were very
19 serious about deployment at that time.

20 SM: But ultimately you never did [?]?

21 JM: I never did. No.

22 SM: Did the [?] become a topic of conversation? Why we would support them?

23 JM: Oh yeah. A lot animosity about that, our people from our division
24 commander on down were really hacked that we didn't. They thought that we'd let those
25 people down, that we'd let them believe that we would support them and then turn our
26 backs on them. Heck I think the troops were ready to go to war!

27 SM: Yeah. Did that ever happen again?

28 JM: Well when they had the problem in Lebanon, I had just left, but they sent the
29 part of our outfit down there. In fact my whole company went down there.

30 SM: Whoa!

1 JM: So that was way back you know, that would have been in the late fifties. But
2 they had a few deployments like that.

3 SM: Of course in terms of the Soviet developments...and this would have been a
4 little bit before, well yeah, this was before your military experience, but I'm curious what
5 you heard about, what you thought and perhaps what was discussed amongst you and
6 your family members and friends when it became news that the Soviets had the Atom
7 bomb.

8 JM: Well of course, hell there was concern that the, you know in those days the
9 deterrent was the big thing if you destroy us, we'll destroy you and it's who can destroy
10 the most and when it got to the point to where it was totally unacceptable to either side
11 then we had that stand off that lasted so long. But no, the threat was there, the threat was
12 real and I think everybody felt that threat; I know I certainly did. When we started
13 training for atomic warfare what we were expecting atomic artillery to be used against the
14 troops on the field that's when they changed their tactics and went from the division-
15 battalion company to what they call regimental combat teams. The idea was smaller self-
16 contained units that you know they could move fast and disperse rather than have a big
17 cumbersome unit in one location.

18 SM: And that would... I assume that that's also an emphasis of training that you
19 had in Europe?

20 JM: Yes, yes it was.

21 SM: How affective did you think that would be?

22 JM: Well in all the scenarios that we played we thought we were highly effective,
23 but whether it really came down to shooting you know it's anybody's guess, I guess. I'm
24 not sure you know, we don't know what type of nuclear, we don't know if all of their
25 nuclear weapons were the intercontinental ballistic missile types or whether they really
26 had concentrated on the smaller units to be used in the field. I think that we felt that they
27 had them, but I'm not sure they really did even to tell you the truth.

28 SM: Was it ever talked about that the use of atomic or nuclear weapons by the
29 Russians especially in Germany if they were to come through the Fulda Gap and all that,
30 tried to take over the rest of Europe that they...

1 JM: Well we... the military thinking at that time that they wouldn't, it would be a
2 conventional war. They felt that...(coughing) excuse me... They felt that the Russians
3 were you know, felt so smug that they were vastly superior in ground forces that they
4 would just walk right over Europe with no trouble at all and of course that's why we had
5 five divisions there to try to stop them. So we were really expecting a conventional war.

6 SM: How about when China fell in 1949. Was that much of a topic of
7 conversation for you and your family?

8 JM: Well no not for me I was pretty young then, but I... later on by the time I
9 was military age it had seen very important to me. I had read a lot about Chiang Kai
10 Shek and Chennault and it fascinated me, I'll put it that way.

11 SM: Well what made you decide not to reenlist?

12 JM: Well you know I came real close to reenlisting and I thought long and hard
13 about it, but I thought, 'well you know, I really should get home and start a family!'
14 (laughing) But I liked the military and it was on my mind. I felt very seriously about
15 reenlisting. Martin wanted me to go OCS and he was going to see that I got in and it was
16 real tempting, it really was.

17 SM: Of course we should clarify; you were alone in Europe, Sandy...

18 JM: That's right that was an unaccompanied tour, that's right. She was back in
19 the states. I was anxious to get home, I'd been married two weeks, but that's all!
20 (laughing)

21 SM: (laughing) Okay. Well so what were your plans when you got out?

22 JM: Well I kind of thought like my grandfather I wanted to be in business for
23 myself and we'd saved the money. Sandy had worked and lived on my folks while I was
24 overseas. I leased a shell service station and we setup general maintenance as well as
25 gas. I friend of mine from the service, Ray White, came back with me and he work with
26 me in my filling station and we ran a successful station. After I had been at it a year one
27 of my better customers, by better customer a fellow that stopped in all the time, he was a
28 young fellow that just got out of the Army about the same time we did. He was learning
29 to fly and he told us about the G.I. Bill and boy Ray and I both said, "Wow! That sounds
30 good!" And he said, "Yeah, if you want to be a commercial pilot then..." you know. So
31 we went out to the airport with him and of course he got himself an hour free instruction

1 by signing us up. We had to apply through the VA to get the benefits, but within a very
2 short period of time we were enrolled in a VA flight school, Nelson Ryan out in
3 Minneapolis and started learning to fly. Once, ah heck I think the very first time I went
4 up I realize that's what I wanted to do! At the station of course we worked long, hard
5 hours there out of the garage and I could see that it would take me many years to learn to
6 fly if I kept doing it at the rate I was starting at, I was lucky to get two or three hours a
7 week. So we sold the business and I took a job as a security guard at night so that I could
8 go out to the airport everyday all day. I got my ratings very fast. I got my commercial
9 and my instrument and my flight instructor's all in about a year.

10 SM: Wow!

11 JM: I got hired there as a flight instructor right off too, so my flying career started
12 off with a boom! I found myself just living at the airport working seven days a week,
13 teaching ground school in the evenings, and flying charter, and flying flight instructing.
14 The company was a large outfit that had a lot of specialized Contracts so we got to do
15 some interesting things. We did power line patrol for the REA and we sprayed for the
16 Twin City mosquito control. So I got to do a little spraying and I got to fly the power line
17 and I got to fly charters. We did a lot of fishing trips and fish camp supplying up in
18 Northern Saskatchewan and the Hudson Bay area. Within three or four years I was a
19 fairly experience aviator, I was flying over a thousand hours a year.

20 SM: Wow!

21 JM: So by '61 or '62 I was very, very experienced. The airlines weren't hiring
22 much back in those days. Northwest, one of my good friends got hired by Northwest and
23 he lived with us in a trailer park. They had a...when they got into the jet, I'm trying to
24 think of what year that was it probably around about '52 or 3... They had a big strike
25 over whether the third person in the airplane and back in the DC-6 and 7 days the
26 engineers were mechanic engineers and they were aircraft mechanics that had flight
27 engineer certificates. Now the pilot's union wanted the pilots to be flight engineers and
28 they wanted to train another pilot to be on there. They're argument was you need a third
29 set of eyes. Well a mechanic engineer can see as well as a pilot engineer, but you know
30 how unions are. So Northwest had a long, lengthy strike about seventeen months. My
31 friend Rex was laid off and he found a blind ad in a Miami paper looking for flight

1 engineers in DC-6 and he had an engineer's ticket too so he went to work. It turned out it
2 was Southern Air Transport in Tachikawa. He wound up as a DC-6 flight engineer and
3 after he had been there about a year he managed to transfer down to Southeast Asia and
4 he flew co-pilot in a C-46 in Laos. Oh he wrote me 'oh man, you'd love this!' and he
5 told me who to contact and gave me a name in Washington. I started calling and writing
6 and sending in my resumes and ah heck I updated my resume every thirty days for about
7 two years before I finally got... In fact I remember the night well. I was flying for the
8 Creamets Company, the Creamets Macaroni Company, I started their flight department.
9 We had landed in Minneapolis, the weather was really lousy, we couldn't get in the
10 Flying Cloud it was below minimum so we landed over at the Minneapolis International,
11 in those days it was called Old Chamberlain. It was below zero and it's snowing, it was
12 really nasty. I had called Sandy... we left from Detroit Lakefront Airport... and I called
13 her and told her what time we were coming in and asked her if she'd pick me up at the
14 airport because I wouldn't be able to get my car out at Flying Cloud. So she came to
15 Wool to pick us up and the fellow that ran the flight department, a fellow named John
16 Westerburg, he was the senior vice-president of the company in charge of marketing and
17 the flight department fell under his baliwick. He was with me and we were going to drive
18 him over to flying cloud airport and Sandy had the kids bundled up in the car, she didn't
19 want to leave them in the trailer alone, naturally. So she said, "John, these people from
20 Washington called and said you were hired and for you to send your passport in
21 immediately to get visas!" And I just turned and John was in the backseat and I said,
22 "John you've got my resignation right now!" (laughing) "you've got two weeks." And
23 that's how I wound up going with... back in those days CAT hired you it wasn't Air
24 America, it was still Air Transport.

25 SM: Did you know who was actually owning and running that airline?

26 JM: Oh yes... well no, you know, it was hinted at, but we knew that CAT was an
27 airline it was a flag carrier of Nationalist to China and we knew that they did some Terry
28 and the Pirates stuff. I'd never heard the word 'Air America' up until that time though.

29 SM: Okay. Now when did you get out of the Army? That was 1956?

30 JM: 1957.

31 SM: Oh '57.

1 JM: Yeah I got out in June of '57.
2 SM: Okay.
3 JM: I was in the station for...oh let's see June, oh I imagine I was in there
4 probably July or August.
5 SM: This is Richfield Shell?
6 JM: Yes in the filling station in Minneapolis in Richfield. Let's see it would
7 have been part of '57, all of '58, I started my flight training in '58 and by early '59 I
8 realized that flying is what I wanted to do and got out of the station and I was flying full
9 time and got my instructor's and was actually flying in aviation.
10 SM: Okay. Now when you... What were you training in, in terms of the aircraft?
11 JM: Oh! We started out in the champ 7-AC champ.
12 SM: Was that taildragger?
13 JM: Oh yeah, yeah...had a little tandem tail dragger and then the company
14 bought, while I was still in training we bought 7-EC champs, which was a little wider fuel
15 fuselodge and more horsepower, went from 65 to I believe 95. Then right after I started
16 instructing we got a bunch of 7-FC champs, which was what they called a Tri-champ, it
17 had a tricycle gear... terrible, terrible little airplane! (laughing) They thought that they
18 would have less accidents with it and heck we had one of those little turkeys upside down
19 in every airport in Minnesota. It was like balancing on a three-legged milk stool.
20 SM: (laughing) Okay.
21 JM: But then... this company was a Cessna dealer and we had 1-72s and 1-50s
22 and we had 3-10s from multi-engine training for charter. I of course flew all of them
23 once I was an instructor.
24 SM: So you got your multi-engine rating and everything.
25 JM: Oh yeah I got my multi-engine rating with 3-10 and one of the old sky king
26 you know straight tail and vertical tip tanks and augments tubes over the top of the
27 wing...The early, early 310.
28 SM: Okay. You mentioned doing mosquito flights.
29 JM: Yeah we sprayed for mosquitoes.
30 SM: Yeah spraying for mosquitoes. Do you remember what was sprayed? Was
31 it malithyon...

1 JM: No, no it was an oil really.

2 SM: Oil?

3 JM: Yeah oil. I thin coat of oil would kill the larvae.

4 SM: Interesting.

5 JM: Yeah I don't know it might have been a special oil, but they called it oil.

6 SM: Okay. So it was an insecticide?

7 JM: I don't believe it had any poison in it because we were spraying right

8 downtown you know...they call Minneapolis...it's got several lakes right inside the city

9 limits. They've got Lake of the Isles, Lake Calhoun, Cedar Lake and of course these

10 fresh water lakes right in the city they were real breeding that Minnesota's full of

11 mosquitoes anyway and they eat you up. So we would...when the conditions were right,

12 they loved to have a real high wind during the time that figured that these mosquito

13 larvae was just about read to hatch and it would blow them over to one side of the lake.

14 Then we would go in there and spray.

15 SM: Oh, okay! Did it work, do you know?

16 JM: Yes it worked! Oh gosh yeah it worked! They were...it was a very

17 successful program. We did it the whole time I was there and I think they continued it

18 for years afterward.

19 SM: Okay. Well what did Sandy think when you started to apply for this job in

20 Washington that may be taking you to Laos?

21 JM: I think she about had a heart attack when I resigned because we were

22 just...you know those were pretty tight days. Flight instructors where known for making

23 great salaries and I had just taken over the Creamet Company flight department, I was

24 making pretty good money and I had a good future with Creamet. She thought I was

25 absolutely lost my mind because the base pay looked a lot lower for civil air transport

26 then what I was getting, but I knew that there was a lot more to be made then what they...

27 but the Contract price for, you were hired as a first officer naturally, I can't remember

28 what the base salary for a first officer I think it was 1200 dollars a month and that was a

29 lot less then I was making then.

30 SM: Did you have any idea the kind of flying you'd being doing in Laos before

31 you...?

1 JM: Well yes I did. Old Rick Nelick had told me about that and it just...I was
2 drooling that's what I wanted to do!

3 SM: Okay.

4 JM: But I also knew that there was a big company and you could be based in any
5 number of different operations. I could have wound up from Japan, Taipei, or Southeast
6 Asia, I was hoping for Southeast Asia of course. I lucked out when I got to Taipei they
7 had had a dry spell of about two years that they hadn't been able to get anybody through
8 the Chinese pilot's license program. Most of our C-46s and C-47s and even a lot of our
9 lighter airplanes were Chinese registered and the Chinese are real bureaucrats and they
10 had tightened up on the testing where nobody could pass the written test. The company
11 had hired one of the senior Chinese aviation officials when he retired from their
12 equivalent of the FAA, they hired him to be a ground instructor for CAP and the first
13 thing he did was setup a ground school to teach the new Chinese senior commercial
14 pilot's license program. So we had a two-week ground school, very extensive ground
15 school.

16 SM: Whoa!

17 JM: and it wasn't easy. They had used, oh gosh, they used several different
18 textbooks like the Navy all-weather flight manual, British...ah I can't remember what the
19 heck that was. Like flight engineer program and the FAA, the ATP and they'd taken
20 questions and problems out of all these different manuals and they'd made up a two-day
21 written examination. It was a nightmare!

22 SM: Whoa!

23 JM: And...well to give you an idea of how ridiculous they were they had radius
24 of action to a moving base ten question. Yeah, you work that out on an DC 6-B you
25 know and they wouldn't allow you to just write down the answer you had to do it in
26 longhand and turn in the paper so they saw you really knew how to do it. That was one
27 of the jokes on the ground school. One of the wags that thought he was going to be in the
28 Beech problem said, "If I get to Saigon on those Beech crafts that have got tail hooks I'm
29 quitting right now!" (laughing)

30 SM: Well what was the...was there a rationale behind them changing the testing
31 scheme, making it [?]?

1 JM: It was just to stop the gringos from getting pilot's licenses, they were made
2 at CAT for one reason or another. There was always a little animosity there. There was a
3 faction that supported CAT of course or they wouldn't have been in the country, but then
4 there was a faction that supported China Airlines that was trying to get started and
5 wanted the flag. So these gringos were seen as the threat to them. This Chinese
6 instructor that they hired, this senior official turned out to be one heck of a guy. He was
7 an excellent instructor, he was really a man of substance. He taught the test. They'd
8 brought a lot of people from Southeast Asia up there and all the new hires that came in
9 they kept there so that they could get as many as possible through this class. I believe
10 about twenty of us went to the class and I think about fourteen of us passed the darn thing
11 right off, which was tremendous success for them because they hadn't gotten anybody
12 through in almost two years. Now I didn't realize how much that changed my future. I
13 was supposed to be assigned to a C-46, C-46 first officer is what I was told and when I
14 got to...we did the ground school in Taipei and we did some link training in Taipei and
15 then they assigned me to Saigon as a base, which surprised me, but then they had...our
16 ground school was in Bangkok for the airplane, you know aircraft specific training. So
17 we went up to Bangkok and I had this week of C-46 program and I thought 'well, you
18 know, I'll be flying a C-46,' but then somebody told me they didn't have any C-46s.
19 (laughing) I thought 'what the heck is this?' They didn't at that time although they knew
20 that there was a bunch of them coming in and right after I got there nine came in all B-
21 registered. I was just about ready to go to Saigon when they stopped me and said, "No.
22 Now you've got to go through the 10-2 program." The 10-2 is a Beech 18 that they had a
23 lot of MODs on that grows 10,200 pounds. When you went through that program they
24 also put you through ground school on the dornier and the Apache because they call it the
25 Lake Twin Program in Saigon.

26 SM: Okay. So you were actually qualified for three aircrafts?

27 JM: I was qualified...well actually at that time I was qualified for four as far as
28 ground school's concerned, the C-46, the 10-2, the dornier, and the Apache.

29 SM: Okay. You mentioned in the interview with the, I guess it's the History
30 Channel that Monty Markum asks you what you thought of the dornier.

31 JM: Yeah.

1 SM: And you said that you didn't care for it.

2 JM: We called it the Damn Near, it was damn near an airplane. (laughing)

3 SM: (laughing) Well I was surprised he didn't ask you why...why didn't you?

4 JM: Well it wasn't...it was supposed to be a STOL airplane and it wasn't all that
5 great of performer. It wasn't all that nice to fly an airplane either. You know I mean it
6 wasn't a death trap or anything like that, but it was in my opinion it was a poor excuse for
7 an airplane.

8 SM: Okay. So it just didn't fly well?

9 JM: Well I flew it. I checked out in it and I flew it a little operationally, but I
10 never really cared much for it. I'd checked out in the Apache and I flew it and of course
11 that's a nice flying little airplane. My primary airplane...when I first got there they were
12 desperately short of Beech pilots, 10-2 pilots. The chief pilot was a fellow named Jim
13 Russell, which if you'd wanted a poster for a mercenary character, I guess Jim Russell
14 would have fit it perfectly. He was kind of a handsome dude, a big guy with broad
15 shoulders and barrel chested and little thin mustache and talked out of the side of his
16 mouth. He was quite a character. Jim was the light airplane pilot chief pilot. At that
17 time he was having a heck of a time training pilots in it. He'd got guys that had spent
18 twenty years in the military, but unfortunately the last fifteen had been in center line jets
19 you know and they forgot to use their feet, they forgot how to use their feet on the
20 rudders. So he was washing people out right and left and he was flying the line and
21 trying to train people and he said, "You know." He doesn't have time to go back to
22 basics and put people through an extensive course in the airplane, he wanted somebody
23 that knew how to fly it. I had Beech 18 time on my resume and when they saw that they
24 diverted me to go back into the Beech program, come over there and try to check out as a
25 Beech pilot. I was disappointed at first, but when I got to Saigon and old Russell grabbed
26 me right off the bat and said, "Let's go fly the Beech!" We went out for two hours and I
27 came back as captain...never flew a single day as co-pilot so actually it was quite an
28 advantage to have flown the Beech at that particular time. Then I was off flying the
29 Beech...within five or six months all of the C-46s came in and Jim Russell was made the
30 chief pilot of 46 program and I became a senior instructor pilot in the light airplane
31 program; on the dornier, the Apache, and the Beech. Then he was having the same

1 problem checking people out in the C-46 as he had in the 45, he couldn't get pilots...and
2 a lot of the DC-3 pilots upgraded but he was even...the 46 is quite a challenging old
3 airplane, I really liked it. So anyway I got a crack at the C-46 program and I checked out
4 in that way, way out of seniority. I hadn't been with the company a year and I was
5 already a C-46 captain and that was probably the most senior program in the company at
6 the time. I mean in Air America anyway.

7 SM: Well let me take a step back with you for a second. Exactly when did you
8 leave to go to Asia?

9 JM: I left in March of 1965.

10 SM: Alright by that time there had been quite a bit of activity of course in
11 Southeast Asia.

12 JM: Yeah really the big military build up that had not really started until later in
13 the spring about April or may I think the troops started pouring in.

14 SM: Right. But of course we had in August of '64 we had the Gulf of Tonkin
15 incident.

16 JM: Was that in '64?

17 SM: Yes sir.

18 JM: Okay, okay.

19 SM: And of course then the decision to go ahead and start the military buildup.

20 JM: Oh yeah they made the decision they were going to be there.

21 SM: Right. So I was curious at how much of this was on your radar screen at that
22 point.

23 JM: Well we knew there was a war going on there's no question about that, but
24 you know that wasn't...it didn't particularly concern me I was young. I got to Saigon I
25 was twenty-nine years old so I was anxious for the adventure to begin.

26 SM: Right. What was the trip like over for you?

27 JM: Oh it was fine. It was a very good trip. When I got to Taipei of course I
28 picked up the mandarin Jets which I'll never forget the first time I saw it...I can't even
29 remember what the name... You know we went through about three Japanese airports in
30 a hurry. We went through Haneda, Narita, and I think this was even before Haneda, but
31 anyway it was the big airport in Tokyo. While we're waiting for the plane to come in

1 there's Northwest airplane all soot streaked and a Pan American airplane all soot streaked
2 and dirty and then this dad gung cowvair 80 taxis in and blind you with the sunshine off
3 of it, highly polished aluminum and they had this dragon and a gold streak down the
4 center of the windows...Just a gorgeous airplane! Holy Mackerel! We were really a first
5 class airline. Of course the Chinese flight attendants treated us like kings. My wife
6 didn't like them because they catered to the men. (laughing) But the service was
7 excellent. I was really impressed with the airline!

8 SM: Okay. So this was your first introduction to Civil Air transport?

9 JM: Yeah. We got on that CAT flight in Taipei, I mean in Tokyo and flew down
10 to Taipei in it. Then I went to my Chinese ground school and through the basic simulator
11 training and you know of course a little basic indoc with the company and all the paper
12 signing at what have you at the offices in Taipei.

13 SM: Now before you left the U.S. did you get any kind of briefing or anything?

14 JM: No. No, no. I got my briefing in Taipei.

15 SM: Okay.

16 JM: Everything was sent by mail, I never went to Washington.

17 SM: Okay. When you arrived in Taipei and you started going to the briefings at
18 what point did you realize that what you were involved in was more than just a
19 civilian...?

20 JM: They never told us.

21 SM: They never told you?

22 JM: Never got into that... they said that you know... they always were low key
23 and they would tell you to be low key. You know don't bring attention to yourself. You
24 know you're living in a country where foreigners are sensitive so be low key. So we were
25 low key.

26 SM: So they kind of used that as the excuse for being low key but there were
27 other reasons as well.

28 JM: Yeah well, Rex told me that it was very secretive and hush-hush and I'd told
29 Sandy that before I even went over that there's a lot of things they do that they don't want
30 anybody to know about so be quiet. You know I don't think there's really anything bad,

1 but as far as nefarious like drug smuggling or anything, but they don't advertise their
2 services that wide.

3 SM: At what point were you introduced to Air America?

4 JM: In Bangkok.

5 SM: In Bangkok.

6 JM: In Bangkok that's the first time I saw a sign that said 'Air America.'

7 SM: Okay.

8 JM: and that's where I saw my first airplane that said 'Air America.'

9 SM: Okay. What did you learn about that outfit?

10 JM: Well then it became more of a Terry and the Pirates operation and of course
11 you're talking with the pilots and you realize that you're flying sensitive government
12 Contracts.

13 SM: So what was your first flight as a pilot working for CAT or Air America?

14 JM: I didn't even have my uniforms yet, I'd just brought my suitcase sat it down
15 outside of ops, went for a two hour check ride and then I was given some maps by FIC
16 and a briefing by FIC, when out and got in the airplane, flew to Da Nang and relived the
17 pilot that had been at Da Nang for a week or two and flew it the direction of the CIA
18 customer up there named Clancy. That was when I began to realize just exactly what I
19 had gotten into and I loved every minute of it!

20 SM: And this was... you were flying from Saigon to Da Nang?

21 JM: I flew from Saigon to Da Nang empty and then I reported into Clancy and
22 then I started flying in the northern part of the country from Dong Hod you know in the
23 north right on the division of the North and South Vietnam down to...oh we might have
24 gone as far south as Qui Nhon, but when we were flying out of Da Nang it was mostly
25 north, Quang Tri, up in that area.

26 SM: Okay. This was in a Beech?

27 JM: Yeah a Beech 18, yeah.

28 SM: How much could you carry in a Beech 18?

29 JM: We'd carry... the airplane was outfitted with ten seats; it had ten passenger
30 seats in the passenger compartment plus crew too. Although we only flew it single pilot,
31 but it had a co-pilot station, you could carry a passenger up there to if you wanted. You

1 could carry...it had a cargo door that was put in by they company. Really a neat
2 installation at...it fit in right behind the air stair door. The company had a...it had an air
3 stair door, you'd let the door down and it became the stairs to get up in the airplane.
4 Then by just a couple of quick fasteners you could pull a cargo door out that went from
5 there back about three feet. So you had that three feet plus you know two and a half feet
6 of the door opening so you had a fairly sizeable cargo opening if you wanted to haul
7 cargo. Of course all the seats were quick disconnect, you could pull the seats up and
8 configure it in cargo in a matter of minutes. The airplane for all practical purposes was a
9 basic Beech 18, but we had a few C-45s that weren't converted to 10-2s and the C-45 had
10 the old Hamilton standard two bladed prop and of course the collector rings were
11 exhausted. It only grossed about 86,87 hundred pounds so it as quite limited in what you
12 could do with it. The 10-2 had all the mods that you could put on a Beech. It had the
13 angle of instant exchange and the tail head squared off, wingtips, three bladed hartsfield
14 props, individual stacks...it had all kind of mods and it was really quite a nice old
15 airplane.

16 SM: It was for all intensive purposes, maxed out?

17 JM: Pardon?

18 SM: In terms of...it was pretty much maxed out in terms of its performance?

19 JM: Oh yeah, yeah. It was about all you're going to get out of a Beech 18, but a
20 Beech 18's a pretty good airplane if you can fly it. (laughing) It's a handful!

21 SM: What was your primary duties flying the Beech 18 especially in terms of
22 customer support?

23 JM: It was primarily picking up agency people and taking them to the various
24 field places they wanted to go and waiting for them and brining them back. It was just a
25 kind of an executive transport for the agency. Now we did haul USAID military and
26 other people from time to time that they'd put on, but primarily you were the agency's
27 direct support for getting from A to B.

28 SM: How much would you be briefed in terms of what was going on?

29 JM: Oh not at all! Your primary customer whoever he might be would say, "Go
30 to Dong Ha and pick up one man." You'd go to Dong Ha and pick up one man, he'd be
31 waiting for you when he got there. They coordinated everything by radio.

1 SM: Did you transport many Vietnamese?

2 JM: Oh occasionally we had Vietnamese counterparts, province chiefs, even
3 military people that worked with the agency. Yeah we had those on board too,
4 frequently.

5 SM: Do you know if you ever carried I guess some of the teams that would
6 probably work with the customers the same way that they worked in Laos with the CIA
7 customers?

8 JM: I worked on a little project out of Kontum when we did that, yes. We would
9 fly a case officer and several locals into a remote strip, drop them off, and leave them and
10 then come back and pick them up whenever they told us to come back and pick them up.

11 SM: Okay. Do you know if you were supporting certain types of operations, for
12 instances I know that near the Vietnamese-Lao border there was of course a couple of
13 operations, road watch...

14 JM: Yeah.

15 SM: trying to watch the traffic coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, stuff like
16 that. Do you know if you guys flew in support of that type of operation?

17 JM: We flew customers in support of some operations. I've even made some
18 trips out of the Kontum province area over into Cambodia, but few and far between.
19 Maybe the whole period of time I was there maybe on three different occasions.

20 SM: Okay. How long were you flying in Vietnam? How long did you fly?

21 JM: Well in November of '66 I'd been flying the C-46 for a while and an
22 opportunity came for a pilot in Bangkok and a customer type...let me think of his name, I
23 understand he became head of AIROPS at one time, he was kind of a Clark Gable look-
24 alike. Good grief...he's name will come to me. I became friends with him early in my
25 Beech days and we stayed friends throughout my stay in Vietnam. He kind of put my
26 name up for grabs for an opportunity to fly an infrared project in...it was based out of
27 Bangkok, but it really flew out of Chang Air Force base in Singapore. You had to have
28 some sort of a slot in Bangkok to fly it because it flew infrequently. So the only
29 slot...the first slot that opened up in Bangkok was for a BTB-18 and that was a Beech
30 with a turbo prop engines. Oh...Jack Benifield, Jack Benifield was the gentleman's

1 name. I kind of I think paid the way for me to get that slot and I said, “Yeah, I’d jump on
2 that I’ll be with my wife in Bangkok, that will be a good deal!”

3 SM: Yeah.

4 JM: So I transferred to Bangkok to fly the volpar and I checked out in it and then
5 of course I had to check out in the C-47 because the airplane that they used for the project
6 was a HC-47. It had...I’ve heard people refer to it as the Pan American wing. It had
7 sixteen hundred gallons of fuel in the wings were a standard C-47 at 800 gallons. I
8 believe the Air Force used it for search and rescue. This one was regular stars and bars, it
9 said ‘US Air Force’ and it had the stars and bars on it. I could never figure that out,
10 here’s a secret project, it’s got a civilian pilot wearing an Air America uniform flying a
11 stars and bars airplane out of a British Air Force base... Now what the hell is this?
12 (laughing)

13 SM: (laughing) And this was the IR project?

14 JM: This was the early days of the infrared project and it was a joint project
15 between the U.S. and the British military research and development.

16 SM: Okay.

17 JM: The people in charge, they’ve had a wing commander really in charge of it, a
18 wing commander Sumners, but the personnel were all civilian, high GS rating, PHD
19 types that were the people that we worked with. It was a fine laboratory. It had of course
20 they had a photo bay where you would actually you know photograph the ground and
21 take these IR pictures. Then they’d develop them and interpret them right on board in the
22 laboratory.

23 SM: Wow!

24 JM: Of course this was the early days so they didn’t really know what they were
25 looking at. (laughing) So they had to setup tests fields where they would setup a test area
26 where they’d fire guns, run trucks, have a bunch of troops, all kinds of different things.
27 You would fly grids over it and take the pictures and then the people would identify what
28 it was they were looking at. Of course we did it at various altitudes and we did it in
29 various types of weather you know to get a good test on it. Then when I got real good at
30 that then I would go out and look for the communist Muslim factor that was giving
31 Malaysia some problems in those days.

1 SM: Oh...okay. So I mean you trained I guess around Bangkok?

2 JM: No, no we never trained, never trained in Bangkok it was all done in
3 Malaysia.

4 SM: Oh. Oh it was all in Malaysia?

5 JM: Yeah, we would...

6 SM: Oh!

7 JM: The plane was based and we would fly it out to Chang Air Force base,
8 Chang is now the main base I mean that's the main civil airport in Singapore. In the old
9 days [?] was the main base and Chang was the royal Air Force base. When we were
10 there it was just an Air Force base and I'd stay at the, it was called the Ocean Palace
11 Hotel I believe, it was an old British hotel right on the coast. They had that land
12 reclamation program going where they were tearing down the mountains and putting in
13 the bay to get more ground and geeze I think the last time I flew that airplane there it was
14 a mile from the ocean. (laughing) It was all flat land out in front of it. We would takeoff
15 just at sunset and the Brits would fly the project with us and they had Shackeltons that
16 they were using. I don't know if you've ever heard of a Shackleton?

17 SM: No.

18 JM: That was quite an interesting airplane. It was a big four engine...they used it
19 as the submarine patrol bomber I think is what its primary mission was, anti-submarine
20 patrol. It had big liquid cooled engines with two four bladed counter rotating propellers
21 on each engine. Obviously it was a maintenance nightmare. They had a fleet of about
22 two dozen of them and I think if they had three of them flying they were happy. It was a
23 long-range airplane too and of course the HC-47 sixteen hundred gallons of fuel and for
24 all practical purposes we'd burn a hundred gallons an hour so we would stay in the air
25 about sixteen hours. We would take off at sunset and come back about sunrise on those
26 missions.

27 SM: What would you use or was there anything you could use to help stay awake
28 besides coffee?

29 JM: Oh no...well it was actually fairly intensive on the training. When we were
30 flying those grids we really had to pay close attention. We had to know exactly where we
31 were every minute you know and navigational aid were fairly primitive, we had some

1 beacons, but we had to track so we had to keep real...we had to do some real good ADF
2 tracking, lets put it that way and when there's winds blowing that can be a challenge. It
3 kept us busy enough that we didn't...staying awake was never a problem.

4 SM: Okay. Now I'm curious if you can say what altitudes you typically flew at
5 for those?

6 JM: Well I would say typically 1,000-1,500 feet above the terrain, but we have
7 gotten down as low as 2 or 300 feet off the terrain if we had a moonlit night and we could
8 see what the heck, you know, that we weren't going to run into a ridge or a tall tree
9 sticking up or something. They wanted to try it as low as possible and then I think the
10 highest I ever flew it was probably 3,000 feet above the terrain.

11 SM: Okay. Now was this in part due to the restrictions on the infrared equipment
12 in terms of techniques?

13 JM: Yes it was strictly the restrictions on the equipment. The equipment was
14 pretty primitive, it you know, it took them a long time to figure out whether it was troops
15 they were flying over or whether it was the water buffalo or whether it was a gun being
16 fired or the exhaust of a car engine or what it was, but they got pretty good at it. I think
17 by the time we finished the project...well of course the equipment they kept upgrading
18 too so the whole thing was a whole lot better towards the end.

19 SM: How long did you do this?

20 JM: We did it...Ed Olrick had started the project. He had been flying for about a
21 year and then when I came down to fly I flew it oh let's see...from early in probably
22 January of '67 and all of '67 and all of '68, so a couple of years.

23 SM: Wow!

24 JM: Now it was infrequent, sometimes we wouldn't fly but go down for about
25 three or four days once a month was what it started out at. Then it got to the point where
26 it was about every three months for a week, then it got maybe every four or five months
27 for a week; you know just whenever they needed it. Sometimes you might make a trip
28 and then come back for a week and go right back for a day or two because something
29 didn't come up quite the way they expected it.

30 SM: What would you do in the interim, in those breaks between?

1 JM: Oh in my regular job then was flying...shortly after I got there we got
2 another DC-3; it was a DC-3C it wasn't a C-47. It was an interesting little airplane, it had
3 belonged the United Airlines back before the war and it got involved in the...I can't
4 remember the name of the program. It was the program where the airlines supplied
5 aircrafts and crews to the military. What the heck did they call that program...anyway.
6 The airplane flew at military's direction; it was converted to a DC-3C, which looked just
7 like a C-47. It had you now a cargo door and bucket seats what have you, but there was
8 some slight differences between a DC-3 and a C-47. I think the thickness of the
9 aluminum and the fuselage and the strength of the gear and a few things like that, but to
10 look at them you couldn't tell them apart. Anyway, this airplane flew Military Airlift
11 Command I believe that's what they called it for about, well through the war and at the
12 end of the war I guess United felt 'hell, we don't need that old cargo plane back' and they
13 sold it to the Dutch KLM. KLM converted it back to a DC-3 and flew it down in the
14 islands for a number of years out of Indonesia and down in there. Then sold it to the
15 Indonesian airline, what the heck was their name...well anyway. Then it flew for them
16 until it was retired from service and then CAT bought it. Took it up to Air Asia,
17 converted it back to a DC-3C, but they had a requirement for a VIP airplane kind of an
18 embassy airplane in Bangkok. They configured it with twelve plush seats and a
19 compartment that started about the trailing edge of the wing forward and they put two
20 electric Beech air conditioners in the cockpit to cool it. I mean they were mounted on the
21 cockpit side, but they outlets were into this compartment where they blow air-conditioned
22 air. It was configured...it had two tables with two seats on each side of each table, that'd
23 be eight and then it had four seats on the other side, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. It had twelve first
24 class type seats in that compartment. Then from the trailing edge back it was no
25 insulation, it was regular C-47 with a bucket seat. (laughing) So it was used as a courier
26 type airplane, it could carry cargo in the back and a few extra passengers in the back and
27 then it could carry twelve people in air-conditioned splendor in the main cabin. Then that
28 was given to me as my primary airplane, when I wasn't flying project I flew that; 9-3-3
29 was its number.

30 SM: Okay. Who would you fly typically in that?

1 JM: Oh gosh it could be anybody. It could be agency, it could be military, it
2 could be state department. We had couriers setup in that airplane where we flew an
3 airline schedule that went to all the military bases. We'd pick up mail, drop off mail,
4 pick up people and drop off people. We went...we had a northeast trip that we went from
5 Bangkok to, oh let me think of the first base. It was a F-105 base, Ubon? No...anyway.
6 We went to this base that was oh 125 miles northeast of Thailand. I guess it was Ubon, it
7 was. No it wasn't either, Ubon was over by PAXICE on the Thailand side.

8 SM: Not Udorn?

9 JM: No not Udorn. It was...the biggest one was five days, most of the 105 raids
10 launched on North Vietnam or launched out of this base. It was central Thailand...

11 SM: Oh, um...

12 JM: "Dressy Lady" was the VOR that was on the mountain ridge just south of
13 this base, I can remember it well. We went into there and then we would go straight east
14 out of there over the river to Ubon, which was F-4s that was where Chappy James and
15 Robin Olds were. Then we would fly north to the civilian Nakhon Phanom airport there
16 was a Nakhon Phanom military, which was where the super secret listening base and the
17 air commandos flew out of. They flew the A-1Es and the nimrod B-26s out of there.

18 SM: Okay.

19 JM: But we would go over to the civilian field on the river and then from there
20 over to Udorn where we would...that be the first time we'd shut both engines down and
21 we would have lunch, stay on the ground about an hour and then we'd go to a base that
22 was about 75 miles straight south of Udorn. It was a big base, but I never saw any
23 buildings on it just a runway they were supposed to be building the base there. Then
24 from there we would go to Bangkok.

25 SM: Okay.

26 JM: Then the next one would be the northwest run. We'd go from Bangkok to
27 Korat the Ranch and then we'd go from there to Phitsanulok and we would land at Pitts
28 Camp, which was up in the mountains and that was where Bill Lare had started his career
29 with the Para troops in Thailand where they trained the Thai paratroops border control
30 and then agency people had a base up there. Then from there we would go to Chang Rae
31 and then from Chang Rae to Chang My and then from Chang My back to Takhli and then

1 back to Bangkok. They had a southern route where we would fly from Bangkok to
2 Wahhien, which was a resort area on the coast across from Pation, the other coast on the
3 west coast. From there we would go to a place way down the Thai peninsula called
4 Nakhon Se Tamirat and there were some agency people there and what they were doing
5 there I don't know, but it was a base. From there we would go down to Thonclaw and
6 Thonclaw was on the coast of pretty much the Malaysian border, I think about eighteen
7 miles from the Malaysian border. The Thais had thought that that was going to be a big
8 resort area and the Thai government built a nice hotel down there, but that's about all that
9 was there except for another agency operation and we had a H-34 helicopter based down
10 there that old Tom...oh heck what was his name? He was our, I think he was our
11 seniority number one in the helicopter program. Tom Moore was it? Anyway this old H-
12 34 driver he flew the troops agency people out into the boondocks rather than the
13 Malaysian border to some sort of a radio I think it was station. They stayed down there
14 all day and at night he'd bring them...fly down, pick them up and bring them back to
15 Thonclaw. Then we'd fly from Thonclaw back to Bangkok. That was the southern run
16 and it would be like Monday, Wednesday, and Friday you would make those schedule
17 runs and then in between you'd fly wherever they needed you.

18 SM: Okay. That's quite an elaborate schedule.

19 JM: Yeah it was really and then when I was off on a project we had...Ed Orlick
20 would fly the airplane if he had, he was the chief pilot in those days up until Fred Walker
21 came down. Then we had Verge Domino was based there and Walter Rosenfield and of
22 course for a while we had, well actually for quite a while we had old George Ritter there
23 too. It was a nice base. We had a caribou, we had a...well we had a couple 46s too. The
24 98-4 and 98-5, the two T-cap 46s that had flown over out of Okinawa on the Ryukyuan
25 Operation. They were configured with in passengers; I think it kept 54 seats in them,
26 passenger seats with a galley and a toilet...a regular airline configuration. When that
27 operation in Okinawa folded they brought the airplanes to Bangkok and we just kept
28 them limber, our maintenance people ran them up every now and then. I flew the
29 airplanes maybe, oh gosh I made maybe two or three runs up to Hong Kong with them I
30 know. I think we made one run down to Singapore. In the year and a half that they were
31 there I probably flew them a half a dozen times.

1 SM: Now the flights that you made in Malaysia, the infrared project, did you ever
2 get any feedback on how effective these overflights were?

3 JM: Not really, again I think that if I had been curious enough to pump the guys
4 for information they would have told me, but it was always...the discrete thing to do was
5 not to ask too many questions about what you were doing. We had our instructions as far
6 as what altitude, what airspeed, and all that kind of stuff and that's all we paid any real
7 attention to.

8 SM: Okay. But I mean, the over flights in Malaysia actually became the military
9 application.

10 JM: Yeah, yeah, they actually would...when they heard there were guys operating
11 a certain area they'd go try to find them so that they could, the Brits could send the SAS
12 troops after them.

13 SM: Now do you know if these aircraft were ever used again later for operations,
14 trail watch, trying to determine where North Vietnamese enemy concentrations were in
15 Laos, things like that?

16 JM: That particular airplane wasn't. That was strictly an Air Force airplane that
17 was assigned for that one project. I could tell you that later on one of our pilots landed it
18 short at Pitts Camp and wiped the gear out and banged it up, twisted the fuselage, tore a
19 wing...really made a mess out of it and they sent a small team up there to get ferried and
20 they carried it down to Bangkok. In fact I went up and flew it out of there and brought it
21 to Bangkok. Then they worked on it some more in Bangkok and myself and one of our
22 first officers Bill Cruthers ferried it to Tainan. They were so worried about the gear and
23 everything on it they said don't even land anywhere just fill it up with fuel and go to
24 Tainan. So we flew it non-stop to Tainan. I never saw it again, that was the end of...it
25 was called 8-8-3 was the last three numbers; it was the U.S. Air Force airplane.

26 SM: Okay. Now were...the time that you were flying these flights in Malaysia
27 and... When you weren't flying Malayan, where were you?

28 JM: I was in Bangkok flying a 9-3-3 was my primary airplane.

29 SM: Was Sandy there with you at this time?

30 JM: Oh sure, Sandy was in Ban...you know she was in Saigon for a short period
31 of time and I sent her to Bangkok. I was worried they were blowing everything up and

1 about the time she came to Saigon, it had been fairly quiet until she got there and just
2 before she got there they'd blown up the embassy and the wrecks and the brinks and the
3 floating market. There was a lot of terrorist activity going on in Saigon and it worried me
4 to have the family there. I can't remember how long they stayed there, but as quickly
5 [as] possible we got them over to Bangkok and then I visited them in Bangkok until I got
6 transferred over there.

7 SM: Did you have a break at all in particular 1966 or was that just the period
8 when Sandy and the girls...?

9 JM: Sandy and the girls went back to the states for a short period of time, yeah.

10 SM: Okay. And then they came back?

11 JM: Yeah they came back, when I got the house set up in Bangkok they came
12 back.

13 SM: Got ya'. This will end the interview with Mr. John McRainey on the
14 fifteenth of June. Thank you.

15 SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. John McRainey on
16 the nineteenth of June 2001 at approximately 10:15 Lubbock time. I'm in Lubbock
17 Texas and Mr. McRainey is in McAllen Texas. Sir why don't you go ahead and if you
18 would add the comment concerning the Air Force base that you just recalled that you had
19 mentioned in the previous interview the F-105s were flying on.

20 JM: Alright Steve. The Air Force base that I forgot the name of was Khorat and
21 that was the base that the F-105s flew out of in Thailand.

22 SM: Okay. Now in terms of new information or other things that I wanted to ask
23 you concerning your time both in Vietnam when you were flying out of Saigon and other
24 areas of Vietnam before you went to Bangkok and also while you were flying in Bangkok
25 and perhaps even later when you were flying in Laos more specifically. Did you provide
26 support for Special Forces units in base camps?

27 JM: Yes we did. We supplied support in a number of different places both in
28 Vietnam and in Laos. I could get my logbook out and give you a specific date and
29 instance, but it would probably have to be after our break because it would take me some
30 time to find the logbook. Where I made an airdrop to Special Forces people on the
31 Bolivans Plateau in Laos where they had come under heavy attack by North Vietnamese

1 group and were out of ammunition. They called on Air America to re-supply them and I
2 made a drop there that was very exciting! It looked like World War Three going on
3 down there. I can give you the exact date and place, but those were Special Forces
4 people who were training troops at what we call the PS strips in Southern Laos on the
5 Bolivans Plateau.

6 SM: Okay. You said you also did supply some support to Special Forces in
7 Vietnam when you [?]?

8 JM: Well yes they...I think I mentioned that we flew some projects out of
9 Kontum. One of them was the landing strip northwest of Kontum that supplied a Special
10 Forces camp and that camp was located several clicks away from the airport and the
11 airport as I recall we had to land to the west and take off to the east because of the
12 mountains. I remember one occasion where they always radioed ahead to make sure that
13 the Special Forces were there to secure the strip because there was no security at the strip
14 it was just a strip with no facilities on it. In one particular flight we went in and landed in
15 the C-46. Once you setup your approach you're more or less committed when you were
16 loaded. We landed and pulled into the parking area and there was nobody there! The
17 Special Forces were detained for some reason in leaving, but shortly after we open the
18 cargo do we receive some small arms fire from probably 50 to 100 yards away up the
19 side of a mountain in some real dense jungle. We received two or three holes in the top
20 of the airplane, in fact three to be exact. They were shooting from above us and the
21 rounds came down through the top and into the cargo. About that time the Special Forces
22 showed up. I did the only time I ever used a weapon in my years in Vietnam I...we were
23 issued uzis to carry in the cockpit in case we did come under fire and I had crawled up in
24 the cockpit and assembled our Uzi and put a magazine in it and I had fired one magazine
25 out over the wing hatch up in the general direction that the rounds were coming from.
26 After that there was no more firing! I don't know if I hit anybody or just scared them off!

27 SM: Wow! Now I was under the impression that as non-combatants because you
28 guys were supposed to be civilian pilots that you weren't supposed to be armed.

29 JM: Well you know if you'll recall in the early days of Vietnam, I think it was in
30 1965, we had an airplane shot down in the delta. The captain was Bill Pruner he had a
31 Chinese first officer and a Vietnamese kicker. At that time the company was really

1 adamant that we weren't supposed to have any weapons with us, we were supposed to be
2 non-combatant civilians and as such we would be a threat, we wouldn't be threatened.
3 Well that particular flight proved otherwise because they made an emergency landing
4 into a rice paddy in the delta and the Viet Cong came out of the bushes and executed
5 them in the cockpit. Bill Pruner had been wounded and had radioed to an airplane
6 overhead that he had been wounded and the airplane saw the people coming onto the
7 airplane and they called in helicopters to try to get there. One of our Hueys in their
8 attempt to rescue them received ground fire and the first officer on that flight a fellow
9 named Janick was shot through the wrist and it took quite a chunk of nerve out and as a
10 result he lost the use of that hand. During that fiasco they decided 'well, you know...'
11 we were at risk not having weapons and so they issued us Uzis, the Israeli made fully
12 automatic submachine gun type. The nice thing about them they folded down into a
13 compact little case and they gave us two magazines of ammunition I believe; thirty
14 rounds in each magazine so I believe that's sixty rounds. We could draw those along
15 with our survival equipment when we flew and I always drew one and had it in the
16 cockpit. Like I say all the years I carried it I only used it one time and that was on that
17 particular flight re-supplying a Special Forces camp.

18 SM: How about personal weapons, was that permissible?

19 JM: Oh I carried a 45 in my flight kit all through Saigon and all through Bangkok
20 and all through Laos.

21 SM: Was that common amongst the pilots?

22 JM: Yes I believe you could say that was the standard operating procedure, I
23 think almost everybody had a weapon somewhere on them. If for no other reason, if you
24 went down you needed a weapon for survival.

25 SM: There were more hazards then just the enemy.

26 JM: Yes. I'd feel a lot more comfortable having a weapon on me down in the
27 jungle if I was jus trying to stay away not only from the enemy, but from some of the
28 animals that inhabit the area.

29 SM: Yeah. Did you have any run-ins with any of the wildlife?

30 JM: No... Well I'll back up. I lived in the setup Palace Hotel in Vientiane Laos
31 when I first moved up there, it's the better part of I'd say six months. We had a parking

1 lot along side it that was not paved it was just dirt and one night I pulled in there in my
2 little Renault and opened the door and stepped out and my foot kind of, my heel rolled off
3 of something and the light from the inside shined on the ground and it was one of the
4 black and yellow and red banded Kraits. That got my blood pressure pounding! I
5 jumped back in the car, slammed the door, drove around and parked right in front of the
6 hotel in the street. (laughing)

7 SM: (laughing) The kraits are pretty deadly?

8 JM: I think they are!

9 SM: Yeah!

10 JM: We had another incident of a Krait that was rather humorous at the Pepper
11 Grinder in Udorn where we loaded ordinance onto the 123. One time George Ritter my
12 best friend over there had a load of pallets put on the airplane and they were laying along
13 side of the ramp in a grassy area and evidently this Krait had gotten up inside this pallet
14 and when they put it on the airplane during the take off the vibration this Krait came out
15 and scared the devil...the kickers in the back saw him and they were beating and
16 screaming and he kept disappearing and they didn't know where the snake was in the
17 airplane. It scared all of them. So Ritter wrote up a Captain's report to be careful when
18 you're loading things out of Pepper Grinder and he missed spelt Kraits. Then all the
19 wags added onto it on the bulletin board and scratched it out and spelled Krait with a K
20 and a whole lot of other things. Finally the last one was "Ritter's Critter." (laughing)

21 SM: (laughing) That's funny! Why was that called the Pepper Grinder?

22 JM: That was just the name that the... It was one by the U.S. Army and the
23 reason I guess is that the airborne troops rigged the parachutes there and put them on the
24 loads when they loaded them on the airplane. The Army gave it the name Pepper
25 Grinder.

26 SM: Hum, okay. Well, how about other incidences involving wildlife that was
27 not necessarily in a jungle environment like perhaps a more domesticated environment?

28 JM: Well I think just about everybody, well not everybody, but the families
29 anyway had pets. I remember the Bob Hardels had some little tiny deer that were native
30 up there like the key deer. They're only about, oh gosh, they were as small as dog; they
31 had a pair of those for pets. Oh God, many of the families had gibbons, we had a couple

1 of gibbons. We had one pilot, Bill Curuthers, who was a PHD in entomology that loved
2 animals and he had pet snakes and sea otters, he had a pair of sea otters, he had gibbons,
3 he had a pet tarantula that was given to him by the wing commander Summners out of
4 Bangkok. He had all kinds of weird creatures that he kept at his place. They called it the
5 zoo in Vientiane.

6 SM: Okay. Well I understand you guys had a large cat too at one time.

7 JM: We had a Malaysian golden cat, yes. I had met a customer in the Nakhon Se
8 Tamirat in southern Thailand that had had this cat...had a Malaysian cat for I think he
9 had the cat nine years. It was a beautiful animal and it was as friendly...I mean I know
10 it's a dangerous animal there, anytime you get a cat... this was male probably weighed
11 slightly over 100 pounds. A cat that big can be very dangerous, but that cat played with
12 his kids, played with his dogs, it would come when it was called, it just a great pet. I said
13 'Gah, I'd like to have one of those. I like cats.' He said he'd check the market and try to
14 find one for me. Well months went by and he couldn't...he also warned me at that time,
15 he said, "You want a male they're not as high strung as the female." He couldn't find a
16 male, but he did find a female kitten and he finally told me it was there. I picked it up
17 one of the runs south and we kept the cat for a long time until we left Thailand in fact. It
18 turned out to be not like his, it wasn't that friendly, but as long as you were careful
19 around it and didn't startle it you could pet it. It would play with our dog, it was very
20 friendly with the dog. It did bite me one time, but it was my fault. It came up and sat by
21 the chair and I dropped the paper on it relaxing and just let my arm fall down and he bite
22 me in the hand, which was another adventure in that it punctured my hand, the fang went
23 all the way through between my thumb and forefinger. My wife and kids were trying to
24 pry its mouth open to get it out of my hand, but... Like I say he wasn't attacking me I just
25 startled him. But anyway the next day I had a VIP flight to Kuala Lumpur and being that
26 was the VIP flight, we had two captains to fly it and we also had a third captain that the
27 chief pilot Ed Orlick, rode along with the VIPs in the back. Going down I started getting
28 sick, I started a headache and fever and by the time I got to Kuala Lumpur I was quite ill.
29 I asked the desk clerk if he could recommend a doctor, where I could find a doctor. He
30 drew me a map where to find this doctor few blocks from the hotel and I walked down
31 these back streets of [?] and found it. It looked closer to a shack or a shanty then a

1 doctor's office. I was a little dismayed in when I walked in the front office...before I got
2 into the office there was kind of a waiting room you might say and had shelves of bottles
3 of snakes and lizards and all kinds of things in these jars, which kind of disturbed me. I
4 thought 'what have I got here a witch doctor?' When I met the doctor he was a very
5 elderly Chinese gentlemen and he spoke English, that helped. I went in to his
6 innersanctum and I told him that I'd been bitten by this cat and he said, "Oh you have cat
7 scratch fever." Well I'd never heard of cat scratch fever and I thought it was something
8 you know...a mythical disease. He opened a drawer with loose pills in it and he took two
9 or three different colored pills out, put them in a napkin, wrapped them up for me. He
10 said he had to give me a shot, he had a kerosene with him and I can remember the pop,
11 the enamel all chipped off of it and dirty. He dropped the syringe down in this pot and it
12 didn't even cover the syringe. The water ran inside it. He heated it up and he pulled a
13 little vial of something out that had aluminum foil over it so it looked like it might have
14 been sterile...and he gave me a shot. He told me that I'd be alright by the next day so I
15 went back to my hotel, but the fever was so high. My teeth were chattering, I was
16 freezing and so I turned the air conditioning off in the room and I got all...there was two
17 twin beds in it, I took all the covers off one bed and put them on the other and got
18 underneath and went out. I think passed out might have been a better word for it. Later
19 that evening Ed Orlick and and the co-captain Verge Domino...we were all going to have
20 dinner together and they knocked on the door and I didn't answer. They asked the room
21 boy to open the door to see if there was something wrong and they opened the door and
22 they said it was like a blast furnace in there. I was being closed up in the heat of the day,
23 it was about 110 down there and I was out of it, they said I was unconscious. They
24 couldn't make any sense out of me at all so they called the British military hospital and
25 they sent an ambulance and took me to the British military hospital and they got a doctor
26 out of a party. He was in his tuxedo when I saw him. They'd gotten me cooled down
27 and I was semi-conscious anyway. I could talk and I told the doctor about this visit to the
28 doctor and he said, "Oh God! At the very least you've probably got Hepatitis." But he
29 said, "I think the doctor was right in this diagnosis, I think it's catch scratch fever." He
30 said, "We can control that." So he gave me some more shots, kept me in the hospital

1 overnight and the next morning I felt pretty good, but... I rode in the back of the airplane
2 and Verge and Ed Orlick flew it back to Bangkok.

3 SM: How long did it take you to recover fully?

4 JM: Oh, I'd say a week before I was really fully recovered from it.

5 SM: Wow! Did you continue to take medication or was it just the shots
6 themselves?

7 JM: Oh yes. They gave me a prescription to last, you know like probably
8 antibiotics that I took for about ten days, but I never had any ill effect that I know from
9 that except the scar on my hand when the cat bit me.

10 SM: Did you Contract Hepatitis from that dirty needle?

11 JM: No. You know every time I got sick after that I kept thinking 'Here comes
12 the Hepatitis!' However my liver has always showed up that there was something wrong
13 with it. Even today, I just came from a doctor's appointment and the doctor said, "You
14 know, your liver isn't functioning quite properly and it looks like...Have you ever had
15 Hepatitis?" And I told her about that instance. I said, "To my knowledge I don't believe
16 I have."

17 SM: That's really interesting. How about malaria or any other tropical diseases?

18 JM: Oh I did Contract malaria, but that came from Central America not from
19 Vietnam, not from Laos.

20 SM: Oh. Did any other strange or exotic diseases?

21 JM: Yes. Both myself and my fine family came down with Dengue Fever in
22 Thailand. My wife had an episode eating seafood where she was poisoned and she swoll
23 up to where she couldn't breath through her throat and her eyes were swollen shut. She
24 was a mess. That was all in Thailand!

25 SM: What did you do?

26 JM: Well we took her to the hospital and they gave her some shots and they told
27 her that the fish hadn't been cleaned properly.

28 SM: Sounds like she went into anaphylactic shock.

29 JM: Oh it was bad. She's not allergic to seafood so it was obviously something
30 else. Quite a reaction.

31 SM: Yeah. How long did it take you all to recover from Dengue?

1 JM: You know I really can't remember. I know it laid us low for quite a while; it
2 was two weeks that we weren't feeling good at all.

3 SM: Well, I would assume that that was pretty common for most the people
4 to...?

5 JM: Yeah, I think it was all common over there. Oh I did go through...I think the
6 whole family went through a couple of spouts of amebic dysentery also. Back in the old
7 days they had a grounded cure that was arsenic. They'd give you some low level doses
8 of arsenic to kill the ameba. Of course that stuff is cumulative so after two or three doses
9 of that they can't give you anymore of that.

10 SM: Right. Otherwise you'd die.

11 JM: Yeah. But they did come up with a non-grounding medicine for ameba
12 while we were over there. I know the last time I went through it it was non-grounding. I
13 could take the medication and fly.

14 SM: Okay. I take it you guys would mix eating on the economy and eating in...?

15 JM: Oh yes we ate on the economy or ate at home, the only two places.

16 SM: Was that also common or was there anything in the compound, the Air
17 America compound a place where you could eat?

18 JM: Well yeah, we had a restaurant at the airport you know where we could eat,
19 but the only time we'd eat there is if I was there in between, you know at lunchtime
20 waiting for an airplane to be loaded and I'd have lunch there. Quite frequently I'd have
21 breakfast there with an early morning flight. But other than using it as a convenience
22 when I was at the airport we didn't use it.

23 SM: Okay. Was that westernized food in the airport or was that...?

24 JM: Ah yes. They had an excellent restaurant in Udorn, better than in Vientiane.
25 When I RON'd in Udorn of course I'd eat three meals a day there if I was there during
26 the middle of the day anyway. Food was excellent, they called it the Rendezvous' Club
27 and it was very good.

28 SM: The Rendezvous Club?

29 JM: Yes.

30 SM: Where there any other clubs that you would frequent, especially in
31 Vientiane?

1 JM: Well you mean on the local economy?

2 SM: Oh yes. There was a...Chez Lin was one of the better restaurants there. It
3 was a French-Vietnamese lady that ran that. There was...oh let me think of the names of
4 some of these...

5 SM: Did you ever go to the, was it the Purple Porpoise?

6 JM: Oh the Purple Porpoise was primarily a bar. It was run by Monty Banks the
7 old Englishmen and yes I've had...I used to go there to play Cameroons and have a beer,
8 or two or three! But Monty was alright, I met him early in my career in Vientiane and
9 that his first place was called the Pub and it was in the Settha Palace and it was right
10 across the hall from my room so I spent a lot of time visiting Monty. Oh another
11 excellent restaurant in Vientiane was at the Settha Palace Hotel and I believe they call it
12 The RathsKellar, it was run by an Austrian or a German who was the chef and the food
13 was excellent there.

14 SM: Could you spell the name of that palace for me?

15 JM: The Settha Palace? I think it was S-e-t-t-h-a. I believe that was the correct
16 spelling. In fact if you look on website [or] if you talk to Sandra or Barbara they can give
17 you... The Settha Palace I understood it fallen in complete disrepair. It was an old
18 French hotel when we were there, but I had heard that it has since then completely
19 renovated and is now a popular tourist hotel and has its own website on the web!

20 SM: Okay. Is this the hotel that...yeah the hotel that had been taken over by I
21 guess some Indians, some Hindus?

22 JM: I don't know. I don't know who has taken it over, but it...It wasn't, even
23 when we were there, it wasn't the biggest hotel in town or the newest or the best, but it
24 had a certain quaint charm about it that I always liked.

25 SM: It was popular.

26 JM: Yeah, it was very popular with the pilots.

27 SM: Okay. I'm curious about some of the bar activity, not because of the
28 drinking, but more importantly because of cosmopolitan aspects of some...I understand
29 that in some bars like the Purple Porpoise it was an attraction for a lot of different groups
30 of people.

31 JM: Oh yes...

1 SM: I was wondering if you could describe some of the, I guess the groupings
2 that would show up at these kinds of bars, the Purple Porpoise and others.

3 JM: Well you know the community... Vientiane was kind of like a Casa Blanca
4 during World War I it was neutral. So the Russians had an embassy there, the Chinese
5 had an embassy there, the North Vietnamese, the Pathet Lao, and as a result you had all
6 different types frequently the bars and the hotels and the restaurants, but there wasn't any
7 terrorism because a terrorist... if he bombed a café he could just as well kill a Russian or a
8 Vietnamese as he could an American. So we were relatively safe within the city and as a
9 result you rub shoulders with quite an interesting group. We had a fellow, in fact I met
10 him in California, it was the only time I've seen him. I can't think of his last name, his
11 first name was Al. He was assigned to the company as a co-pilot in C-46 and I was
12 flying the C-46 at the time making rice drops and Al flew with me several times. We got
13 to be pretty good friends. Al was a Russian by birth and he was a naturalized U.S.
14 Citizen, but he spoke fluent Russian. I didn't know it at the time, but he was obviously
15 working for the agency and Air America was his cover. But he... agency propriety is a
16 cover, it's kind of loose control. One time we were at the bar in the Settha Palace, which
17 was separate from the restaurant and we were waiting... well it was in the restaurant, but
18 it was in the corner of it. We were waiting for a table to open up and we couldn't even sit
19 all the seats were full and we were standing there. Al had his back to two gentlemen and
20 he obviously was interested in their conversation and I couldn't hear any of their
21 conversation so I didn't know what language they were speaking. While we were talking
22 all of a sudden Al broke out laughing and these two guys jumped up and turned and
23 looked at us and Al said, "Let's get the hell out of here!" I left with him. I said, "What
24 the was that all about?" He said, "They were speaking Russian and they told a very
25 funny joke!" He blew his cover! (laughing)

26 SM: Was there... Did you have conversations or interactions with any of the
27 Russians, North Vietnamese, Pathet Lao... Did you ever...

28 JM: I didn't know any personally. I believe there were some of the pilots that
29 did. I believe Ed Adams knew them, he lived I think very close to the Russian embassy.
30 But I didn't have anyone that I called a friend or acquaintance that were in that
31 community.

1 SM: Well maybe not a friend or acquaintance, but maybe just someone that you
2 happened to sit next to in a bar and all of a sudden you were talking to them and then you
3 learned later that's who they were?

4 JM: No. One time I was introduced to a gentlemen, I didn't know who he was,
5 by a piano player in the Settha Palace. He said, "This is my friend, he'd like to talk to an
6 Air American pilot." I said, "Okay." So I sat down with him and this gentlemen had an
7 accent, but I couldn't make out what it was. He was asking me questions, he was
8 particularly interested in the Pilatus Porter. He wanted to know how we mounted the
9 guns on them. I said, "We don't have guns on our pilatus porters." And he says, "Well I
10 hear that you have guns." "No, no, no, no. [?] we're non-combatants. We don't have
11 guns." But he was insisting that these airplanes were used militarily and I kept saying no
12 they weren't. This gentlemen that played in the band or played the piano was swift, but
13 he had a little background on him. He had been caught on some kind of a drug charge in
14 Bangkok and the states and got into Laos, which was...without a passport, the Thais had
15 his passport. He was kind of a man without a country. This Swiss ambassador [?].
16 This was a Swiss ambassador from Thailand that had came up there. Evidently the Swiss
17 had had a complaint that he Swiss Pilatus Porters borders that we were using up there
18 were being used militarily and they didn't want to be selling their airplanes for military
19 use. That was what he was trying to pry out of me, but that's probably the only time I
20 really didn't know who I was talking to and ran across somebody who wasn't who he
21 seemed.

22 SM: Yes sir. What kind of instructions were you given in terms of talking with
23 people?

24 JM: I really was never given any...personally. Maybe some people were, but
25 nobody ever took the time to tell me not to talk to anybody. Oh I mean we were given
26 the various thing that what we were doing was nobody's business and we weren't going
27 to talk to the press of course, but as far as the strike of a conversation with a friend at a
28 bar where discretion was always the better...you know, what we were doing militarily
29 anyway in supplying arms and ammunition we always kept that to our self.

30 SM: When you...Were you ever told that if you were approached by someone
31 say like the Swiss Ambassador, if you were approached by someone like that, someone

1 obviously trying to plug you for information... Were you ever told to report that, do be
2 debriefed on it, [?]?

3 JM: No I can't say that I was. Again I don't know if I missed some special
4 indoctrination or not, but I was never given any real specific instructions except use your
5 commonsense and keeping what you're doing to yourself, you're a U.S. Contract carrier
6 flying primarily for USAID or hauling rice and things like that. Most of us didn't need to
7 be... I think that we kept that pretty much to our self. I didn't see a whole lot come out.
8 There were a few a stories in some of the adventure magazines about us hauling arms and
9 ammunition during the Vietnam or during the Laotian War in the early days, but it never
10 seemed to be real big time in the press that I can recall.

11 SM: Okay. Well would you say then that the only time that you were given
12 specific instructions in terms of security is if and when you had a special project...?

13 JM: That's exactly right. When we have a special project we were given a
14 briefing and then again it's need to know, we were only briefed on the project as far as
15 what we needed to know to fly it. But we were given a security pledge to sign that we
16 would not divulge any information concerning that forever or maybe longer under
17 penalty of imprisonment and etcetera. So if I sign something I naturally was going to be
18 very close, tight lip about that. I wasn't going to mention it. If I didn't I considered
19 everything else, you know again commonsense would come in to it. We went beyond a
20 typical USAID charter airline. I don't think many charter airlines make air drops of arms
21 and ammunition to troops on the field. We used discretion in that respect.

22 SM: When you had to sign a security agreement, that was for a specific project in
23 a specific mission?

24 JM: Yes, a specific project in a specific mission.

25 SM: Okay. Good enough. Well what did you do after you finished the Malaysia
26 project, the infrared project?

27 JM: Well we... about the time that that was over the company just got the K
28 model 123s. The B models, which were just two R-2800s were replaced with K models,
29 which had the two J-85 jets and better brakes. There were several modifications that
30 were made on the aircraft to make them a K. They were given twelve of them and they
31 put a bid open for additional crewmembers. At that time Ed Orlick had gone to, well

1 he'd gone several months earlier to Vientiane and Fred Walker had come down to
2 Bangkok. I'd become very good friends with Fred Walker. I think Fred was...Fred was
3 one of the most memorable characters that I met over there and I had a lot of respect for
4 him, I liked him I thought he was a real gentlemen and a heck of an aviator. I did the 123
5 project and I turned it into Fred and he said, "Well John you know you've got a good job
6 here, a comfortable living, and your with your family...Why do you want to go up there
7 for?" And I said, "Well, I want to fly that airplane and I'd like to get up to Laos, that's
8 where the real action is." And he says, "Well, you know your seniority of such there's no
9 question that you'll be going up there if you take this." And I said, "Yeah I would like to
10 go." Fred tried to talk me out of it but...myself and George Ritter who's my best friend
11 and he was in Bangkok at the time and Fred Conley all did the program at the same time
12 and of course we all went right up to Laos. We got to Laos...the only IT at that time was
13 Phil Schneider and Bill Cooper another friend of mine who had stayed in Saigon had did
14 the program and he came up from Saigon. One of the first training flights Bill was flying
15 with Schneider and they were making touch and goes at the Vientiane airport and on one
16 of the touch and goes they forgot to put the gear down and they touched down on the jack
17 pads. Did minor damage to the airplane, just wore the jack pads down. They added the
18 power and were airborne in an instant. But of course the company took bending the
19 aluminum real seriously and they grounded both Bill and Phil. That stopped the training
20 in the 123 program so they were real short of 46 pilots, a couple of pilots had been on
21 home leave and a couple others got sick and they were desperate for 46 pilots. I had
22 flown a 46 in Saigon so they checked me out on air drops on the 46 with a rice drop and I
23 started flying 46 until we got a new instructor pilot in the 123.

24 SM: Did they... They never reinstated the two pilots?

25 JM: Yeah they reinstated Bill because he was a trainee and they Phil also as a
26 line captain, but they didn't let him instruct anymore. He went back and just flew the 123
27 in the line and after the investigation and the slap on the wrist. Bill Cooper then went
28 back to training and he checked out in the 123. In fact Bill and I were IPs in the airplane
29 starting very early. They made both of us instructor pilots and check airmen in the 123.

30 SM: Wow! Okay. Well were there any particular missions that you recall while
31 you were flying...

1 JM: The 123?

2 SM: The 123 and then the 46?

3 JM: Well 46s...I have in my log book an exact date of it, but it went back to the
4 Saigon days. I had a trip in a 46, the weather was bad, it was raining and a lot of
5 thunderstorms around. We had a short flight from Saigon to Da Nang and we were
6 carrying almost entirely the trip was made up of medical supplies. Shortly after takeoff I
7 started getting a terrible headache and feeling nauseous and my co-pilot did too, he's a
8 Chinese first officer. It wasn't long before my first officer's losing his breakfast. We'd
9 both eaten breakfast together at the airport in Saigon. And I thought, "Uh oh, food
10 poisoning!" I radioed the company and told them that both the first officer and I were
11 sick. I opened my window on the left side...in the 46, boy you really get a gust of air in
12 there the way the airplane's designed. That cool air rushing in made me feel better
13 almost immediately. I cracked it, you know I didn't leave it full open very long because
14 it's blowing us away, but I left enough air coming in there that as long as I was breathing
15 that fresh air I was feeling alright. But I was still nauseous and headache and we radioed
16 ahead to Da Nang that both the first officer and I were sick and we suspected food
17 poisoning and they said they'd have a doctor waiting for us when we landed. They had
18 an American doctor, I don't know whether he was military or USAID, but when we
19 landed the doctor was the first one on board the airplane. The minute he'd come up the
20 ladder, "Oh chri." He knew immediately what was wrong. He said, "Ether!" The
21 airplane reeked of ether. So they started searching the airplane and obviously there
22 was...some of the loaders that had loaded the airplane were Viet Cong and they had
23 opened a can or a box of ether that was an aluminum can. They'd punched holes in the
24 tops of them with screwdrivers and put them in the radio rack of the airplane.

25 SM: So the heat would...

26 JM: The heat vaporized that stuff, but it was also the danger of a spark igniting
27 and blowing up. But they made us ill to say the least.

28 SM: Man you were lucky!

29 JM: We were lucky, yep, we were. In Vientiane, I mean the difference in the
30 mission between the 46 and Saigon and Vientiane was night and day. The flying of the
31 46 in Vietnam was primarily a USAID mission, point-to-point landings, but we did make

1 a lot of landings and a lot of short strips and a lot of bad crosswinds along the coast. So it
2 was a real challenge flying in the 46. In Laos the mission was almost entirely airdrop
3 rice, which was a completely different mission but again very, very challenging, very
4 exacting. I enjoyed the missions in both Vientiane and Saigon in the 46, but the 46 to me
5 was I believe I might have mentioned it to you before; it was like the era of sailing ships.
6 Old sailors say back in the days of wooden ships and iron men and I always thought of
7 the 46 as that era in aviation. Grog, rugged airplane that you had to fly, but real good on it
8 certainly.

9 SM: Was one mission more challenging than the other, that is flying out of
10 Saigon versus Vientiane?

11 JM: I think that Vientiane was probably a little more challenging. Getting down
12 in some of those narrow valleys and planning these drops, boy you had to be very, very
13 exact. However, short strips and strong crosswinds the 46 is a real challenging airplane
14 in that respect too. They both had their challenges.

15 SM: Yes sir. In terms of the rice drops and I assume that we're talking both hard
16 and soft drops?

17 JM: Well the 46 was almost all regular rice drops. That's where they put the one
18 sack inside the other sack. It required a very different technique and it required quite a
19 level of skill to really be able to put ever sack on the DZ you had to pay very close
20 attention to what you were doing.

21 SM: Was there an altitude window that you had to keep in?

22 JM: Oh yes there was a definite...The idea was that the rice had to be free falling,
23 it had to be falling with no forward motion. In other words reach terminal velocity where
24 it's falling straight and flat. If it had any forward motion it would hit the ground and
25 tumble and then of course scatter rice. The only time you could drop low was if you
26 were dropping onto the side of a hill and they had some DZs that way. Then you could
27 come in lower and just plant it into the side of the hill and it wouldn't roll, but most of the
28 DZs were flat and therefore you had to be a very...You had to be where the rice was
29 falling free and that was about 800 feet, 800 to 1000 feet was a good altitude above the
30 terrain. Then you wanted the airplane as slow as possible. I would slow the airplane to
31 about say 105 knots and that's pretty dang slow. You would lose your...as the airplane

1 approached the DZ you know you would blanket the DZ and when the airplane went over
2 you couldn't see it anymore. So you had to have a side reference to where as you were
3 approaching the DZ you would know some prominent landmark that was right even with
4 the beginning of the DZ but off the your left, if you're the captain so you can see it. As
5 the airplane's come up over the DZ and the DZ would pass under me is the end...as the
6 airplane came up right on the end of the DZ I would call for drop and the kickers would
7 release the load and we would generally put it on, I'd say nine times out of ten it was
8 right on the DZ.

9 SM: Okay. This will end CD number one in interview with Mr. John

10

11 SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. John McRainey on
12 the 19th of June 2001 at eleven twenty Lubbock time. I'm in Lubbock Texas and Mr.
13 McRainey is in McAllen Texas and we are continuing the interview on CD number two.
14 Alright sir why don't you go ahead and provide that additional information concerning
15 those events that we just previously discussed.

16 JM: Okay. On the incident where the ether was put in the radio rack of the C-46,
17 I looked up in my logbook that took place on August 24, 1966 in Chinese registered C-46
18 Bravo 9-1-0. That was the trip between Saigon and Nha Trang. Then I mentioned when
19 you asked about...and heck I had it in my logbook right here, I lost the page, I'll look it
20 up, but you mention about did we ever work with the Special Forces re-supply Special
21 Forces and I mention one instance where we drop the ammunition to Special Forces that
22 were being overrun. I had the dad gung thing out here and now the page has flipped
23 away from me...but I normally didn't make very many notations in my logbook...here it
24 is...unless there was something really out of the ordinary. Like getting shot at was fairly
25 routine unless it was out of the ordinary where they actually hit us or something, but on
26 this one I made the notation heavy fire and as I recall it did look like World War III.
27 They had called in Spectre gun ships, the C-130s with the mini guns, and there were A-
28 1Es and F-4s and everything you could think off and they're trying to beat back the North
29 Vietnamese were overrunning the strip and of course Special Forces guys couldn't even
30 fight their way out because they were out of ammunition. We made the drop right on
31 their little compound. The whole strip had been overrun except for the landing or the
32 parking pad, a small part of that, as I recall it was the northwest part of the strip. We put

1 the load in there and they managed to get their ammunition together and fight their way
2 out to the west towards Pax Khe, but that was on March 8th of 1917 and it was at PS-22,
3 which that would've been the last drop made there because the North Vietnamese did
4 overrun the strip. With the trip flares that were going off and all the tracers that were
5 coming up it was pretty exciting night as I recall!

6 SM: Was it typical for you to get shot at?

7 JM: Well yeah, well you wouldn't say it was typical, but it happened. When we
8 were re-supplying places that were under siege...you know the came they played were
9 during one season the North Vietnamese would push and then during the next season the
10 Hmong would make their push. So there were offenses and defenses and back and forth
11 depending on the season and when, as long as Vang Pao's troops were supplied they
12 would hold the position. They'd be on these mountaintops dug in real good and if we'd
13 get food and ammunition to them boy they'd stay there. But of course the North
14 Vietnamese at the Pathet Lao would surround their position and of course their game
15 would be fight off or shoot at all the airplanes that came in there and hopefully keep
16 them from re-supplying them so they could overrun them. So during the seasons that
17 those various places were being surrounded we could expect ground fire every time that
18 we went in and they normally didn't disappoint us, but that was one of the reasons I
19 really liked the 123, we considered it the closes thing to a flying tank that we had over
20 there. We had armor plating in the floor of the airplane and we had...some of the
21 airplanes even had the side armor where you could, it was kind of a foam type plate that
22 was put along the side of a seat where if you sat back in it they wouldn't even get you
23 from the side.

24 SM: Wow! Was this some kind of a think...?

25 JM: It was about a three-inch thick foam mat as I recall.

26 SM: It would absorb the shock.

27 JM: It would absorb the rounds and the shrapnel if there was shrapnel.

28 SM: Wow!

29 JM: The 123 had...the fuel system was designed, the main tanks were in the back
30 of them as cells, a big, big bathtub like tank held over 700 gallons of fuel, and they were
31 on bomb shackles where if you took a hit that was so bad that the tank caught on fire,

1 which took a substantial hit because the airplanes had, they had a reticulated foam baffle
2 in them, what we called it, that would not let the fuel flood out in a gush and explode, it
3 would come out but it would just trickle out. But if it did catch on fire you could drop the
4 fuel tank, go to cross-feed first of course, and then drop the fuel tank and fly on the other
5 tank, and if you had the pylon tanks on, they were on bomb shackles also so you could
6 drop those. Actually you could drop all your fuel and become a glider if you so desired.
7 (laughing)

8 SM: How well would it glide though?

9 JM: I wouldn't recommend that.

10 SM: No, but it did have glide capabilities?

11 JM: Yes it did. The airplane was designed to be shot at, it was called the
12 Provider and it was built by the Air Force to be an airplane that would re-supply troops
13 and get shot at, but that would take an awful lot of ground fire to bring it down and it did.
14 I was...in looking through my logbooks I came across another, like I say I didn't make
15 many notations unless it was really out of the ordinary, but this one I did make a notation.
16 It said return with load due MiG, and this was on January 15th 1972 and I was making a
17 drop up in the northeastern part of Laos, very close to North Vietnam and these radar
18 picket ships that monitored what they call "the Barrel". They called it "Barrel Roll",
19 which was Lao and the Air Force flew these airplanes at high altitude in a circle over
20 Laos monitoring aircraft movements. You know like if the North Vietnamese turned off
21 they'd have them on radar immediately. They call these airplanes, they had different call
22 signs, but it seems to me that during the day it was Cricket, was the aircraft that we
23 communicated with. They would give you all kinds of advisories about, particularly
24 enemy air action and they would coordinate search and rescue and what have you. Well
25 on this day my first officer was flying and Van Ingen and I were way up and we had a
26 solid under cast underneath us. We were looking for a hole so that we could get down
27 underneath and get into our DZ, when Cricket called us and said, "Aircraft in..." and I
28 can't remember what area it was in, but it was well north of the PDJ and it was us
29 obviously and we called back and gave them our call sign...let's see what I was that
30 day...I was flying 54-556, that would have been 556 and they said that a MiG, that three
31 MiGs had just departed Vinh and they appeared that they were on an intercept for me!

1 Of course the North Vietnamese radar had painted us up in that area. So I said, “Well
2 I’m going to head south, see if they change course.” I turn 180 and headed south and
3 sure enough, they said, “Yes! The MiGs have made an intercept on you and now they’re
4 coming at us and we’re heading south!”

5 SM: Whoa!

6 JM: So they left the barrel and told me, “You’re on your own!” All of us said,
7 “Oh my god!” those MiGs had taken off from Vinh they couldn’t have been more than
8 seventy or eighty miles away, they’re going to be there in a heartbeat. So we
9 immediately put on our parachute, which we normally didn’t, well the kickers wore
10 there’s back there but the pilots normally didn’t wear there’s unless they got into
11 something like this. We all put on our parachutes and we lit the jet and went to 100% on
12 the jets and we went up to medo power on the recipis to go as fast as we could and we
13 headed west away from Vinh and we decided after a minute or two of that...here we are
14 on top of a solid under cast and it’s a clear day out there and of course we knew the MiGs
15 didn’t have radars themselves, but they were relying on the ground radar to fector them
16 into us. I said, “Those turkeys you know, they’re going to be on us in a heartbeat and of
17 course we’re a sitting duck.” So we have not choice, we got to get down in that under
18 cast, the tops were about 800 feet. We didn’t want to get down so low we were going to
19 run into the side of a mountain, but at that time getting shot down was inevitable if we
20 didn’t disappear. So we went like a submarine and descended into the under cast into the
21 clouds and I of course pulled the power back on the jets so that we weren’t going too fast
22 underneath there and we stayed as close to the surface as we could, we didn’t want the
23 fin, the ruder to be sticking up in the air to attract the MiG, but we wanted to be out of
24 site. Of course we’re sweating blood that we were down there in terrain that we were
25 scrambling for the maps to see just how high the terrain was, but it was too close for
26 comfort, but there was not alternative. By then of course Cricket had left the area and we
27 didn’t have any of their advice as to when to make the MiGs broke it off, but we stayed
28 down there as long as we absolutely dared and then we popped up for a peek and there
29 was nobody around so we headed south and back to Vientiane.

30 SM: Wow! Did you ever encounter MiGs at all?

1 JM: That was the only occasion that we had. Now we never saw them, but we
2 knew they were real close to us. They were probably just about within visual sighting of
3 us when we went down in the clouds.

4 SM: Had anybody else that flew for Air America or any of the other charter
5 services out of Southeast Asia, do you know if they ever encountered MiGs?

6 JM: I don't know you know. I don't recall of any stories, but I'd certainly be the
7 last one to say that they didn't because a lot of our missions were way up on the China-
8 Lao and on the Vietnamese-Lao border and they certainly could've encountered them. I
9 know that a lot of the rescue missions that our helicopters made way up there they used to
10 have US fighter escort, what they'd call CAP, a MiG-CAP in case the MiGs came they'd
11 have some help.

12 SM: Right. Okay. Just out of curiosity, you mentioned going up near the
13 Chinese border, do you know if you guys ever provided support to nationalist Chinese
14 forces over the border or even in Laos?

15 JM: Nationalist Chinese in Laos?

16 SM: Yeah, Northern Laos or just across the border into china?

17 JM: I don't know...when you say nationalists you mean like Taiwanese forces
18 over there?

19 SM: Well apparently there were some nationalist Chinese that when the
20 Communist took over back in '49 they went west and of course stayed there in the border
21 area to harass the Communists Chinese.

22 JM: Yeah, I believe that most of those wound up in Burma and they had been re-
23 supplied back in the early days by Cat, but by the time we were over there I think they
24 were considered to be drug smugglers and unfriendly. I don't think we were giving them
25 a whole lot of help. I had flown real close to the Chinese border dropping leaflets from
26 time to time up in Yunnan province, but my only encounters...I encountered Chinese
27 guns I know, but that was on the road that the Chinese were building from Yunnan
28 province down to the Me Kong river. We called it the Chinese road and the Chinese
29 made an autonomous area about fifteen miles on either side of that road and they shot at
30 anybody that came in that area, including the Royal Lao Air Force or the Royal Lao
31 government. We had one occasion, you know Jim Ryan our chief pilot flying over that

1 road got his leg blown off...Oh, about a week prior to that, maybe two, well not over a
2 week prior to that, a fellow named Ray Selucy and myself were on a search and rescue
3 for George Ritter, my best friend that disappeared on a flight to Lima site 69 alternate.
4 We had done a little triangulation with taking the winds into effect and felt that he might
5 have been up in the area of Pak Bing, which was where the Chinese had an airport and a
6 large military encampment and big, big radar controlled guns. I heard that the guns were
7 85 millimeter and I had other people tell me they were 100 millimeter, but I can tell you
8 first hand having seen them up close and personal they were very, very big. Ray and I
9 thought that if George was as far off course as he could've been, with the real strong
10 winds out of the south they had that day we knew after the fact, he could have wound up
11 near that area and there was broken clouds and he could've seen that Chinese runway,
12 which was aligned pretty much like the runway he was going to at 69 alternate and it was
13 a laterite dirt strip, which would have looked the same, and it was in a valley with
14 mountains on both sides, which would have been pretty much the same, and we thought
15 that they might of landed on that strip and they could've pushed the airplane back in the
16 tree line, thrown a camouflage net over it and nobody would've ever spotted it on search
17 and rescue. Number one because they couldn't go over that road to see it and we had had
18 several days of extensive search, a lot of airplanes hit by ground fire all up and down that
19 road, just outside the Atmois area and we hadn't found a trace. We'd checked out every
20 single fire and we felt the airplane would burn because it was carrying white phosphorous
21 106 recoilless rifle rounds and there should've been a heck of a fire if it'd crashed, but we
22 couldn't find one out there. So we thought that 'well maybe he did land there and he's a
23 guest of the Chinese, and we devised what we thought was a good plan. He was flying a
24 twin Otter at the time, and the twin Otter was a very nimble little airplane and fairly
25 quiet, and we thought we'd get down behind the mountains on the east side of the road
26 and do pass right over the airport, break out into the valley, over the airport, and out the
27 westside before they even knew what was going on. We had two kickers, well actually
28 we had a flying safety guy, named Anthony, I believe Tony Anthony, and we had a
29 kicker, I can't remember his name, that had volunteered to go along, and they had
30 binoculars. I was sitting in the cockpit in the right front seat, we didn't use the co-pilot in
31 the Otter, and Ray was flying. We let down behind this mountain and came in over the

1 road and when we broke out into the open those big guns had us boresighted like ducks in
2 a shooting gallery. When they opened up on us we forgot completely about looking for
3 George's airplane or anything else, but... The first thing we saw, and the kicker in the
4 back said, "This truck's coming down the road, you can see the dust." When you look
5 through your binoculars all your peripheral vision's gone and I took the binoculars down
6 and I saw the columns of dust straight up in there air and I said, "That does not compute,
7 if it was a truck it would be horizontal it wouldn't be vertical!" and then I could see it
8 was these huge guns, it was a recoil from the guns blowing dust up, and then with the
9 binoculars down you could see these big red rounds that looked like telephone poles
10 coming up at us and we were real close... the minute that he saw them shooting at us Ray
11 turned away from them, but now we were ninety degrees to them and just going from left
12 to right and close to the side of the mountain. The vegetation ran right up the side of
13 those mountains right to the top, heavy vegetation, and the rounds were impacting into
14 the side of the mountain and blowing tree trunks and rocks out, it was surreal. Of course
15 Ray was jiggin' and jaggin,' he was up and down and right and left trying to be as hard a
16 target as possible. I think the only thing that saved us, outside of dumb luck, was the fact
17 that right up against that terrain I know those big guns get what they call proximity fuses,
18 where when it's in the proximity in the airplane it will go off and the shrapnel and the
19 blast will get you even if it isn't a direct hit, and those rounds were very close to us, but
20 they weren't going off. Obviously the proximity fuses when you're shooting into
21 something dense like the side of a mountain, don't work! Very, very exciting moment or
22 two while we were getting out of there.

23 SM: How much of a hazard were the tree trunks and debris?

24 JM: Oh they were all over the place. I mean how we came out of it without
25 getting shot down or knocked down by debris was a miracle. We all felt like we'd grown
26 a beard in the two or three minutes that we were under fire there. I know that I didn't see
27 Ray for about ten years after that. There was a reunion about ten years afterwards,
28 somewhere in California, and I had just had a real exciting experience in Mexico. I had
29 crashed and burned in a Lockheed Lodestar and managed to walk away from the crash
30 and I thought that was probably the most traumatic experience I'd ever had in my life.
31 Old Ray saw me and in the hospitality suite, "John!" He said, "I bet you haven't had as

1 big a scare as you had the last time you were with me!” and I said, “Come to the bar and
2 let me talk to you for a minute.” (laughing) But it was very exciting.

3 SM: So had you had a scare that rivaled that?

4 JM: Yeah the crash into the side of a mountain in a Lockheed Lodestar was pretty
5 scary. (laughing)

6 SM: (laughing) Okay. Where did that happen?

7 JM: Now that happened down in Mexico. It was in the Veracruz area, south, and
8 the west of Veracruz.

9 SM: Was this your own personal work or was this...?

10 JM: No. It was an airplane that, I had trained the young man in the airplane, a
11 fellow named John Willard, and Willard was an excellent pilot but he was totally
12 unfamiliar with big airplanes, he'd been flying little airplanes mostly. He bought this
13 Lodestar and after we'd done some preliminary local training he wanted me to make an
14 actual trip down to Mexico with him on it and he said he knew where the strip was and he
15 was going to land on it, they would have the lights on it. I knew John was a good pilot,
16 I'd flown with him before, and so I was in the right seat and when we lined up on the
17 strip I never saw the strip, and the weather wasn't all that good, but I never saw the lights
18 that he said he saw and we kept getting lower and slower and I kept telling him he's too
19 slow and I was bumping the throttles up and then finally he said, “No that's not it!” and
20 he started a steep turn because we were flying into high terrain, the minute he started the
21 turn we hit a power, the airplane started to snap on a power on stall and the only thing
22 you can do is lower the nose, which is bad when you're flying in the high terrain, add the
23 power, which I did, he was looking out the window, a look saying ‘help me’ and about
24 the time the airplane was level and the vertical decent had been slowed to probably, I
25 don't know how fast we were going down, we were still going down mighty fast. We hit
26 flat in the side of the mountain and a little open clearing and of course the airplane
27 disintegrated, but we both got out of it with minor injuries and it burned! But it was a
28 very exciting day.

29 SM: That is lucky! How in the world did you get out of that?

30 JM: Well I crawled out the cockpit windows, the windows, both windows were
31 broken out, the windshield was broken out and the side windows were broken out. The

1 airplane was burning bad, but it was burning worse on the left side then it was on the
2 right, so the right the engine was kind of curled under the wing and burning under the
3 wing, on the left it had broken off on a fuel line, it was just an inferno. So both Willard
4 and I crawled out of the right side cockpit window and got out of it and the airplane
5 burned up.

6 SM: How did you get out of there?

7 JM: Oh it was very short distance to a little village and we walked to a village.
8 From there called the people that we were coming down to see and they got us back out
9 of there and went back to Veracruz.

10 SM: That's amazing. Is that your scariest story in terms of an aircraft crashing?

11 JM: I guess that's about as close to dying as I've ever come!

12 SM: Or are there more?

13 JM: Well I won't bore with any thing like that.

14 SM: They're not boring, they're quite fascinating, you've been very lucky.

15 JM: Yes. I've found that's the only truism I'm absolutely certain of, you can't
16 bet dumb luck.

17 SM: Well back to the Southeast Asia real quick.

18 JM: Okay.

19 SM: You mentioned those guns that you encountered as being the second hairiest
20 situation...

21 JM: That was on the search and rescue for George Ritter.

22 SM: Right. Was he ever a counted for?

23 JM: You know, we never found a trace of him or the airplane and the MIA POW
24 group in Hawaii, it's run by the Army, that has been looking for remains of U.S. service
25 men, it's also been helpful in finding our crashes that we weren't able to recover the
26 bodies of. Several years ago, when I was still with AMR, I got a call from...oh gosh I
27 can't think of the gentleman's name who was in charge of office out in Honolulu, and he
28 said that they had a tentative crash site and he wanted to know what I...he knew that I
29 was involved in search and rescue, he'd be talking to George's son, Philip who was
30 president of one of the MIA POW groups, and Philip had told him that I had sent an
31 awful a lot of time researching it and I'd spent a lot of time in the search and rescue, and

1 he asked me where I thought the airplane would be and I gave him a five mile circle
2 around Pak Bing is where I thought it would be. They said they thought they had a
3 tentative crash site and as soon as they could get permission from the Lao government
4 they were going to go in and excavate it. Well about two years ago, they called again,
5 it's probably been two and a half or three years ago. No, two and half because I was
6 president of the Air America Association and he called me and said that they had gotten
7 in and he gave me the exact coordinates and wanted me to put them on the map and see if
8 I thought they matched and of course they did. They had gone in and done a preliminary
9 excavation, and they had found a crash site, they couldn't identify the aircraft, but the
10 cargo was, they found some 105 recoilless rifle rounds. Well I called them 106, that's
11 what we called them, but they are the same rounds. A 105 round is used in the 106
12 recoilless rifle, which is a 105 rifle with the fifty caliber-spotting rifle on top of it that has
13 the same trajectory as the big round. So they fire a small round and if it's on track then
14 they fire the big round behind it, but the fact that he found a crash site with 105 rounds
15 I'm fairly certain that he's found the crash site. But then they told us that now the had the
16 preliminary and that that was it, before they could go in with the forensic people and
17 really excavate the site it would be about two years, that they were about two years ahead
18 of the forensic groups. So I was say right about now they should be in there doing a
19 forensic investigation on that crash site. Hopefully they'll find some remains because I
20 know Barbara, his wife, and Brett and Phillip and George Jr., and Vicki the daughter,
21 have never found out what happened to their dad.

22 SM: You don't remember the person at the joint task force accounting that was
23 handling the case?

24 JM: Hold on...let me ask Sandy. Gosh I should remember his name, he was so
25 helpful and I talked to him a dozen times.

26 SM: Do you know if it was...

27 JM: Pardon?

28 SM: I was just going to say, I've met a gentleman that works in that office.

29 JM: Oh do you? Oh, hold on...(to Sandy) what's the gentleman's name I used to
30 talk to from the Tri Task force in Hawaii? Forsythe, something like that.

31 SM: Was it Flanagan?

1 JM: We're going to have to look it up, it was...

2 SM: It wasn't Flanagan?

3 JM: No it wasn't Flanagan.

4 SM: Okay.

5 JM: I think it's something like Forsythe, I thought but...Forsythe...

6 SM: I hope he wasn't one of those that was killed recently in a search.

7 JM: No, no, I looked up the names of those and he wasn't. I was concerned

8 about that too, no he wasn't.

9 SM: Oh good. Okay. Well, were those the heaviest guns you've ever

10 encountered?

11 JM: Oh gosh yeah, without question, you can't move that kind of gun around in

12 the jungle you know. That is a big heavy gun, it takes a railroad car almost to move that

13 thing. The heaviest thing that I encountered, you know dropping at the sites up country

14 and out, was occasionally they'd move a 37-millimeter out, and that's big and bad

15 enough, but it's a long way from an 85 or a 100-millimeter.

16 SM: You mentioned that, of course a lot of the military activity that occurred in

17 Laos was depending upon the seasons, and I just wanted to confirm the seasons in terms

18 of what was the wet season, dry season, smoky season.

19 JM: Yes.

20 SM: Were there particular seasons that were capitalized upon by the Pathet Lao

21 versus the Lao under Vang Pao, did they, one or the other group usually capitalize on one

22 particular person?

23 JM: Oh yeah, well they liked to move in the dry season because they're

24 equipment wouldn't bog down, so they'd make they're big offenses in the dry season.

25 SM: Both sides?

26 JM: Yeah, well we had the advantage in air support so we could move in the

27 rainy season when they had a harder time moving.

28 SM: So the enemy would move more in the dry season?

29 JM: I think they moved more in the dry then they did the rainy, yeah. The rainy

30 season presented a lot of problems, although there were offenses on both sides at any

1 season, but I think generally speaking the North Vietnamese launched there's in the dry
2 season.

3 SM: Okay. How about the smoky season, in fact both the support and also the
4 operations and the offensives or defenses?

5 JM: Well the smoky season, if you're on the ground you know your visibility was
6 limited even on the ground, but it wasn't as bad as being in the air, it was like flying in a
7 bottle of milk. Our visibility, forward visibility would be a half a mile or less in some
8 cases, but we had some slant visibility, you know when you're looking down and forward
9 you might be able to pick out a ridge line three quarters a mile or a mile away, but
10 straight down you could see the ground fairly well. So that gave us, again it was like
11 looking through binoculars all the time because we didn't have any peripheral vision, and
12 we had to know that countryside very, very well because we had to be able to look
13 straight down and pick something out that we could positively identify and then let down
14 off of that you know on a heading that we knew was terrain that we were going to run
15 into anything on, until we could work our way down to our DZs or our landing strips, and
16 it presented a real challenge. Of course we had a lot of accidents because of that, we had
17 a lot of operational deaths flying into the side of mountains and doing all sorts of bad
18 things because the visibility was so restricted. But I mean, you can't quit flying if people,
19 if they're out of ammunition or they're out of food, you know you've got to get it in. We
20 had a lot of peer pressure, we knew if one guy wouldn't do it that the next one would, so
21 almost everybody did otherwise they couldn't face their friends that night when they
22 bellied up for the bar at happy hour. There was a lot of peer pressure. You knew you
23 were flying with some really first class pilots out there and you wouldn't admit it to the
24 world or even to yourself that you couldn't do anything they did.

25 SM: Was there also a sense of you had to accomplish the mission because if you
26 didn't the guys on the ground [?]?

27 JM: Oh yeah, naturally you're always concerned with that poor son of a gun on
28 the ground.

29 SM: Yeah, you get to belly up at the bar afterwards, they're still there.

30 JM: Yeah, you couldn't live with yourself if you just turned around and didn't try
31 really, really hard.

1 SM: Yeah. When Vang Pao, with Vang Pao's forces, were there [?] of any other
2 customers?

3 JM: Any other customers with his force?

4 SM: Working with him?

5 JM: Oh yeah there were case officers with them all over the place.

6 SM: When did you realize that the customers were case officers, CIA case
7 officers?

8 JM: Oh I think very early. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out.

9 SM: Okay. Did you ever, I understand that there were some times when, and I'm
10 not trying to bring up anything negative, but I mean the thing is is at times there might
11 have been conflicting interests in terms of what the customer wanted, what the customer
12 thought he needed, and what the pilot could provide safely. Did you ever encounter...?

13 JM: Well yeah, there was. You know old Glearum on the History Channel tape
14 handled that very well and it was exactly the way I felt. I never had a customer push me
15 into something I didn't want to do, in fact the ones that I worked with I found they
16 always told me where the bad guys were, gave me all the advice they could, and then said
17 you know, here's what we want to do, we want to get this load in there and how would
18 you suggest we go about it. That's generally the way they would handle it. I never had
19 one of them try to tell me how to fly my airplane in there. I've had them ride with me. I
20 remember one particular place that we had a 123 that had been flying at the direction of a
21 customer out of alternate when one of the sieges was under, one of the strips was under
22 siege, and they'd been dropping too high and the chutes had been going to the enemy,
23 and the customer was really upset. He wanted to see if there's somebody else that could
24 get the load in and of course you don't like to try to show up another a pilot, but then on
25 the other hand you want to get job done for the customer. I was an instructor pilot in the
26 airplane and Jim Ryan asked me if I'd go in and talk to the customer, who was, let me
27 think, Shep Johnson was the customer, and Shep said, you know, "Here's where we want
28 the load, and yeah they're shooting at you, and yeah they've got 12.7s," but he said, "I'll
29 ride with you in the jump seat." And I said, "You don't have to do that Shep, but you're
30 welcome to come along if you want to." And he rode the ride in, he went in with me
31 while we dropped. So I had a lot of respect for that.

1 SM: Was that common for them to go ahead and jump in with you?

2 JM: No it wasn't common, it wasn't common. I think Shep, I mean I think they
3 all were brave enough to do it in a heartbeat, there was no question about it, they'd do
4 anything that we did, but you know they had other things to do, but Shep felt strongly
5 enough about it he wasn't going to ask anybody do anything that was crazy, but he said,
6 "I'll sit in the jump seat if you go in there." I said, "Yeah let's go!"

7 SM: Do you think that was in part of an attempt on his part to I guess convey to
8 you, first of all he's not asking you to do anything that he's not willing to do himself, and
9 he must feel secure enough, if he's willing to jump on that plane he must be fairly secure
10 in knowing it's going to succeed and there's not going to be too much harm.

11 JM: Well I think that there was a case officer on the ground there and they were
12 in real dire need of supplies and he not only wanted to assure me that, you know, that he
13 felt that way, but also he wanted to make sure that load got on the ground and in the right
14 place too. So he went along to where he look right out the back, he could look over his
15 shoulder and the jump seat could see the parachutes open and where they landed. So it
16 gave him a little, it gave him a warm fuzzy feeling to see that the troops got what they
17 wanted or what they needed.

18 SM: Yeah, peace of mind.

19 JM: Yep.

20 SM: Okay. How many of your operations, and if you can disclose this and if you
21 can't, I certainly understand. How many of your operations would you say took place out
22 of the ranch, was that a significant base of operations for you?

23 JM: Well I flew out of the ranch on a scheduled basis out of Bangkok, you know
24 that was part of one of our scheduled flights, but for projects I probably flew a half a
25 dozen projects out of the ranch.

26 SM: Are there any that you can discuss or are they still all classified?

27 JM: Well, there's one that I don't believe is classified. The reason I'm saying
28 this is has been mentioned in a couple of books that I've read recently and I know the
29 books are wrong, and I know the agency knows the books are wrong, but I don't know if
30 the agency has ever told the world what it really was, so I'm not going to say what it was,
31 but there was a drop made out of the ranch on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in a very hot area

1 just on, it would be the southeast end of the PDJ, right along the border with Vietnam and
2 Laos. Real mountainous valley with a road cut into the side of a hill and we dropped...if
3 you've read the book of General SECORD, he wrote a book Honored and Betrayed, and
4 in that book he told about his days as a liaison from the Air Force to the CIA and he
5 coordinated this mission. He said that we dropped detergent on the roads to make it
6 slippery and that wasn't what we dropped on the road and the idea wasn't to make it
7 slippery, so I'll just leave it at that.

8 SM: Okay. Was it a success, can you at least say that?

9 JM: Yes, yes, the mission was a success. The customer was very happy with it.
10 We used, god we used a lot of stuff. We dropped, oh I believe each airplane had
11 probably close to 18,000 pounds and I think there were five or six airplanes involved in
12 that. We flew formation and we hit an IP, initial point, where we started descending on
13 the drop and we dropped in trail one behind the other and we put an awful lot of stuff
14 right along...They wanted on the upside, along the mountain just to the high side of the
15 road and on the road, and we did a good job of it, we covered the whole area.

16 SM: Wow. Was this, I don't know how much you can talk about so if my
17 questions are out of order just say so.

18 JM: Well, you know, I'm kind of in a gray area here because I don't know either.
19 I have a feeling that it would be sensitive in that they're certain groups in the U.S. that
20 would be upset about it, but...

21 SM: I didn't know if you could say the mechanisms dropped.

22 JM: Oh no, we free falled it, it was no parachutes it was free falled, just say it
23 was detergent like General SECORD said it was, we were trying to make it slippery and
24 it was in paper sacks and we dropped it and the sacks broke and the detergent flowed out
25 on the ground. The North Vietnamese laughed themselves silly you know because of the
26 detergent, at least that's what General SECORD said.

27 SM: Yeah, until of course they split off the side of the mountain.

28 JM: (laughing) Something like that, but the drop was successful. There was
29 some ground fire, they had helicopters standing back by for search and rescue, and I
30 didn't know that until recently, some of the helicopter pilots that were involved said they
31 were hangin' out there waiting for us. I remember a humorous thing about the drop, I

1 can't remember, I think my co-pilot was Bill Carruthers on that drop, but we frequently
2 listen to radio Australia. In the book The Two Vietnams...

3 SM: By Bernard Fall.

4 JM: By Barnard Fall, he mentioned, he went on a ride in 119s where he heard
5 that something that the Cow Cow Boogie being played, well we used to listen to radio
6 Australia all the latest songs and it just broke us up, there were some 12.7 it looked like
7 coming up and he could see the tracers and we were mildly concerned with that and all of
8 a sudden on radio Australia through the intercom comes "What the world needs now is
9 love, sweet love!" (laughing) That took our mind off it.

10 SM: (laughing) I would imagine. Maybe you can relay this again through
11 SECORD's book in his version of the story.

12 JM: Yeah his version of the story was that we dropped the detergent on the road
13 to make it slippery.

14 SM: Did he give the name of operation?

15 JM: No, he just mentioned that that was one of the projects that he coordinated.

16 SM: How about the time period?

17 JM: I'd have to look in my logbook to tell you, and I'm not even sure I made a
18 notation, I never noted, I never listed projects that were really projects in my book, that
19 way I could never be guilty of disposing anything pertinent, so I never even logged them.

20 SM: Right, okay. Well, is there anything else about that particular project that
21 you [?]?

22 JM: Oh, other than it originated at the ranch and that's where the load was put on
23 the airplanes and we flew from there up to the DMZ and made the drop, it pretty
24 uneventful, all the airplanes return home safely, the customer after the fact said that their
25 reconnaissance of it after showed that it was extremely successful, they were happy.

26 SM: Do you know if that cut off that portion of the trial for any length of time?

27 JM: I believe it did, I believe it did.

28 SM: Do you know if it was indefinite or just for limited time?

29 JM: I believe it was probably forever, maybe longer. (laughing)

30 SM: (laughing) Boy that's a long time.

31 JM: Yeah, that's a long time.

1 SM: Wow. Okay. Well are there any other projects that you can discuss?

2 JM: Well, you know, no I don't believe so. The day to day flying up there was
3 very exciting in itself, we didn't need to go, in fact some of the projects were real boring,
4 they were just long range.

5 SM: Interesting.

6 JM: Sit in the airplane for hours, some of them with internal fuel, so you'd fly
7 and fly and fly and nothing real exciting about that.

8 SM: Would those typically be drops?

9 JM: No, no. The ones that I flew were not; we'll just put it that way.

10 SM: Okay. How about reconnaissance flights, did you do any kind of recon, I
11 mean besides the IR?

12 JM: Oh from time to time I have. We've done some road recon from time to
13 time. I flew a trip out of Bangkok in the C-45 and I don't know who the men were, I
14 don't believe they were based there, but they wanted to spend the night, in fact we did
15 spend the night at the Nakhon Phanom Military Airport. That was kind of a humorous
16 experience. It was one of the super secret base I guess in Southeast Asia where all the
17 electronics eavesdropping and everything was at and they had the A-1Es and the nimrod
18 B-26s flew out of there, air commandos and... We had done some reconnaissance in Laos
19 and southern Laos in the Atapoo area and it was about the time Atapoo fell. Well, yeah,
20 Atapoo had already fallen in fact when we did that. I was coming out of Laos and I came
21 across the river, we'd been down low so I just stayed low and it was just before dark, it
22 was just starting to get dusk, but you know in the tropics that old like the road to
23 Mandalay where the dawn comes up like thunder, it gets light in an instant and it gets
24 dark in an instant, so there isn't much twilight, but this was just before dark. I had
25 crossed the river at probably two or three hundred feet and I started to climb up to traffic
26 patten altitude in Nakhon Phanom and entered, I went ahead and called the tower and told
27 them that I was east of the field and entering down wind for landing and boy they were
28 really shocked at that. They said, "Oh, who are you?" I just gave them my tail number,
29 which is all we had and they wanted to know what the nature of my business. I said,
30 "I've got some people that want to spend the night there and they're expected," and
31 there's silence and they finally said, "Okay, fly the pattern and over fly the runway." Of

1 course they're looking at us with binoculars, by the time I did that it's already getting
2 dark and I re-entered down wind and they told me to "land and hold on the runway."
3 And so I landed and stopped on the runway and boy the jeeps came flying up the road
4 with security guards with guns and they look over the airplane, the airplane was painted
5 gray. That airplane was kind of an odd ball, in fact I believe it was almost all of our
6 Beeches were 10-2, I believe that was a straight C-45 out of Bangkok. But, I was
7 wearing my uniform, my epaulette and everything and they thought I was Navy. It's a
8 gray airplane you know, so they were kind of satisfied and followed us up to the ramp
9 and parked us and then a car came and met the airplane and it was the customers on the
10 base that were picking up the customers that I'd brought in and they disappeared and of
11 course we're not going out until the next morning, but no body told me anything of where
12 I'm going to stay. So went in to talk to the duty officer, "Well hey have you got a place
13 for me to stay tonight?" At first he thought I was a Navy Captain with four stripes and
14 he's really all, but the he could see I'm too scruffy to be a Navy Captain. (laughing) He
15 finally asked, "Who are you?" I said, "Air America." And of course then the eyes rolled,
16 'oh Air America,' well, yeah they got a place to put me up and they showed me to a room
17 and then I went to the mess hall to eat and boy everybody there, when the word Air
18 America got around I had all kinds of company wanting to know how to get a job with
19 the company when they finished their tour.

20 SM: (laughing) Okay. Did you ever meet any of them later, people that got
21 hired?

22 JM: No. Did I tell you about the officer that I did met? I met an officer, I don't
23 believe I told you this story...

24 SM: Was this your XO in basic?

25 JM: Pardon?

26 SM: Was this one of your XO?

27 JM: No, no, I met my old [?] in the 11th Airborne division Carleson out of
28 Bangkok, but no I was flying a C-46, I'd taken a load into Da Nang and there was a US-
29 Aid group there and they had some people entertainers that had been in a USO type show
30 in Da Nang, there were several women, all in all I'd say it was thirty five or forty people,
31 and they wanted a ride back to Saigon. So we loaded them in the 46 in the bucket seats,

1 and there was a military guy that had just finished his tour of duty and he had missed his
2 flight back to Saigon and he was really worried that being he missed his flight he was
3 going to missed the scheduled airline flight out of Saigon back to the states. So he asked
4 if he could bum a ride and I said, "Well yeah, it's kind of crowded in the back, if you
5 want you can ride the jump seat in the cockpit." He said, "He'd really appreciate that."
6 He was a young captain and he'd just finished a tour of duty out of Da Nang for the Air
7 Force and [was] going home. So anyway, as we fly the trip back we got a carburetor
8 problem in the airplane, it was something with the automatic mixture control, it was
9 running lean and every now and then it would backfire and run rougher than the devil.
10 Scared the daylight out of the people in the back and the US-Aid man that was in charge
11 strolled up to the cockpit and told us, "Gentlemen, I don't want alarm you, but I think you
12 have a problem with the right engine." Like we didn't know! We told him everything
13 was under control, no problem. We pulled the mixture back to rich and then run it back
14 up and everything would settle down and it would run for a while and maybe fifteen,
15 twenty minutes later it'd back fire again and we'd richen it up. Anyway, we played with
16 it, we were never very far from a landing strip all the way down the coast, and as we got
17 down the coast we cut over into the central part of the country and I think we flew over
18 Ban Me Thuot and straight south from there to Saigon. About Ban Me Thuot it really let
19 go, it backfired several times and fire'd come out of the stacks and we couldn't calm it
20 down so we had to feather the propeller. We feathered the prop and no big deal; I mean
21 we were nine thousand feet we could glide to Saigon almost and it as no emergency.
22 Anyway, this guy comes up in the cockpit, Joe Cool, "Gentlemen I don't want to bother,
23 but really I think that there's a problem with that right engine." And of course the
24 propeller's standing at attention out there and the Chinese co-pilot and this captain are
25 about having a heart attack laughing at him, "Yeah, we know, we know." Anyway, we
26 landed Saigon uneventfully and I'd say 'good-bye' to this young captain figuring I'll
27 never see him again. Well about three years later I was flying a Volpar out of Saigon one
28 night, in fact I was flying it up, I was going to Tay Ninh with it, they had had a wing spar
29 problem and they wanted to x-ray the wing spars. It was an AD that came out of the
30 states that prompted this. I was leaving Bangkok late in the afternoon going to Udorn,
31 then I was going to pick up some company cargo at Udorn, and the next morning flying

1 to Tay Ninh. At the last minute a young guy had gone to the CAT counter seeing if he
2 could bum a ride to Udorn, they said well they had an airplane going to Udorn and they
3 thought they could get him. So they call out to the airplane and the operations manager
4 asked if I'd take, I said, "Sure, send him out." So this guy comes out, throws the suitcase
5 in the back and sticks his head in the cockpit and says, "Do you mind if I ride up here?"
6 we didn't carry anybody, it was only single pilot, and I said, "No, come in..." and the
7 minute I saw him I recognized him. He was major now, but it was that same captain and
8 he was coming back for a second tour this time out of Udorn and F-4s. He said, "My
9 god, you're still here?" "Never left!" (laughing)

10 SM: Well that was one of the unique characteristics of Air America pilots, you
11 guys stayed for the long duration.

12 JM: Yep, year, after year, after year.

13 SM: Yeah. Okay. This will end the interview with Mr. John McRainey on the
14 19th of June.

15

16 SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. John McRainey on
17 the 20th of June 2001 at approximately ten minutes after eleven. I'm in Lubbock Texas
18 and Mr. McRainey is in McAllen, Texas. Sir I wanted to address a couple of issues from
19 our previous session, real quick I just wanted to re-verify, clarify. When you were
20 talking about the operations out of Takhli, the special projects in particular the one that
21 you went on that we discuss specifically, that Ranch is that correctly described is
22 Takhli?

23 JM: Yes that is correct.

24 SM: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that that was clarified. Then I was
25 wondering, you mentioned in our previous session, search and rescue operations and I
26 was wondering if you yourself have ever participated in any SAR operations?

27 JM: No. I've participated in looking, searching for downed aircraft. Well I guess
28 you could call that search and rescue. You've got to find it before you can rescue
29 anybody so I guess in that response, for that I guess I have because whenever an aircraft
30 was missing or downed everybody went right to work and tried to find the airplane. So
31 we dropped whatever we were doing and get to the area. So yes, I guess you'd say we all

1 participated at one time or another in search and rescue. It was primarily a helicopter
2 mission you know to pick the people up, but finding it in the first place could be fixed
3 wing as well as rotary wing.

4 SM: I was curious, I have heard a couple of incidents where a fixed wing pilot,
5 that is a fixed wing Air America pilot saved a fixed wing or picked a fixed wing Air
6 Force pilot who had to make an emergency landing on a strip in Laos and of course since
7 there's the strip...

8 JM: Oh yeah I could see where that would be possible, yeah.

9 SM: But you personally didn't engage in any?

10 JM: No, no I never came across that.

11 SM: Never had an opportunity?

12 JM: No.

13 SM: But of course if the opportunity arose...

14 JM: Oh well sure if somebody was down on a strip and we were in the area we'd
15 certainly do our best to pick them up, you know.

16 SM: Now of course I'm sure you've heard and have bristled that some of the
17 rumors that have gone around about Air America pilots being specially compensated for
18 that type of activity.

19 JM: No not at all, yeah we were not.

20 SM: No and let me think...In terms of compensation, what was the primary
21 mechanism of compensation for the pilots? Was it basically a salary or was it hourly?

22 JM: Well we had a salary and it was based on a given number of hours to fly and
23 although at one time I was the President of the Fareast Pilot's Association in Vientiane I
24 can't tell you what the total number of hours per month was based on our salary, seventy
25 or eighty I believe. Then everything above that we were paid overtime and we were paid
26 an hourly rate for project pay when we were flying in areas that were deemed to be
27 hazardous.

28 SM: Okay. Now you mentioned in the previous session also leaflet drops.

29 JM: Yes.

1 SM: I was wondering if you knew the target audience for those leaflets because
2 of course the indigenous Lao didn't have a written language and so was it pictures for
3 them or...?

4 JM: Well pictures and language. I've dropped leaflets that were printed in two or
5 three different dialects. I know they had little sections where there'd be like maybe
6 Chinese and Thai and then...I think there was a basic Lao language also, but, at least I
7 think it was the Lao language that was written. I've seen lots of looked like Thai written,
8 but I thought it was Lao; it was in Laos. It might be that the printed word was used from
9 Thailand, I don't know. Not being a historian I haven't looked into that, but...

10 SM: Well I guess for the hill tribes, the Hmong.

11 JM: Oh I'm sure that very few of them could read or write anything, but we
12 dropped leaflets for different reasons. They were propaganda leaflets of course trying to
13 get soldiers to defect and then we dropped leaflets I know in the search and rescue with
14 George Ritter we dropped leaflets to offer a gold reward for information leading to the
15 recovery of the aircraft or crew. Those were printed in two or three different languages
16 all on the same leaflet with a picture of the airplane. I've heard of counterfeit currency
17 being dropped, but I don't know anything, I was never involved in that and I've never
18 really heard anybody verify that so I'm not sure if it was just a rumor or not.

19 SM: Well, are there any other operations or types of operations that we haven't
20 discussed yet that you can think of?

21 JM: Well our day to day operations of course were very varied in everything
22 from still landings on a short strips and offloading sometimes heavy equipment. I've
23 carried everything from trucks, bulldozers, you name it at one time or another we
24 probably carried it. The old motto: anything, anywhere, anytime. But the STOL
25 operations for the light aircraft, of course I wasn't involved in the Helio program or the
26 Pilatus Porter program, but they landed...and of course everything's relative you know, if
27 you've got an airplane that's designed to land on 300 feet that's one thing and then the
28 one that's designed to land with an absolute minimum of 1000 or 1500 or 2000 the
29 problems were pretty much the same, airspeed control and just plain ol' stick and rudder
30 flying. The strips though were hard to imagine an airplane landing on some of them.

1 They were built on ridgelines with bends in the middle; sometimes the angles that they
2 were built on were like a ski jump. It was an amazing operation really.

3 SM: When you say like a ski jump, you mean on a downward slope?

4 JM: Yeah you would land uphill and take off downhill on a slope that...oh gosh,
5 I don't know what the steepest one was, but I know there were a lot of them probably
6 exceeded seven or eight degrees; pretty good inclination.

7 SM: Wow! What would you describe as the most challenging strip that you had
8 to fly into?

9 JM: Well in the 123...you know every airplane was different. I can think of back
10 in the Beech program in Saigon the shortest strip we had was a place called My Tho Nieu
11 and it was a laterite strip built up with rice patties all around it. It was absolutely you
12 couldn't land one foot short or go one foot long or either right or left without being in
13 water. It was 1600 feet long and for a Beech-18 that was, you could go unloaded and on
14 empty, but that was a pretty short strip. The 46 we were limited to 3000 feet, but we had
15 some 3000 foot strips that when you added crosswind and what have you really, you
16 really had to work to get that thing in and stop and the same with the 123. We operated
17 out of Samton, which due to a several different circumstances was a fairly challenging
18 strip for us. Number one the approach wasn't all that good, you kind of let down in a
19 bowl and you were turning until on short final. They airfield had a good inclination to it
20 and of course a short drop off at the end. It had a short level spot and then it went up hill
21 at a pretty good angle. I can't remember what the total length of it was, I think it was
22 probably a couple thousand feet, but it was short. During the PDJ [Plain de Jars] when
23 Vang Pao took the PDJ back from the Communists and we were supplying the troops out
24 there. There was a strip on the north edge of the PDJ that had been 3000 feet long, but it
25 had been cratered by a large bomb right in the middle, a real deep bomb crater and so
26 there was only half of it that was useable. We walked it off carefully, went in there in a
27 light airplane to see if we could get in with a 123. The strip was 1600 feet long, but there
28 was real good approaches. There was flat approach over the PDJ and you could touch
29 down right on the end with heavy breaking and reverse you could get it stopped alright.
30 Then taking off you would back up with your tail out over the edge of the PSP and you'd
31 go to full power in the airplane, release the brakes, and you're wheels would kind of dig

1 through the edge of the bomb craters as you took off. It was really short for us, but we
2 landed there during that whole operation and I think it lasted two or three months. That
3 was a very challenging strip for us in the 123, probably the most challenging that we had.
4 There were so many of them that were fairly marginal that I say they kind of all blend
5 together. The two that stand out in my mind was Lima Lima for the 123, My Tho Nieu
6 for the C-45, and there was a Special Forces camp that had a PSP strip up in the Cam
7 Ranh Bay area that was really short for the C-46. I remember that one was my most
8 challenging in the C-46.

9 SM: Speaking of Special Forces, did you, while you were in-country and flying
10 in and around Laos had you heard of Project 4-O-4?

11 JM: You know if I did it sure went in one in ear and out the other. You're always
12 hearing different projects and what have you, but I can't say that I did.

13 SM: Did you know what it is now? Do you recall what I'm talking about?
14 Special Forces in Laos...

15 JM: No I can't say that I do.

16 SM: Oh okay. Do you know if you ever specifically supplied or provided
17 support for American Special Forces in Laos?

18 JM: Oh yes absolutely. I told you, I even gave you a specific date.

19 SM: Oh that's right.

20 JM: Those guys fought their way out of there. We gave them the ammunition to
21 fight their way out. The strip was under siege and falling, in fact when they shot their
22 way out and got out to the west that was the end of that particular strip. We call those PS
23 strips and I don't know, I've heard that PS stood for Public Service, but I don't know. It
24 seemed to me that the primary thing that they were doing is they were training
25 Cambodian troops in Laos. I think it was PS-22; I gave the number on the tape the other
26 day. I looked up in my logbook on the day, I know that if there was really something
27 unusual about a drop I'd make a little notation. On that one I just put heavy fire because
28 since it was like I say it was quite a sight that night.

29 SM: Do you know what Special Forces group these guys were assigned to?

30 JM: No I don't. In fact I've often wondered who they were. In fact I've asked
31 Leigh Hotucek's husband is a retired Special Forces and he's active in that Special Forces

1 organization and I mention that particular drop and those guys I've often wondered what
2 happened to them. I asked a customer down at Paxkae and he said they all got out
3 alright, but I never did find out who they were. I would have liked to, it'd been
4 interesting to talk to them.

5 SM: Do you know if you flew any support for Lam son 719? That was the
6 operation the South Vietnamese invaded into Laos going to the Tchepone area. It was in,
7 I think in 1970, '71 that that occurred.

8 JM: Holly mackerel! Well I very well might of made drops to them I don't
9 know. I would have heard the project number because our operations manager was just
10 giving us the coordinates for the drop or if there had been an ordinance drop pepper
11 grinder was giving us the coordinates for the drops and we don't you know have to know
12 what the project is or what kind of troops we're supply. All we've got to know is where
13 to put it.

14 SM: Did you fly many operations near Tchepone?

15 JM: Oh yeah. I'm sure I have, I'm sure I have.

16 SM: Let's see, you mentioned hauling some heavy equipment, construction
17 equipment and I would assume that you also at times hauled construction materials.

18 JM: Oh yes, all kinds.

19 SM: Do you know for instances when you were taking heavy machinery,
20 bulldozers and what not, do you know what those pieces of equipment were used for?

21 JM: Well I know that, I've been told on some of them they were used for roads,
22 some of them were used for extending the runway...gosh I can't, a number of different
23 reasons that they used them. I've hauled just about every type of construction material
24 you can think of. I know that one time I hauled a load of reinforcing rods; that re-bar that
25 was real long. I imagine the dad gum things were fifteen, eighteen feet long and they
26 were like great big hairpins, they were curved. I would assume they'd just cut off what
27 they needed, but that stuff was so hard to handle you had to have real heavy gloves and
28 the poor loaders were getting their hands all cut up loading it. Then I took it up to Dong
29 Ha, which was right on the DMZ almost up there at the northern most airport and it was
30 like unraveling a puzzle trying to get that stuff out, it was all tangled up. You know when
31 they cinched it down with the tie down straps it was hard to tell which one you should

1 take off first and if you tried to pull the wrong one out of course it was all tied up with the
2 other one. What should have been about a thirty or forty-five minute unloading took
3 several hours. I was up there all day waiting for them to get that stuff off the airplane.

4 SM: Was that one of the more difficult things you transported?

5 JM: Well yeah that was a load that was sure hard to unload, probably the most
6 difficult loads to unload. One time in South Vietnam, it would have been in 1966 in the
7 fall, I took a load of cement into the Dalat Lin Khan, the lower airport. We had two
8 airports at the Dalat, one at Kam Lee and I think the lower end was called Lin Khan. At
9 that time the airport wasn't secure at night and they didn't try to keep the troops out there
10 and they would withdraw back into their fort or their garrison. Then in the mornings
11 they'd go out with mine sweepers and check the runway and the roads and they would
12 reoccupy the airport. I had been shuttling cement in there all day and my last trip in I got
13 in just before dark and everybody had left! We stood around, got on the H-F radio and
14 called and said, "Hey where is everyone?" "Well they're gone." Well it was just me and
15 the Chinese first officer and we were sitting on the main ramp at Lin Khan and we started
16 dropping that cement sacks to the ground. Well about every third one broke, we had a
17 huge stack of cement with paper sticking out of it, it looked like a great big pile of sand,
18 fine sand laying out there. We were told to go ahead and unload it so we dumped it on
19 the ground, but as we were finishing unloading the dad gum thing it started to rain! We
20 had to swing the tail, you know stand on one brake and swing the tail sharply to get
21 around the dad gum stack. We'd literally built a little mountain right up against the
22 airplane. We taxied out and left and I heard latter that I'd made a monument up there,
23 everybody joked about my monument at Dalat because it was just one big great cement
24 pile.

25 SM: Which of course the rain hardened. (laughing)

26 JM: Yes it did, solidified it! (laughing)

27 SM: Okay. Well were there any other... What was the, I guess what would you
28 consider the most difficult load you had to carry or one of the most difficult besides the
29 other two that you already described?

30 JM: Well you know I...difficult load, by difficult getting it loaded or getting it
31 off loaded?

1 SM: Well perhaps more I guess because of your experience as a pilot anything
2 that made the aircraft more difficult to handle in the air or was there anything that you
3 had to fly?

4 JM: Well we'd been overloaded on a number of occasions where they would
5 make a mistake in the weight of the equipment they put on board. I had that problem
6 with a bulldozer. The weight of the bulldozer it was I believe around, without the blade it
7 was supposed to have been something like 15,000 pounds or 16,000 without all of the
8 accessories and they would be hauled separately. But they loaded it on thinking it was 15
9 or 16 thousand pounds and it turned out to be kilos. So you can figure that that one was
10 grossly overloaded airplane. We should have caught it our self, but we caught it on
11 takeoff and climb out of course because the airplane performed...(laughing) it wasn't a
12 performer, it was just barely flying. We came back making a real slow power-on landing
13 of course, we landed without any trouble and slowly came back and off loaded it, but that
14 was a severe overload.

15 SM: Okay. Now in terms of the policies and in particular against the... The war
16 in Laos was, compared to Vietnam, smaller scale, emphasized having American advisors
17 on the ground advising and working with indigenous military forces...compare that to
18 Vietnam you had huge American forces kind of the American military running the show
19 if you will and things didn't seem to be going all that well in the United States in
20 Vietnam. How do you think things were going in Laos?

21 JM: I think for the...I think they did an amazing job holding as many, I think I've
22 heard as many as five North Vietnamese divisions were held at bay for what a decade and
23 a half. I think they did a tremendous job with a handful of Americans and a relatively
24 small number of local troops. But the difference is that...with the exception of just a few
25 major bases up country, they fought a guerilla war, they fought the kind of war that the
26 North Vietnamese were fighting in Vietnam. It's one thing to be constantly on the move
27 and nobody knowing where you're at and to be in a garrison situation as to how many
28 casualties you're going to take and how hard it is to fight a war. I believe that, well of
29 course I'm just one of thousands, hundreds of thousands that believe that we fought the
30 wrong kind of war in Vietnam we should have been fighting our own guerilla war over
31 there, but by bringing in large numbers of troops and putting them in garrison situations

1 we made a tremendous target for the guerilla troops. As a result we took an awful lot of
2 casualties.

3 SM: Were you getting a lot of information on a lot of news when you were flying
4 out of Bangkok and Vientiane? Were you getting information about the war in Vietnam
5 very often?

6 JM: Oh sure we had radio and television in Bangkok and of course we all ready
7 Time and Newsweek and of course the Bangkok Post was American language, English
8 language newspaper. I think we were as well informed as anyone about what was going
9 on in Vietnam. I've read a number of books about it and thought a lot about it sense and
10 I'm sure that has a historian you've probably read...oh let me think of the gentlemen's
11 name, Sheehan's book A Bright Shining Lie.

12 SM: Yes sir.

13 JM: I think that he probably was as close as anybody as having analyzed the
14 situation, at least the way I saw it. I think he was right. It disturbed me, I saw enough of
15 how ineffective we were. We were using the South Vietnamese army and how we were
16 being taken advantage of the South Vietnamese that I couldn't tell the good guys from
17 the bad guys, I guess that's what I'm saying. I could give you a for instance. When I
18 was flying to USAID load into Kontum one time. We off loaded it, the trucks pulled up,
19 deuce-and-a-half pulled up and loaded all these supplies. They were mixed loads of food
20 supplies primarily, there were some sacks of rice, but there were cans of soup and there
21 were cans of beans and there was all kinds of just general food stuff in the load. They
22 loaded two trucks with that stuff and the trucks left and we started up and taxies out. I
23 took off and as I was circling, I was told to turn out to the left so I was turning to the
24 north as I was circling around I saw the two trucks winding out in the countryside going
25 out to a USAID warehouse. There was guys standing up in the load I the back throwing
26 cases of stuff along side the road that they'd come by and pick up later obviously. I was
27 just wondering how much of that load ever got to the darn warehouse. I think that was
28 just a picture of what you could expect with almost everything we did in Vietnam. We
29 probably only got ten cents on the dollar, of every dollar we spent over there we got that
30 much benefit out of it.

31 SM: Could you do anything in terms of reporting that?

1 JM: Oh gosh, I'll tell ya' no it was like urinating in the ocean to raise the tide.
2 Tell you what we did do one time. I took a load up on a Sunday afternoon to the same
3 airport. The USAID guy that was supposed to meet the airplane wasn't there, there were
4 some American GIs that were there that they told me what they did, but I can't
5 remember. It seemed to me they were in some sort of communications outfit. They were
6 hanging around the airport and I waiting, and waiting, no load, no truck and I said, "Well
7 if we dump this stuff out on the ramp it's all going to be stolen. Again it was the same
8 kind of food stuff, there was rice, there was canned goods, and a mixture. They said,
9 "Well boy we know somebody that would like it." There was an American doctor for
10 catholic relief hospital that took care of the Montagnards and she had a real common
11 name and I can't...that was the only time that I really met her and it was either Smith or
12 Jones, it was a name like that. They said she is at the tail end of the food chain, she
13 hardly gets anything and she's really doing a great job. And I said, "Well can you guys
14 get me some trucks to haul this stuff out there?" and they said, "You bet!" So it wasn't
15 long before the GIs brought a couple of deuces and a halves out there and we loaded all
16 the stuff on. They said, "Come with you, we'll show you where it's going." They took
17 us out to her house and of course they couldn't believe what we were giving them, but I
18 think that's probably the only load I delivered in that area that we really got a dollar for a
19 dollars' worth of material. It didn't go to who it was supposed to go to, but it was well
20 used.

21 SM: Yeah. It certainly fits in with the humanitarian mission.

22 JM: Yeah. Yeah, as far as I was concerned it was the best load I ever delivered
23 in South Vietnam.

24 SM: Wow! Well, did you ever encounter other incidents of corruption or black
25 marketeering or any of that in Laos?

26 JM: Oh it's absolutely, absolutely everywhere. You couldn't live there on the
27 local economy, you couldn't rent a house from a local landlord, you couldn't go and buy
28 in the local market without seeing all kinds of evidence of corruption and black market.
29 It was everywhere. It was...and it's a horrible thing. You know you see so much of it
30 that you become...I've always tried to be open minded as I can be about people you
31 know, it's real easy to paint with a real broad brush and say all people are bad for this

1 reason or that reason. It was easy for us to say all Vietnamese were corrupt because the
2 ones we came in contact with seemed to be, but I'm sure there were many more of them
3 that were not that way. It was gross, it was gross.

4 SM: Well of course this touches on a rather sensitive subject also concerning Air
5 America and operations in Southeast Asia and of course given the popularity of that
6 movie with Mel Gibson and some I guess writings from certain authors. Air America has
7 been accused of participating in some of the illicit activities. So I wanted your opinion on
8 those controversies and those issues, especially about [?]....

9 JM: You mean about the drugs?

10 SM: drugs and things like that.

11 JM: Ah, you know I flew out of every major base that we had in Southeast Asia, I
12 was physically based at like Saigon, and Bangkok and Vientiane and I flew so often out
13 of Udorn you could almost say I was based in Udorn. I spent almost as many nights
14 down there as I did in Vientiane. I flew every multi-engine program, almost every one.
15 And I never in the whole time I was over never saw, never had the slightest indication
16 that anybody involved with the CIA or with Air America was smuggling drugs for their
17 own personal use or personal gain or for any other reason. I just saw not instance of it.
18 Now having said that I'll say that there's now question that there were people on our
19 airplanes from time to time that had the stuff in their pockets, but we just didn't have the
20 where with all to search every soldier that got on our airplane or every local that got on
21 our airplane for drugs, particularly when we're evacuating people and moving people in
22 and out as fast as we did with the quick turn arounds we had. So...but you know if you
23 want to use that as a criteria well then major airlines hauled more drugs than we did
24 because the people that were on the backs of those things had drugs too.

25 SM: Absolutely. Well I understand and maybe you can either clarify or maybe
26 not that some soldiers some of the Lao were actually paid with heroin. Did you ever hear
27 of that or ?

28 JM: No I never heard of it or saw anything, but I heard that Vang Pao had a stash
29 of it that he kept at Long Chin and that was strictly rumor, but I had heard that. It was
30 like, not that they used it or he used it, but it was just something that they used as kind of
31 their Fort Knox, so they had to have some capital, but I don't know whether that was true

1 or not. I guess Professor Leary would be the gentleman to talk to on that because he
2 investigated the allegations of drug use at length and interviewed hundreds of people. If
3 anybody I think would be an expert on it, it would be Leary. You know the historian or
4 alleged historian from the University of Wisconsin, Alfred McCoy?

5 SM: I have heard of him. He wrote a book on...

6 JM: He wrote the book called Politics of Heroin.

7 SM: Yes, the Politics of Heroin.

8 JM: Of course he claims that he you know, that Air America aircraft hauled the
9 opium crop and he almost implied that we financed the war with opium. The gentlemen
10 that he used I understand is a translator with a string reporter for the Bangkok Post and
11 some other papers. Bill Caruthers the PHD in entomology that was an Air America pilot
12 and then stayed over there. He says this guy was if there ever was a lose cannon he was a
13 lose cannon. He got in trouble with the Lao authorities for trying to smuggle his
14 girlfriend out of Laos and it was a lot of things that...you know that might not have been
15 a bad thing if he was trying to get his girlfriend away from the communist, but it seemed
16 like the guy was not a reputable source. According to Bill, who spoke fairly good Lao
17 and Thai, this guy's Lao was terrible and certainly shouldn't have been used as an
18 interpreter. The only person that claims they saw drugs put on an airplane was this
19 turkey! And nobody could substantiate it so that's where Alfred McCoy got his drug
20 crap from. That's like that...the difference between perception and reality. He perceived
21 this guy knew what he was talking about that we were involved in hauling the opium crop
22 for the opium industry in Laos. Boy if we were it was the world's best-kept secret. I
23 certainly never saw any indication of it.

24 SM: Okay. Have you seen the movie Air America?

25 JM: Yes.

26 SM: What did you think of it?

27 JM: Ah it was just a farce. What they did is they just make a comedy out of the
28 book that, oh what was the gentlemen's name.

29 SM: Chris Robbins.

30 JM: Pardon.

31 SM: Chris Robbins.

1 JM: Yeah, Chris Robbins wrote a book in the early days...and nobody would talk
2 to Chris except peripheral people, disgruntled wives, the kickers, very few pilots, non that
3 were held in high regard gave him any, any help at all on this book. But he did I'll say on
4 his behalf, he did some research and he had a whole lot of things that were right, but he
5 told a whole lot of stories that were just that, stories embellished. It was kind of kick the
6 tires light the fires, gave the impression that we were cowboys. The movie carried it to
7 the extreme you know, where Robert Downey Jr. is flying the right seat of a 123 and tells
8 the captain to bail out. Can you imagine that? (laughing) And when they were hit the
9 captain is pumping something on the left hand side of the seat. I saw film with Ed
10 Adams and Ed and I both have got thousands of hours in the 123. He looked at me and I
11 looked at him and Ed said, "What do you think he's doing?" I said, "Well the only thing
12 he could be doing is pulling the gust lock on them!" (laughing) that was the only thing
13 that was over there. But it was...you know... They really garbaged up what could have
14 been a hell of a good movie if it was done right. We really did have a bail out and weird
15 Neil was really a character there's no question about that and Weird did tell the co-pilot,
16 in fact it was Bill Caruthers, my friend Bill was the co-pilot on that flight that bailed out.
17 Bill...Bill he told Bill to bail out and Bill went back and he came up and said, "Yeah I
18 left my camera!" Of course old Weird Neil was having a hard time controlling the
19 airplane, evidently it'd had some control cables shot out and had real major problem and
20 he was trying to circle over the only friendly position in the immediate area so that when
21 the troop bailed out they would be in a safe area rather than in the enemy. Of course that
22 unnerved Neil you know, 'Get the hell out!' Then after of course the last one went out
23 Neil had to go all the way to the back of the airplane and jump. Neil said that the
24 airplane arrived to the ground about the same time he did. It was very exciting if it was
25 done right it would have been a lot more interesting I think than the movie.

26 SM: What about some of the other antics?

27 JM: Well the coloring book. Neil did that. He did all sorts of things for shock
28 value. He carried a coloring book and crayons in his flight kit and he would...he loved to
29 get new first officers brand new to Laos and he would give them the controls, it'd be their
30 leg and he would just intently color very carefully the whole flight and the next leg when
31 it would be his leg to fly and the co-pilot's leg to rest he'd hand them the coloring book

1 and the crayons and tell them you know, “Okay you can color, but don’t go outside the
2 lines and don’t color the horsies!” (laughing) He was just a bond fide character. He
3 worked hard at being weird.

4 SM: Oh okay. (laughing) How about the...let’s see, in the movie they showed
5 pilots jumping from aircraft to aircraft and not just fixed wing, but area pilots jumping
6 from rotary...

7 JM: Rotary wing to fixed wing. Yeah. No, no, no.

8 SM: Fixed wing to rotary, back and forth.

9 JM: Nope. Nope.

10 SM: How much did that happen to your...?

11 JM: I don’t think rotary wing to fixed wing ever happened. There was some
12 rotary wing pilots...we had a couple of opportunities for rotary wing that had fixed wing
13 experience to go to fixed wing or back and forth, but then anytime you bid a program like
14 that, particularly rotary wing to fixed wing you’re going to bid it and go through the
15 training program and probably a change of base involved and it’s going to be a month or
16 two process. It’s not going to be a matter of walking across a ramp and getting in the
17 other airplane. Now however, from one type of helicopter to another type of helicopter it
18 could be that they were checked out in more then one helicopter. In fixed wing, ah heck
19 I’ve flown as many as three or four different aircraft at one time where I was current and
20 qualified in all of them. In Saigon I know at one time I was qualified in the 10-2, the
21 Apache, the Dornier, and the C-46 and I went back and forth from time to time when they
22 needed me in one or the other I’d go back and forth. In Bangkok I flew the BTB-18, the
23 DC-3, the C-46, and the 10-2 and stayed current in all of them. In Vientiane I stayed
24 current in the 123 and the C-46 just about he whole time I was up there going back and
25 forth. Whenever they’d need me in one or the other I’d go back and forth.

26 SM: So that kind of...within the aircraft specific specialty you could jump
27 between aircraft? That is fixed wing aircraft you could go from aircraft to aircraft, same
28 for the helicopters?

29 JM: Yeah if you were current and checked out in it. Now having said that, we
30 had a seniority system and you had to bid on airplanes. It was just alike an airline...and
31 you bid a base. You know you hear Civil Air Transport, Southern Air Transports, Air

1 Asia and Air America and you think ‘oh well these are all different companies,’ but we
2 were...all the pilots were on the same seniority level. Seniority number one of course
3 was Bigone who flew a Convair 880 and later the 727 out of Taipei and then the junior
4 pilot was probably a co-pilot on a C-47 or a caribou or something in Saigon. As you got
5 senior and they needed pilots in a particular program they put it up for bid and you would
6 bid the program. If you wanted to fly the Porter program you’d bid the Porter, if you
7 wanted to fly the 46 you’d bid the 46. When you got senior enough to hold the slot then
8 the company would put you through the ground school and check you out, but when you
9 did bid a program or a base you had to stay there for at least a year. You know they’re
10 not just going to keep retraining you constantly unless they need you in another program
11 and then of course they’ve got the right to put you in it if they needed you. So if you bid
12 a program and you’ve been checked out in it and then after a year you bid another
13 program [and] you’re checked out in that as long as you keep going back and flying the
14 other airplane occasionally to stay current...and all it takes is three takeoffs and landings
15 in [the] preceding ninety days and of course it takes going to the ground school at least
16 once a year and it takes a flight check at least once a year to stay current. If you do all
17 those things then you’re qualified in two airplanes and you can add it to three, four, and
18 on up the line; it’s how much you want to put up with. The reason I flew so many
19 airplanes in Saigon is we considered...I was an IP in all those airplanes, an instructor
20 pilot and a check airman. They didn’t want a check airmen instructor pilot designated for
21 a program that only had two programs. We only had two Dorniers and we only had two
22 Apaches in Saigon. So they just lump it together and call it the light airplane program
23 and if you were the IP and check airmen they did it in all three. Of course you had to go
24 through the process of staying current in all three. In Bangkok that’s where the stand
25 board was. That’s where Don Cofstaff who was the head of training and if you want I
26 can tell you an interesting story in Bangkok with Cofstaff.

27 SM: Oh yeah, by all means.

28 JM: Don Cofstaff was outstanding, probably as good a pilot as I’ve ever flown
29 with and technically one of the most astute aviators I’ve ever met. I believe it was TWA
30 that he was the head of training for before he came Air America, but he was hired to be
31 the head of our stand board and to write all of our manuals and standardize our training

1 and flying and he did a heck of a good job of it. He wrote some of the best manuals I've
2 ever seen before or since. Descriptive pictures of how to do all of the maneuvers exactly,
3 what was expected of you on a check ride... The guy was a genius! But Don...his
4 offices where in Bangkok and he had men that he hired for each program. He had a man
5 that was the head of the training and the C-47 and DC-4 that was Don Cofstaff, I mean
6 Ed Linebach. He had a fellow that was in charge of the Beech 18 and the BTB-18 that
7 was Rocky Myers. He had...oh he had one for every airplane. While he was in Bangkok
8 and I was in Bangkok we didn't have that many pilots down there, I got to know Don real
9 well and I had been flying a VIP flight in a Volpar to Wa Hin the resort area and I call it
10 amounted to is a general that wanted to play golf. I'm hanging around the hotel, I didn't
11 have anything to read, and I was bored out of my mind, I'd been down there for a couple
12 of days. So I went out to the airport and I got my flight kit out of the airplane and I
13 started...you know I had a few paraphernalia to read in there, but the primary thing was
14 the flight manual for the airplane. I knew the airplane well, but with nothing else to do I
15 sat under a palm tree and I read that flight manual cover to cover about four times!
16 Playing games in my mind...normally you would remember a few general specifics about
17 your instruments, but you didn't take the time to remember verbatim about looking at the
18 instrument. The maximum, the minimum and the normal range and things like that, but I
19 played those kind of games head. One the flight back to Bangkok as soon as I get at
20 Bangkok, who meets me at the ramp but Don Cofstaff with three gentlemen from the
21 FAA! Don said that these men had came down from Japan and the company had put him
22 in to be a designated airmen, a designated flight examiner and of course he had to take,
23 the had to show the FAA that we had the proper training programs and that he could give
24 the check rides and evaluate the training. So they were there to evaluate Don evaluating
25 one of us and he said, "Now I'm going to give you an oral on the airplane." So he got the
26 flight manual and we went to his office and the three FAA guys and Don started asking
27 me questions out of the manual and I just started rattling off and Don started...when he
28 say that I knew the airplane very well he got more and more technical and I kept rattling
29 them off. Finally this FAA guy said, "Give me the manual!" He looked and he started
30 asking technical questions and I kept rattling them off. He said, "Well Mr. Cofstaff it
31 appears you have an excellent ground school!" (laughing) And Don loved me, he was

1 smiling from ear to ear. Then we went out and we flew a check ride in the BTB-18 and
2 that qualified him for everything below 12-5, he could give check rides in the Porter and
3 the Beech and those little airplanes, but then he needed to one of each one of the transport
4 category aircrafts. So we went out to the DC-3, which I flew on a daily basis and knew
5 pretty well, but I was a little leary of the oral if he got real technical on that I hadn't
6 boned up on it like I did the Volpar. So he said, "Well do the oral," and all the FAA said,
7 "Ah we don't need that! We know that you guys have got an excellent ground school,
8 let's just go fly the airplane!"

9 SM: Oh man!

10 JM: [We] flew a very brief check ride in the DC-3 and got out of it and flew a
11 very brief check ride in the C-46 and after that I was Don Cofstaff's fair haired boy. He
12 thought I walked on water.

13 SM: Oh yeah, uh huh! How did that help you?

14 JM: Oh just that, well of course I already was an instructor pilot in all of those
15 airplanes, but I was always an instructor pilot and a check airmen in everything I flew.

16 SM: Okay. What do you think prompted you to do that, to study up so well?

17 JM: I don't know. You know talk about fate. I told Don afterwards, I said, "Don
18 you know damn well we don't study minimums and maximums." He said, "Yeah, I
19 know that." And I said, "I just..." I told him the story, I leveled with him, he laughed.
20 In fact I'm sure Don has told the story many times although he's passed away a couple of
21 years, several years ago. He was quite a bit older, I would imagine that Don was...Don
22 was probably in his sixties then.

23 SM: Wow!

24 JM: Yeah he was getting up there. In fact I think that's probably the reason he
25 left TWA, he was too old to fly [the] 121.

26 SM: Okay. Now you mentioned these were FAA regulators, Americans.

27 JM: Yeah these were Americans, yeah. Well we flew some N-registered aircraft.
28 We had n-registered C-46s, we had n-registered...we didn't have many. Most of our C-
29 46s were Bravo-Chinese registered and we had some X-ray-Whiskey Lao registered, but
30 we did have some registered. 9-8-4, 9-8-5 were registered and we had all of the Beech
31 18s were n-registered; I don't believe we had any of those foreign registered. Some of

1 the...well the Apaches were n-registered, the Dorniers in believe were n-registered
2 although we did have at least one Lao registered one up in Laos. Then we had, let me
3 think of what else was n...Oh I think some of the Porters were n-registered. There were a
4 number of aircraft that were, which the FAA had authority over.

5 SM: Was that the only encounter you had with FAA in a regulator...?

6 JM: (laughing) I had a real funny one. I had a flight to Tainan out of Bangkok.
7 We were flying from Bangkok to Da Nang, Da Nang to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to
8 Taipei, that was the route of flight and those were all tech stops it wasn't that we
9 were...we had some company cargo I think to offload in Da Nang, but most of them were
10 just to get fuel and go on. A FAA examiner that had supposed to have done a route check
11 with Pan-American between Bangkok and Hong Kong and then pick up there other Pan-
12 American flight from Hong Kong to Bangkok had missed the first flight and now it was
13 obvious that he was going to miss the second flight that was late in the day coming the
14 other way. You know there was Pan-Am one and two that went around the world, one
15 went eastbound one went westbound. Anyway, he was frantically checking all the airline
16 counters seeing if there was any aircraft going to Hong Kong that he could get on. When
17 he went to the CAT counter they said, "Well we've got a C-46 freight airplane going up
18 there." Oh it tickled him to death because it would get up there early enough in the
19 evening that he'd be able to catch the Pan-Am flight that was coming back the other way,
20 the westbound flight. So he gets in the airplane, in the jump seat, and I've got a Chinese
21 first officer and we taxi out and we take off and the Chinese was one of the new,
22 relatively new Chinese pilot and he was a little nervous he'd never flown with me before.
23 He'd fumbled on the check list, he's English wasn't quite as good as some of them and
24 this guy started picking on the co-pilot and really irritated the devil out of me. He was
25 acting like he was on a check ride with us. Oh, early in the flight I'd had enough of him
26 and I turned around and said, "Look Mister. I don't know if you noticed that when you
27 got in here, but this is a Chinese airplane. This airplane has got a big B on the tail, not an
28 N, and I have a Chinese pilot license and this gentlemen sitting next to me has a Chinese
29 pilots' license and you have absolutely no authority here. And if you don't leave this co-
30 pilot alone I am putting you off in Da Nang!" At that he got a little militant at first telling
31 me I was also an American and had a U.S. pilots' license and tried to intimidate me. I

1 intimidated him right back and said there's no question that he was going to spend some
2 time in Da Nang! Then he got to be very, very friendly. The rest of the trip he was no
3 problem.

4 SM: (laughing) So he didn't want to spend time in Da Nang, why?

5 JM: No, he didn't want to spend any time there at all.

6 SM: But why?

7 JM: Why was he such a jerk or why didn't he want to spend any time in Da
8 Nang? (laughing)

9 SM: (laughing) Well you may not know the answer to the first one so how about
10 the second one?

11 JM: I don't know the answer to either one of those. He was a jerk.

12 SM: Yeah. What time period was this, do you remember?

13 JM: That would have been 1966.

14 SM: Okay early in the war. So it might have been too hostile on the ground in
15 Da Nang?

16 JM: Yeah...well in fact I remember we did our number two services I believe in
17 Bangkok and I was still based in Saigon at the time, but we flew the airplanes over to
18 Bangkok for service. This particular airplane had something that needed a heavier
19 maintenance then they performed in Bangkok and they wanted it farried to Tainan for the
20 heavier service. So I...and it might have been that it was just overdue for a heavy service
21 too as they caught in the records check., but at any rate that is why I wound up flying the
22 airplane out of Bangkok. I was still based in Saigon.

23 SM: Well let's see. Let's move forward a little bit to Tet of '68. I was
24 wondering what you hard about Tet, when did you hear about when Tet hit...?

25 JM: Well we heard a lot through the grapevine in a hurry about it and of course I
26 had a lot of real close friends that were down there you know flying. It was pretty
27 exciting period of time for them so there were lots of Tet stories that came out, but
28 being... I was still in Bangkok at that time so it was... I couldn't tell you a whole lot
29 about it except second hand information.

30 SM: Okay. But you did hear about it relatively quickly?

31 JM: Oh yeah we heard about it quickly yeah.

1 SM: Of course shortly after Tet it would have been about May of 1968 President
2 Johnson made the decision not to run for reelection. What do you remember hearing
3 about that and what did you and other colleagues think about that?

4 JM: You know I was rather detached I guess from American politics at that time
5 as far as presidential politics. I normally would have been very interested in it, but we
6 were so busy in our day to day mission and it seemed like our whole world was what we
7 were doing that it really didn't mean much to me at the time. I missed everything that
8 poor ol' Johnson went through with the flower children.

9 SM: When Nixon won the election in '68 and of course he came in with this
10 secret plan to win the war...did you notice any changes or any differences after Nixon
11 took power in 1969 and he started implementing eventually of course what became to
12 Vietnam the vietnamization and basically started winding down the war in Vietnam.
13 What happened in Laos during that period say from 1969 to 1972?

14 JM: '69 and '70 was the wildest period I think they ever had up there. We were
15 going full bore. In fact '69, '70, and '71, '72 was absolute go, go, go; it was the busiest
16 time I can ever remember in my years with Air America. Particularly '69 when they got
17 the PDJ back it was wild up there! '70 was too, it was...lots and lots of things happening
18 and of course if you look at the plaque we lost an awful lot of people during those years
19 too.

20 SM: How long did Vang Pao hang on to the PDJ?

21 JM: Oh it was less than a year.

22 SM: It was?

23 JM: Yeah.

24 SM: Were you part of the... I would imagine they had to evacuate?

25 JM: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We take them in, bring them out.

26 SM: What was that evacuation like?

27 JM: I don't remember it being much more than just a routine operation. It
28 wasn't one of these last minute things like the Fall of Saigon with the guys beating down
29 the gates when they saw the handwriting on the wall, they got out.

30 SM: Okay so it was not a rushed...?

1 JM: The ones that I was involved in was not a route, no it was more or less
2 orderly.

3 SM: Okay. When did things start winding down in Laos for you as an Air
4 America pilot?

5 JM: It never did from the time I left!

6 SM: It never did?

7 JM: In 1973, actually yeah it was '73; the U.S. Military left Vietnam, pulled out
8 completely right after the prisoners were released. The U.S. had a cutoff time as to when
9 they could give anymore material weapons or support to the Vietnamese, South
10 Vietnamese. As a result they upgraded their Air Force with 130, which meant that the
11 123s, 119s, a whole lot of the other aircraft were obsolete and the Air Force decided they
12 wanted those back for other friendly governments like Thailand, Laos, the Philippines
13 and wherever and they wanted those airplanes back and of course the South Vietnamese
14 had several squadrons scattered around the country. The U.S. weren't supposed to be in
15 there anymore so they brought some crews from Air America from Laos over to ferry
16 those aircraft to Clark Air Force base in the Philippines. They asked for volunteers for
17 this and I can't remember exactly how I got hooked into it, I think Jim Ryan asked me to
18 go on it. It was supposed to be a voluntary thing and the idea of living out of your
19 suitcase TDY back and forth to Clark wasn't very appealing to any of us. I think they
20 were having a hard time getting the crews to volunteer. I think it was Jim that asked me
21 if I would go over and ferry as many of these airplanes as I could and take a co-pilot with
22 me whoever I wanted. The thing that we were lacking was maintenance support. I recall
23 they were supposed to use VNAF for maintenance support and they were poor. But I
24 went over; I flew with Bill Caruthers at first. Bill was the one that bailed out of the 123
25 with Weird Neil when they were shot down in the Bolivan. Shortly after that he had a
26 real narrow escape in a 123 with George Ackley up in Long Chin. A T-28...as they were
27 getting ready to taxi out for takeoff, they were getting ready to pull into position, a T-28
28 landed without any hydraulics, no brakes, and went roaring off the end...he didn't want
29 to run into the karst, which was like a brick wall at the end of the runway, it was a sheer
30 cliff. He swerved the airplane into the parking ramp and ran into the side of the 123. He
31 would have hit right in the cockpit, but Ackley saw him coming and added full power and

1 it pulled the airplane up just far enough to where it went under the wing, sheared the
2 propeller off of the airplane and sheared one of the jets off, and crashed into the fuselage
3 under the wing tearing a great big hole in the fuselage and killing... I don't remember
4 how many were killed, but there were two or three killed that were sitting in the jump
5 seats in the airplane. Of course Caruthers thought that thing was coming right through
6 the cockpit, he had already got his seatbelt off and was almost in Ackley's lap when the
7 thing hit! Now that would've been the second close call that Caruthers had had in...oh
8 heck in less the ninety days! So when this ferry mission came up where they were just
9 going to ferry airplanes across the South China Sea that sounded like what he wanted and
10 he volunteered to go. I remember we went just before 1973 I think we got over there in
11 December as I recall and we were there it might have been right after Christmas because
12 it was New Year's Eve one of the first flights we took out of Tan Son Nhut we had a
13 123...they were outfitting them, the VNAF were putting the drop tanks on them and the
14 internal fuel too so that we could fly non-stop from Saigon to Clark. They were hooking
15 up the drop tanks and it required a physical check that they had to take this plate off of
16 the wing that was way out outboard towards the tip, but it was a plate where the
17 connections were made from the drop tank to the line that ran into, through the wing into
18 the main tank. You were supposed to pressurize them, there was an air compressor in the
19 pylon and they would pressurize the line and check for leaks and then after that check
20 was made they would screw this inspection plate back down onto the wing. The
21 inspection plate was flush and it was mounted with little beveled machine screws that
22 screw down into the spar and there's quite a load on that plate because it's almost an
23 integral part of the leading edge of the wing. On takeoff you've got a lot of negative
24 force over that. Well what had happened they had a shift changed and the airplane had
25 just been signed off that the airplane had checked out all right, but the mechanic that was
26 putting the plate had putting the leading edge screws down the front of the plate all the
27 way down...this plate was probably thirty inches long and ten inches wide or twelve
28 inches wide. So the screws on the leading edge of it were all in, but around the edges and
29 the backside were not and it's time to go to lunch he gets off the wing and leaves. The
30 next shift comes, the airplane's been signed off checked okay, they release the airplane.
31 Caruthers and I get in the airplane and taxi out, takeoff and on takeoff just as the airplane

1 rotated the control wheel...in a 123 the captain has got one hand on the nose wheel
2 steering and the other hand, the right hand on the recip throttle, the co-pilot has his left
3 hand on the jet throttles, which are toggle switches below the recip throttles and his right
4 hand is flying ailerons and holding the nose forward, holding forward pressure on the
5 yoke so the nose wheel's tight on the ground and then using the ailerons to steer for
6 cross-wind. So both pilots are busy on the takeoff role. The procedure is that at rotation
7 the co-pilot calls out the rotation speed, the captain takes his hand off of the nose wheel
8 steering onto the yoke and then hits the mic button, which is right there with his thumb
9 and says, "It's my yoke." And the co-pilot releases the yoke. The captain rotates and
10 then you're airborne and then after that of course you start through your after takeoff and
11 climb check button. At the point that I rotated the airplane the control wheel snapped out
12 of my hand and the airplane started a violent roll to the left almost drug the wing on the
13 ground and both of us grab the yoke and as hard as we could hold it off to the right we
14 were probably still in close to a seventy degree bank! The airplane was out of control! It
15 was jerking back and forth, the wheel was jerking right and left like crazy! It was hard to
16 hold onto. We declared an emergency of course, we hit the mic and said you know that
17 we were having a control failure and declared emergency. I, being an old C-46, C-47 tail
18 dragger pilot you're real, you're always aware of asymmetrical thrust and what it can do
19 for you. You start to lose directional control you close one throttle on landing or takeoff
20 with a C-46. First thing that came to me I just reached up and pulled the right recip
21 throttle back to the stop and the airplane yaned out of course this tremendous amount of
22 drag on the right side and it raised the left wing up to about a thirty degree bank. Now
23 we had a little control, but has the two jets and the other recips started to accelerate the
24 airplane the roll started to get steeper so. By manipulating the throttles we managed to
25 maintain, oh somewhere between a twenty and a thirty degree bank and we were making
26 a big skidding turn. Every time I tried to add power back in to the right recip of course
27 the airplane the roll to the left would get greater. So we made a big skidding turn around
28 the airport and I tried to land on the main runway, the left runway, but I was at about a
29 forty-five degree angle as I came across the end of so I couldn't land on that one. I
30 continued to turn and about half way down the right runway I was lined up, but although
31 still in a steep bank but to heck with that. I just chopped all the power and planted it on

1 the ground and we got it stopped! That was Bill's third major thrill in oh maybe four
2 months and he wanted to quit right there. He didn't want to do any more flying. I had a
3 hard time talking him into getting back in that airplane after we'd found out what was
4 wrong. What had happened that plate on takeoff had lifted up like a giant spoiler and of
5 course it disturbed the airflow over the aileron and the aileron was snapping back and
6 forth like crazy. It was a wild experience.

7 SM: Now what would happen when you...when something like that happened?
8 Was the mechanic...you know, what happened?

9 JM: Oh we went back and they immediately got up on the wing and they could
10 see the plate was bent then; it was bent up like a spoiler. There was no question what was
11 wrong you could see it from the ground. It was funny there was an Air Force colonel that
12 was left there as a liaison man for the VNAF that was real red in the face because you
13 know, this had happened on his watch and I understand he was up for brigadier. He
14 wrote a nasty letter to the company saying that the pilots didn't check their controls
15 before takeoff and the he suggested that we use the Air Force method where one man on
16 the ground showed whether the airline was up or down and all this baloney. Well it had
17 nothing to do with the controls, you know absolutely nothing, the controls were
18 functioning normally. Of course our chief pilot wrote back a nasty letter to him telling
19 him that he suggested he'd learn a little bit more about airplanes before he made those
20 kinds of suggestions.

21 SM: (laughing) Oops! Okay. But did the mechanic...did you ever see the
22 mechanic that made the mistake?

23 JM: No. There's a bunch of them, there's six or eight of them in a group you
24 know and as to which guy was actually responsible I'm sure everybody was saying 'it
25 wasn't my job.'

26 SM: Who did the mechanic work for?

27 JM: VNAF, they were Vietnamese. They were the Vietnamese Air Force.

28 SM: Oh. My goodness! Okay. What other close calls like that did you have,
29 anything?

30 JM: Oh I'm sure there are others, but I don't want to bore you forever. We could
31 talk about that kind of stuff for a long period of time.

1 SM: Anything else that stands out though?

2 JM: Well. We had a... I was checking out a new captain, in fact it was... not
3 Larry it was Terry, Terry Fraiser who lives up in the Seattle area now; I just saw him at
4 the reunion. I was checking him out on his final ride as captain. During out checkout
5 procedures you have your normal training you know, which is all your emergency
6 procedures and steep turns and stalls and etcetera and then after that you have to fly... if
7 that satisfactorily passed then you're upgraded to captain. Before you were turned lose
8 on the line by yourself you have to have twenty-five hours of IOE, initial operating
9 experience, with an instructor pilot check airman in the right seat. So I was flying the
10 right seat with Terry and this was his last day. He had his twenty-five hours he got in that
11 day and we'd been flying a lot of STOL operations on the Bolivan, it's a muddy dirty
12 strips and the airplane was splattered with mud. We came back in to alternate and we
13 were going to pickup some people on alternate, we were going back to Udorn, it was the
14 end of his checkout and he was officially a captain. We came into alternates, we called
15 for gear down and we got the indication on down wind that we had three gear. The
16 indicator said, "Down." And we called for the pin and there the kickers physically put
17 pins in for the gear you know to lock them down. Then there's one for the nose wheel,
18 which is the long rod that goes in on a bulkhead below the cockpit, the cockpit's on a
19 ladder elevated from the floor of the airplane. That nose wheel pin goes forward several
20 feet into the nose wheel and then there's a big round pin about an inch and a half in
21 diameter that goes into each main gear strut through the main trust and into the strut. The
22 kicker called that all the pins were in. Well on touch down, we touched down real
23 lightly; he made a beautiful landing. The gear horn came on showing 'gear unsafe
24 warning' and the sensor indicator on the right main gear showed unsafe. I said, "What
25 the hell is this? Well the pins are in what difference does it make?" I thought it was just
26 a micro switch problem, but then the airplane started leaning to the right and it was
27 starting to go off to the right and of course we used differential power [and] kept it on the
28 runway. The right main just slowly folded up into the well. Again the airplane drug on
29 the jack pad and a little bit of skin damage on the bottom, but the propeller never touched
30 the ground. There was no damage to speak of to the airplane except the right main gear
31 is folded up in the well. We'd always been told up until that time that it was impossible

1 to put the pin in if the gear wasn't all the way down and Lockheed. If it was a little bit
2 out of being Lockheed you couldn't get the pin in. Well this gear was so far from being
3 down that when they put the pin in it was in front of the strut and the airplane on
4 touchdown tried to, the gear tried to come down and the extension, the hydraulic
5 extension that pushed it down tried its best to hold it, but of course it couldn't support the
6 weight of the airplane and it slowly folded up into the well. Actually the pin is what kept
7 it from going down all the way! But it was just one of those things. Of course the
8 company send their flying safety people up and their accident investigators like Doug
9 Dreyfus that just passed away, and they jack the airplane up, put the gear down and flew
10 it back to Vientiane, put it on stands in the maintenance hanger and duplicated the same
11 malfunction and it was mud and dirt that had choked around a couple of micro switches
12 and gave us a false indication and it also jammed the gear and of course the real culprit
13 was putting the pin in in front of the gear. So after that the fix on it was that the flight the
14 kickers had to carry flashlights and shine a light in there to make sure that the strut was
15 down when they put the pin in.

16 SM: Oh okay. But it was an honest mistake.

17 JM: Oh yeah it was an honest mistake. Oh yeah it wasn't the kickers fault. He'd
18 put the pin in thousands of times. They'd all been told, hell I'd been told as an instructor
19 pilot you couldn't get the pin in if it wasn't all the way down and Lockheed.

20 SM: Any... But no one would be reprimanded in any instances like this?

21 JM: Well no. No not as long as they can ascertain that it wasn't your, that you
22 didn't make a mistake.

23 SM: What was the relationship like between the different types of employees
24 working therewith the pilots, kickers, administration? Bureaucracy is I think tend to...
25 well internal conflict inevitable...

26 JM: I know what you saying. I tell you this, there naturally are going to be minor
27 irritations between them. The biggest irritation between flight crews and maintenance
28 was in write ups and write offs. If there's something wrong with the airplane the pilot is
29 supposed to write it up to where the mechanic can understand what the devil is the
30 problem and then the write off is supposed to be what they did to fix the problem as the
31 mechanic and from time to time they'd get irritated with each other because their write

1 offs or their write ups were garbled to where it was hard for them to understand. But I
2 can tell you this, I never met a flight crew member with Air America that didn't think that
3 our maintenance was the best in the world. I've flown with a lot of people before and
4 after and I can say that our maintenance people did an outstanding job. We beat the hell
5 out of those airplanes all day long, we'd bring them back looking dirty and hang dog and
6 maybe have ten or twelve discrepancies of things that we broke during the day from the
7 rough use that we had on the airplane and of course a lot of those airplanes were really
8 getting up in years. The next morning you'd pick that airplane up and you thought it
9 came out of the factory! It was sparkling clean, everything that was written up was
10 written off, and it was fixed and it flew beautifully! I had nothing but respect for
11 maintenance. You know you can get some problems... I remember Weird Neil one time
12 had a large rat, came out of the cargo in the C-46 and then hid some place and they
13 couldn't find it. He wrote up that there was a large rat terrorizing the passengers in the
14 cargo compartment and the write off on that one was 'large rat counter terrorized by
15 entire RMD department.' (laughing) But that's the kind of stuff you got. I remember
16 one time Walter Rosenfield came in and the airplane that he was supposed to fly the
17 propeller wasn't on it and of course...the logbook should have never been released to
18 operations, but due to a little bureaucratic snafu it was. So he just took the logbook and
19 wrote up that the right, left engine will over... the airplane not air worthy left engine will
20 over speed on takeoff. Of course it would over speed the minute you started because you
21 know prop is like your counter weight on it. Of course your RMD says, "How does he
22 know the engine's going to over speed?" They got a little hot under the collar until they
23 realized there was no propeller on the end. (laughing)

24 SM: (laughing) Okay. Kind of almost pranks...?

25 JM: Yeah actually I think we got along very well and of course as far as the
26 kickers were concerned I thought those guys walked on water. I had nothing but respect
27 for them. They are hard, hard working guys. You know loading that heavy equipment,
28 laying on your back, and tying trucks down... we carried 155s, 105s, trucks, trailers, all
29 kinds of really difficult stuff to load and tie down and those guys always figured out a
30 way to do it and do it safely. They always balanced the airplane right, they really did an
31 excellent job. Then of course they would rig the parachutes and they were indispensable

1 in dropping the loads and... we just had nothing but respect for them. We worked
2 together very closely.

3 SM: How about going up the chain? How much interaction did you have with
4 management?

5 JM: Well of course we had interaction with the chief pilot on a daily basis, you
6 know at least your base chief pilot.

7 SM: How about administration, going up higher?

8 JM: Well you know, Grundy was a real hands on man. Did I mention to you
9 about the one instance that I had with Grundy?

10 SM: I don't think so.

11 JM: In Saigon, I think I did, but maybe not it might have been somebody else we
12 were talking about recently. I was landing on a strip in Vietnam that had a big exercise
13 going on with 130s flying in and out and the parking area was separated from the runway
14 by two taxiways that had culverts underneath them and PSP, which is perforated steel
15 planking, to the parking ramp. The 130s have got a narrower footprint than the 46s and
16 they'd pushing the dirt out on both sides of the PSP and our gear on a 46 was very wide.
17 We had to swing wide and we only had about twelve inches to center it on each side of
18 the wheels to stay on the PSP. As I was taxiing across the PSP gave way on the right side
19 and the airplane started to lean into the right and I thought 'oh God!' So I immediately
20 shut the engine down and positioned the props so it wouldn't hit the ground. The
21 airplane kept sinking and sinking. The Chinese co-pilot screamed, "Bu How!" the
22 minute your airplane started sinking, which is very bad in Chinese. When the airplane
23 wound up, my God it was leaning at an horrendous angle to the right, it was almost down
24 in that gully, but it wasn't scratched, but boy was it out of service. So I took pictures
25 with my Polaroid I had with me that the gear was centered, the left one was twelve inches
26 right... you could see a little skid mark where it'd moved about two or three inches to the
27 right as it skidded sideways because the airplane was sinking down into the ditch. They
28 had to send the mechanics up from Saigon with all kinds of jacks and materials that
29 would jack that airplane up and rebuild that ramp until they got the airplane out of there.
30 It took several days of hard work to get it out. Well while all this was going on my local
31 chief pilot, which was George Calhoun, had flown up there in another airplane [to]

1 investigate it. “So god John you did everything you could you know, you did a good job
2 of shutting the engine down, position the prop so that nothing got damaged. Don’t worry
3 about it.” I had a maintenance flight from Saigon to Tainan within a day or two after it
4 happened and when I got to Tainan...if you’re going to be up there for a few days they
5 always send you to Taipei to get your link training updated. So I went up and did my
6 four or six hours of link training and I was in the officers’ club having lunch at noon and
7 the systems chief pilot Don Tears came in. He saw me and did a double take, came over
8 and he said, “Are you up here to see Grundy?” I said, “No, I’m here on maintenance test
9 flight, I mean check flight, the airplanes down in Tainan and I came up on the inter-island
10 flight, I’m going back tomorrow.” He said, “Oh God! You haven’t gotten the word.” I
11 said, “No, I guess not. What’s up?” He said, “Boy is Grundy mad at you. He wants to
12 see you right now. You better go to the headquarters and see Grundy right now!” “Ga’
13 okay.” So I went down to the CAT building and went to see Mr. Grundy and in the
14 meantime he hadn’t received the customer, the company correspondence with all the
15 pictures and the letter from George Calhoun on his investigation, all he knew was that
16 there was a 46 stuck and some idiot pilot taxied the airplane in a ditch. He had just
17 finished reading the letter when I came in and I said, “Mr. Grundy you wanted to see me,
18 McRainey?” He looked up and he said, “Not anymore. That’s all good-bye.” (laughing)
19 That was the end of it.

20 SM: Okay. How about George Duell, did you ever meet him?

21 JM: Yes. [I] met him in Washington D.C. I think really in the early days of
22 FEPA, Far East Pilots Association; some of our negotiations back there. It seemed to
23 me... I can’t remember when George Duell left completely. He might not have been in
24 an official capacity even then because I believe Paul Velty was really in charge, was
25 really running the show at that time. But I found everybody that I met to be gentlemen
26 and first rate people. I thought the world of Paul Velty and the old vice president [of]
27 flight operations was Jim Walker I believe. I think Jim committed suicide years ago, but
28 he was a fine gentlemen, I liked him. I thought they had a good management team.

29 SM: This will end the interview with Mr. John McRainey on June 20th.

30

1 SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. John McRainey on
2 the 21st of June 2001 at approximately eleven twenty Lubbock time. I'm in Lubbock
3 Texas and Mr. McRainey is in McAllen Texas. Sir why don't we go ahead and follow up
4 a couple of questions about your time in Southeast Asia real quick, I was curious, at what
5 point did you know that Air America was shutting down?

6 JM: Well I left before I really knew it was shutting down. We... you know the
7 company had gone on so long dating way back to the old china days that we all thought
8 that while the mission might change the company would probably continue on. We
9 thought it was a long project job. We realized Southeast Asia wasn't going to last
10 forever, but we thought there'd be other missions that would probably keep at least some
11 of the pilots employed. (moments of silence) You there?

12 SM: Oh yes sir.

13 JM: Oh okay. In other words we weren't looking at it as all the flying stopping
14 like it did with the Fall of Saigon.

15 SM: Now when you did leave had anything... I guess the question is when
16 exactly did you leave? What dates did you leave?

17 JM: I would have to look up in the...

18 SM: How about approximately?

19 JM: In my book. It was the summer of '73.

20 SM: Summer of '73.

21 JM: Right. And the military had already pulled out of Vietnam and we knew the
22 handwriting was on the wall.

23 SM: Yeah. Well did anything change after the Paris Peace Accords were signed
24 in '73 in terms of your activity in Laos?

25 JM: Well within the company a number of things changed in that you know CAT
26 had had that crash in Taiwan a few years earlier and lost the flag to China Airline and
27 they cut way back on...well they just cut CAT out. Then Southern Air started backing
28 off of its operations up in Tachikawa and Yokota and started sending pilots down to
29 Southeast Asia. Some of the real, real, real senior people, people that had been flying the
30 jets up there for years wound up back in Southeast Asia. I checked out Don Peters,

1 assistant chief pilot in the 123, so things are really getting... they company is definitely
2 down sizing when you see those kind of things happening.

3 SM: Okay. How about the number of aircraft that were available, was there any
4 shuffling or any selling of aircraft at that point?

5 JM: You know a lot of our aircraft were bailed military aircraft. I didn't see any
6 change in the manning of Southeast Asia up until the time I left. When... like I say my
7 last assignment was just ferry all the VNAF airplanes that had been left all over the
8 country in South Vietnam to Clark Air Force Base. So I wasn't even flying company
9 airplanes I was flying you know aircraft that had been bailed with an Air Force.

10 SM: Okay. Now did you ever work with Vietnamese pilots in Laos out of
11 Bangkok?

12 JM: Vietnamese pilots? No.

13 SM: Yeah. Did any transfer over at all?

14 JM: When you say transfer over... you mean pilots that worked for us, for Air
15 America?

16 SM: Yeah or maybe that were on loan to the Royal Thai or Royal Lao Air Force
17 or anything like that?

18 JM: No. The third country nationals that worked for us actually you know were
19 employees. There were... I don't know of any Vietnamese pilots, now there may have
20 been some. We had a sub Contract, China Airlines provided two 123s they were B-
21 models that flew out of Saigon, but they weren't really company aircraft. I think we
22 sponsored them in the country, but I don't... you know, they weren't on our seniority list
23 or anything. Now the only foreign pilot, well we had Chinese pilots, a lot of Chinese
24 pilots. Most all the first officers on the C-46s in Saigon were Chinese and the C-47. We
25 had a few Thai pilots. In fact I trained I think the very first Thai pilot we got, there were
26 two of them. I'm trying to think of their names, one of them was Gumlarp I remember
27 and then there was another real short one, dang his son was a very high official in the
28 Thai government... let me think of his name... Sompong. Sompong was his name, that's
29 all I knew him by that, just Sompong. Both of those came out... there was another one
30 two, I think his name was Pradus, they came out of the Wah Hin Flying Academy, which
31 was a flight school using Cessna 150s that was I believe a Thai government entity. These

1 three young men had gotten their flying experience out of there and the company hired
2 them. I think for political reasons more than anything else. I trained them, did their
3 transition training for them for the company in Bangkok. I gave each one of them
4 probably twenty-five or thirty hours of flying time in the DC-3 and one of them then...
5 Sompong stayed on and flew as co-pilot on the DC-3 for I'm going to say a year or more
6 in Bangkok. The other two went up to Laos and wound up flying co-pilot in the C-46s
7 and I believe it was Gumlarp that was killed in a C-46 drop over lima site 32 I believe it
8 was. They took ground fire and the airplane caught on fire and they were trying to make
9 it to a landing strip and the nearest one that would have taken the C-46 would have been
10 probably...there was a landing strip on the left side of the PDJ that would have been very
11 suitable, I think that was 108, but I'm not positive, I think it was Monsui. In route the
12 wing burned off and the airplane crashed and the pilot and co-pilot were killed. I believe
13 the kickers bailed out. I think ol' Gularp was killed in that crash as I recall. I believe that
14 there were some Thai helicopter pilots trained in Udorn, but you'd have to talk to one of
15 the helicopter types to confirm that.

16 SM: Okay. No other third country forces, Koreans...?

17 JM: Oh there were lots of third country forces working in other jobs. We had
18 Vietnamese kickers, freight specialists. In fact a good friend of mine he was, he lived
19 right next door to me, Jim Russell used to be the chief pilot of the Beech program and
20 then became the chief pilot of the C-46 program, he had a house boy that he got a job
21 with Air America. He called him Punja and that fellow flew...the whole time I was in
22 Vietnam I know he was flying as a kicker in the 46s and I believe he flew right up until
23 the end with the company. There were lots of them in operations and traffic and
24 maintenance and various other areas, but we just didn't have any Vietnamese pilots that I
25 know of.

26 SM: Well, I guess another interesting area was can discuss real quick. How was
27 it having your family over there? What was it like? I mean, what were the challenges of
28 having family so close?

29 JM: If you're going to stay there year after year after year I think it's very
30 beneficial to have your family there. Long separations from your family are just not
31 good. When I say long I mean like, like we stayed over there for eight, ten years or

1 longer. The families enjoyed it, the living in Bangkok was excellent and Sandy and the
2 kids loved Bangkok. When we moved up to Laos my wife didn't care much, she was
3 very, very depressed at first, but the children loved it almost from the beginning. They
4 could have their horses right in the back yard where they had to go to the riding club in
5 Bangkok. The children they rode their horses throughout the area, they played with
6 American children that worked for USAID, Embassy, or Air America or the customer
7 and built lifetime bonds. They go to the reunions and meet friends that they grew up with
8 every year. I think it was a unique experience. We all became a close knit family;
9 everybody seemed to know each other you know. If you were in a big city like Bangkok
10 of course you didn't necessarily live close to each other, you could be scattered out over
11 quite a big area, but in Vientiane the city was small enough that you knew just about
12 everybody.

13 SM: Did you know some of some of the riskier activities that the kids were
14 engaged in?

15 JM: Well after the fact we learned some of the riskier activities they were
16 engaged in. When we were there we didn't realize some of the things they were doing. I
17 know the kids used to go to the Me Kong River; I'd have had a heart attack if I had
18 known that because it's a very treacherous river. They tell about one time they got
19 caught up in an old woman's fishing net so she came after them with a cane pole.
20 (laughing) They would ride their horses out, you know really out too far. They would be
21 out on the outside city limits in areas that the Pathet Lao could even be in so we were
22 concerned after the fact when we learned that.

23 SM: (laughing) When did you learn that they got fired at?

24 JM: Oh I never know they got... I don't believe they ever got shot at, I hope not,
25 but I mean they were out in areas they could have been.

26 SM: Okay. (laughing) Let's see. What about travel? I assume that you...

27 JM: Oh we did lots of travel. Now the company had scheduled time off as well
28 as our annual leave and home leave. Every three years you got three months home leave
29 and then you got annual leave besides. We would do the flight scheduling at more or less
30 the pilot's...if he wanted to fly a day and be off a couple of days that was fine, if he
31 wanted to do all of his flying in a relatively short block of time and then take off and get

1 out of the area that was alright too. We could get... you could easily schedule a hundred
2 hours of flying time in ten or fifteen days if you were really busy. Then you could have
3 ten days for scheduled STO, scheduled time off, where you wouldn't appear on the flight
4 schedule and you could leave the area. So we would travel in Bangkok, Hong Kong,
5 Singapore, throughout the far east and sometimes even put two scheduled STOs back to
6 back. Schedule your time where you've finished up the end of a month and you had the
7 last ten days of one month on the first ten of the next month and go to Australia or go to
8 Europe, go anywhere you wanted. There's a lot of traveling.

9 SM: And of course the kids were able to enjoy that as well?

10 JM: Oh yes. My children have feed the wallabies and the emus in Australia and
11 they've visited the zoos in Frankfurt and they've done all over!

12 SM: Now as you were... the months before you left and I guess really from say
13 January, February until you left in '73. First I guess did you engage in many
14 conversations with other pilots and other personnel concerning Paris Peace Accords?

15 JM: No, not really. We were flying in such a very small group. Generally the
16 only Air America person I saw during those last few months would be my co-pilot.
17 Because of the condition of the aircraft we didn't carry a full crew. We didn't have an
18 airfreight specialist or a flight engineer or anybody like on board. We carried just the
19 pilot, co-pilot, with one-man life rafts and parachute with the idea we could bail out of
20 those piece...their junky if they fell apart en route. So it was just the pilot and co-pilot
21 and we stayed together. We would pick up an airplane in-country, stay with it until it
22 was...you know they would assign us to an airplane in-country and we'd stay with it until
23 it was ready to be released. We would fly it to Clark and there we would catch whatever
24 transportation we could get back to Vietnam. Sometimes it was military transport like
25 the Flying Tiger line, not the freight line, but there was another outfit over there called
26 Flying Tiger Line that flew government Contracts. There was World Airways over there
27 that flew government Contracts. Continental, Pan American...whoever we could get on
28 or a lot of times we would get on military aircraft. I know one time we flew over on a
29 little T-39 what they call a Scatback, the civilian version was the Saberliner. We flew
30 back on a 141 one time. Whatever we could get on. Then we would come into Saigon
31 and be assigned to another airplane and take it back to Clark. We might sometimes

1 remain in town waiting for the airplane as much as a week, sometimes we'd go out the
2 very next day. So we just lived out of a suitcase for quite a period of time there and the
3 only people we came in contact with was just the two of us, the two pilots.

4 SM: Okay. Well, as you left what did you think about what the United States
5 was doing in Southeast Asia? In particular did you feel like you had accomplished very
6 much? What did you think was going to happen?

7 JM: Well I can't speak for everyone, but personally I was rather dubious that the
8 South Vietnamese would be able to stand alone. It didn't surprise... actually what
9 surprised me I guess is that they lasted as long as they did. I thought that they'd be over
10 under the North Vietnamese in due time, before very long. I didn't have any confidence
11 in the South Vietnamese military at all.

12 SM: What did you think, what did you feel when they did fall in '75?

13 JM: Well it was a disappointment you know. The way I've always looked at it,
14 you had Russia and China the large communist bloc countries supporting the North
15 Vietnamese with weapons and logistics support and you can't just allow the schoolyard
16 bully to beat up on everybody without trying to stand by them like the United States has
17 done so many times since World War II. We haven't really been very good allies for
18 standing by someone when the going gets tough and we didn't do it again. I was
19 disappointed. I've been disappointed in our state department, oh gosh, every since I
20 traveled overseas as a civilian. I don't have any more confidence in them I guess then I
21 had in the South Vietnamese military to be able to defend itself. There was a time, you
22 know you like to think back during World War II an American pilot could be shot down
23 even in Germany sometimes and be protected or France. Anywhere they were respected
24 and taken care of and not too many years after World War II you'd be run out of town if
25 they found out you were an American almost anywhere. It's disappointing.

26 SM: Again as you were getting ready to leave was there a sense that if South
27 Vietnam fell then Laos would be close behind?

28 JM: Well yes, we felt... the domino theory was I think pretty widely accepted as
29 being valid. We were afraid that they would all go. There's no question to me that Laos
30 and Cambodia at least would go. I had a heck of a lot more confidence in the Thais. I
31 had a lot of confidence in their Air Force and their military that they would stand and

1 fight. I also had a strong feeling the U.S. would probably stand beside them although we
2 haven't been real good for standing, when the going gets tough we're the first ones to
3 break and run it seems.

4 SM: What did you think when the United States started making progress in
5 normalizing relations with Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia?

6 JM: Well it's inevitable. I didn't have any negative feelings about it. I didn't
7 feel that we would ever become at least not for many, many years become real close like
8 we did with the Japanese and the Germans after World War II. But I did get back to
9 Vietnam when I was with AMR. I soon as they would allow Americans in I was over
10 there. We couldn't write Contracts yet, it was before they would allow you to enter in
11 any business agreements, but we went over to test the waters to see what the
12 opportunities might be and I made several trips to both, well they were one country, but
13 up north and went to Hanoi, Vinh, and to Saigon, which Ho Chi Minh City now, but all
14 the locals still call it Saigon. I made probably a half a dozen trips over a period of three
15 or four years.

16 SM: What time period was that?

17 JM: That would have been starting about...oh gosh...probably about '91 maybe,
18 '92, early nineties anyway.

19 SM: Okay. I didn't realize you went back for these trips.

20 JM: Oh yeah when I was with AMR I can tell you some interesting stories about
21 that too. I was with, I was a development of, I started out as the managing director of
22 flight operations and I put together our certificates of all the companies and built the jet
23 charter company, but then I transferred to the airline services side as the director of
24 international project development and I traveled in mostly third world countries.
25 Occasionally I'd get to go to a nice place like France or Paris or London, but generally I
26 was in Vietnam or Corsica or Turkmenistan or Azerbaijan or places like that in
27 Vietnam...and Russia, lots and lots of traveling in Russia. I was one of the first
28 Americans to get into Petrobrulam, not Petrobrulam I've traveled there too, but into...oh
29 good grief, [?] when they opened it up to the world, you know it had been a closed city
30 even to the Russians. Did a lot of traveling primarily in the Russian farie in Siberia.

1 SM: Man! That's really cool! Now when you were making these trips this was
2 in order to try to establish business ties?

3 JM: Yes. What we were trying to do is establish a third party airline connections
4 for various services that AMR could provide. Like maintenance, flight operations, traffic
5 passenger service, freight handling, things like that, fueling.

6 SM: This all occurred after your time in Central and South America?

7 JM: Yes. I started working for AMR in November of '87 and I got a one year
8 leave of absence to fly for the war on drugs in 1989 The company let me go allegedly for
9 a year, but they called my back after about eight months to be the chief pilot of the
10 transport program out of Peru.

11 SM: Well we need to talk about this too if it's okay.

12 JM: Oh sure.

13 SM: This is really...you've gone quite a bit after Southeast Asia.

14 JM: Well I started an aviation company for ten years. The first thing I did I
15 formed McAllen Aviation in McAllen Texas, which is a fixed base operation. We were a
16 full service, full line viper dealer. I had everything from the, you know, the multy
17 engine, nib line, and down to the little viper tomahawk. We had a large flight school, did
18 a lot of training of Mexican pilots up here. I had what the Mexicans said was the largest
19 legal 135 Mexican certificates. I had eighteen aircraft on my Mexican charter certificate.
20 We had a large maintenance department. We were a service center naturally for viper
21 and up to and including even a Cheyenne service center, which was very difficult to get
22 in those days. They had what they call a viper aircraft corporation where the only people
23 authorized to be service centers, but being we were so ideally located for the Mexican
24 and they were having to fly all the way to Memphis, which was the nearest one they
25 allowed me to be one. I went and bought all the equipment and parts and the train
26 personnel to be a Cheyenne service center as well. Then during those times the FAA
27 designated me as a FAA pilot examiner and I gave private [?] and transport pilot ratings,
28 I also gave all the written test for everything. Anything from mechanic...

29 SM: This will end the interview with Mr. John McRainey on the 21st of June.
30

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. John
2 McRainey on the 22nd of June 2001 at approximately 10:05. I'm in Lubbock Texas and
3 Mr. McRainey's in McAllen Texas. Sir why don't you go ahead and describe what it was
4 like leaving both Air America and Southeast Asia for you and your family.

5 John McRainey: Okay. I'd promised my wife, oh years earlier probably six or
6 seven years earlier, that when the girls reached high school age we'd get them back to the
7 states and get them in normal high school and then when the kids set off to college we'd
8 go back overseas. It was...she went home... Sandy left about a year before I did, maybe
9 a little over a year. She did come back and visit on one occasion for a couple of weeks,
10 but it was a very difficult thing for me to do to resign and leave. I sincerely hoped that in
11 some future day I could come back, but it was a tough decision and it was a tough
12 adjustment. When I went back to the states I had no idea what I was going to do. I'd
13 thought about starting some business for a few years and shortly after I returned a
14 gentlemen that had to the Rio Grande Valley and whom I bought a home down there
15 from and several citrus groves told me that he and his wife were getting divorced and he
16 wanted to know if I would buy his wife's interest in the company, which included some
17 real estate and half of a United Farm Real Estate Agency. I told him I knew absolutely
18 nothing about real estate and I knew nothing about farming and ranch, but he convinced
19 me that it'd be a thing to do so I bought half of his company and I went to school and got
20 my real estate license, my brokers license, even went to an extension school at Texas A
21 and I in Weslaco and took several agricultural courses so that I'd now a little about the
22 farm and ranch business. I worked in the farm and ranch business for a little over a year
23 and rather enjoyed it as a matter of fact, I kind of enjoyed getting out on the country...
24 primarily we sold citrus groves and I had owned citrus groves for years and been an
25 absentee grower and I took a citraculture course at the university and I got to the point
26 where I felt very comfortable in the citrus business and so it wasn't all that difficult to
27 transition. After about a year a FBO at the McAllen airport came up for sale, it was a
28 sheriff's sale for taxes, and myself and my partner Joe Carpenter looked into it. We had a
29 good friend; I had a friend that was a local doctor by the name of Bob Pate, who had put
30 himself through medical school crop dusting and had been an Air Force pilot and a
31 civilian instructor pilot for the Air Force. He was quite an accomplished aviator himself.

1 We became very good friends and he wanted to go in on this business. I had another
2 friend that I'd sold citrus groves to, a fellow named Earl Chaffy that was very interested
3 in it. So the four of us bought a FBO. We hired a manager for it, which was a good
4 friend of mine Jerry S Jimwhatelse who was also with me throughout the Air America
5 years and whom I had flown with in Minneapolis. We were both flight instructors
6 together; we both flew for the Creamets Company. Jerry was living in Florida with his
7 wife and kind of bored so he came down with his wife Poppy and became our manager. I
8 stayed in the real estate business a little longer, but Jerry's wife really rebelled against
9 south Texas. Poppy thought that south Texas was more third world then Laos and she
10 wanted to go back to Florida. Jerry being a good husband he finally caved in and went to
11 Florida with her and I found myself running the FBO. At the time that I went over to run
12 the FBO or shortly after I made a deal with my partner where I bought him out, I bought
13 Joe's interest in the FBO out and he bought my interest in the real estate company out.
14 So I became the largest single owner in the FBO and we leased some additional land and
15 built new buildings and about tripled the size of it and the business was going very good.
16 Back in the late seventies and early eighties business in south Texas was booming! There
17 was a strong emerging middle class coming out of Mexico, there were a lot of private
18 aviation in Mexico, almost every rancher and every businessman had an airplane, and I
19 found our business was thriving. I got the delusion that I was a good businessman, but
20 about '79 Earl Chaffee decided he was going to move to Florida and I bought his interest
21 in the company out. I split a small portion of it, ten percent I sold to Jack Fitch who was
22 another old Air America pilot that was working for us in the FBO. So Jack became a
23 minor partner in the company. Then it became just Jack and Bob Patet, myself and
24 myself being the major investor and we ran the company up until 1984. In 1984 a
25 wealthy Mexican who had done quite a bit a business with us, he had a jet charter
26 company, his name was Salvador Esqino, wanted to buy the company from us. He
27 bought and sold jet aircraft and he thought that our outlet there was the perfect vehicle for
28 selling airplanes both in Mexico and the U.S. He made us a good offer in cash and
29 bought us out! So I sold the business and thought I was going to retire in 1984, but I still
30 had my pilot examiner's ticket. I'd been an examiner there for the whole Jim I had the
31 FBO and I thought 'well I'd give some flight checks for privates who do ATP and I

1 would you know still give type ratings in some of the transport carrier aircraft I had
2 letters of authorization on, but after about a year of that I decided that I needed to do
3 something else. I moved to Florida and I tried seriously to play golf and determined I'd
4 never be a golfer. I said I had to go back flying I was too young to retire. So called an
5 old friend of mine that I knew ran a proprietary for the CIA, Jim Ryan, and I had a
6 Bonanza straight tail Bonanza. I was living in Melbourne Florida and he told me yes that
7 he did have an opening and that if I'd come up he'd show me around and we'd go
8 through the processes of getting on with him. So I flew up to his base in North Carolina.
9 I looked the operation over and something about the area...it was a small town in central
10 North Carolina only about, oh fifty miles from my hometown where I was born.
11 Something about it really depressed me. It wasn't the same. They say you can't go back
12 and I said "Jim you know living in this small town..." and it wasn't an Air America type
13 operation. It was primarily a support and training operation. I said, "This isn't what I
14 had in mind. Do you have something like the old Air America days you know where we
15 worked hard and play hard and get off around the world doing something exciting?" He
16 said, "Well John there's something that's going on that you would fit into perfectly and I
17 know the people that are running it would want you, but I have absolutely nothing to do
18 with it. If you take it you just better watch your six o'clock!" That kind of concerned me
19 a little. I couldn't understand why he was so adamant in telling me that he had nothing to
20 do with it. He said he'd put the people in touch with me and for me to you know...they
21 would contact me in my apartment in Melbourne. So I flew back to Melbourne
22 wondering 'what in the devil is this all about' kind of cryptic, Jim and I have always been
23 very open together [and] he wouldn't tell me anything about the program or the project,
24 but he was adamant in telling me he had absolutely nothing to do with it. I was
25 somewhat encouraged that I knew he wouldn't even put people in touch with me if it was
26 anything nefarious like I knew darn well it had nothing to do with drug smuggling or
27 anything like that. So shortly after I got back I got a call from an old friend of mine a
28 fellow that I had flown with in Saigon starting in 1965, we were both in the Beech
29 program together. Later we were both IPs in the 123 program together in Laos. Fellow
30 named Bill Cooper, we called him Coop. And Bill said, "John, tell me could you get in a
31 123 today and fly it without a check list, without a manual? Do you think you could

1 safely get in a 123 and ferry it out of the United States to a Central American country?" I
2 said, "Well, yeah I think I could do that, you know I had thousands of hours in a 123, but
3 why would I want to do it. I've got check lists and I've got manuals for 123s." He said,
4 "You do. Well get your manuals and go to Miami at Southern Air Transport, pick up a
5 123 and fly it to a place called Illapango the airport in San Salvador, the capital of El
6 Salvador." Next thing I knew I was ferrying a 123 to El Salvador and I still didn't know
7 what the devil was going on although a couple of flags were going up. I knew that... you
8 know you read the newspaper you know about the Contras and then it dawned on my
9 why Jim was so adamant about saying he had nothing to do with it because the Boland
10 Amendment, which was a typical garbage legislation you know you can't get it through
11 unless you tag it onto a bill to shut the country down, finally passes after being defeated
12 many times. A few years earlier and there hadn't been any aid except non-lethal and
13 going to the Contras and I'd been following that with quite a bit of interest. So by the
14 time I saw the airplane in Southern Air and met several old friends that I hadn't seen in a
15 long time from Southern Air, we had some old Air America pilots that were still flying
16 down there and of course George Stubbs our maintenance man was the director of
17 maintenance down there, but they didn't have anything to do with the 123 other than
18 provide Contract maintenance service on it. I was pretty sure that that was what this was
19 all about was the Contras, which didn't bother me at all. Politically I thought it was the
20 right thing to do. I saw a major threat in the way I evaluate it anyway, the Sandanistas
21 were more or less stole the revolution from the larger part of the population and went
22 communist under Daniel Ortega and immediately started building the largest army in
23 Central America. In fact their army was bigger then all the rest of the armies combined.
24 He was openly saying that this was going to be a revolution without borders and I knew
25 that they were re-supplying communist troops in Guatemala and Honduras and El
26 Salvador and they were spreading their mischief just like Castro had all over Central and
27 South America. So I felt politically it was the right thing to do. But anyway. I found
28 myself involved in it. Bill Cooper, who in the SECORD's book was called the chief pilot
29 of the program, considered himself the project manager and the organizational chart that
30 he drew up made me the chief pilot. He wanted me to do the training and hiring of pilots
31 and scheduling of pilots and just provided the functions of a chief pilot and he was going

1 to take over the management end of it and running the hostels and the rental cars and
2 little logistics and support that we had to keep the thing going; although he did intend to
3 do some of the flying too. So we... the program and been static at the time that I got
4 there. They hadn't made a drop to the Contras in Nicaragua yet. They were trying to get
5 ready to and they had a group of pilots that had been hired through Richard Gad a retired
6 Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force that provided services for the agency as far as getting
7 crews and airplanes and what have you together. The people he hired, although there
8 were some that were very good, for the most part just weren't suitable for the job. They
9 weren't qualified in the aircraft and they really hadn't done any of that type of work. One
10 of them and I don't think I should probably mention his name because he did go to work
11 for the agency later on, was an excellent aviator and very competent and I had a lot of
12 confidence in him. He was also a West Point grad. The rest with the exception of one
13 fellow who's name I will mention. He's a very good friend. He wound up... I
14 introduced him to my secretary in later years when I was with AMR and he wound up
15 marrying her so I think we're friends. Ernie was an excellent aviator. He wasn't checked
16 out on neither the caribou nor the 123, which were the primary aircraft we were using.
17 We had two of each, but I didn't have any trouble training him. Everyone else we
18 replaced primarily with ex-Air America people. We hired... They had one gentlemen
19 down there, an ex-Air Force pilot, who had brought a friend of his down too who up until
20 that time had not made a drop. Without their permission, I hate to mention their names,
21 but we kept both of them as first officers and they were confident. One of them had
22 spend five and a half years in the Hanoi Hilton that'd been shot down over North
23 Vietnam as a 105 pilot. Of course they felt just like I did that this was the place to be and
24 this was the right war to be involved in so they believed in what we were doing. In fact
25 that was the only reason that I believe any one of them were there. We hired Jerry [?].
26 Jerry'd been everywhere else with me so I brought him down there and Jake Raywell and
27 Frank Hines. I had a young fellow that worked for me at McAllen Aviation that had, he
28 worked on the line pumping gas and parking airplanes and what have you and then he
29 learned to fly and got his instructors rating and did some instructing and became a charter
30 pilot. Then he went to Oklahoma to an accelerated school and got his A& P license as a
31 mechanic and came back and worked for me as a mechanic. His reasoning was that the

1 wanted to know the FBO business from A to Z because he intended to own one some
2 day. His name was David Johnson. A real fine young man; young, had a couple of kids.
3 He kept after me...He knew I was down there and he kept after me to hire him. I finally
4 hired him and regretted it almost immediately. Not that he wasn't very competent young
5 man, but the rest of us down there were older men, we were all in our fifties or sixties in
6 case of Cooper and you know it's one thing to have a man at the end of his life get
7 involved in something dangerous like that, but it's such a waste for a young fellow with a
8 couple of small children to get involved in it. For that reason I wouldn't let Dave fly
9 south. We had a maul, which is a short take off and landing four-place airplane that we
10 used to tie the various bases together for logistics; moving people back and forth and
11 small parts back and forth. We had a base that we flew out of for all the northern drops
12 called Aguacate in Honduras right down on the Nicaraguan border. The SECORD and
13 North had purchased some property down in Costa Rica and built an airstrip just south
14 of the Nicaraguan border on the coast in Costa Rica. So we were going to make that a
15 major base for staging after to drop in the southern front, which was the more dangerous
16 area where this fighting was going on and it was presented the biggest problem to us
17 because of the distance that it was from Ilpongo down there. So Dave flew the maul
18 between those bases, moving pilots and parts and whatever was necessary back and forth
19 while the rest of us made the drops. He was really anxious to make the drops, but I
20 just...I would have never forgiven myself if anything would have happened to him and
21 we all agreed that what we were doing was so dangerous that it was inevitable that we
22 were going to lose an airplane and a crew. In fact just before Bill Cooper and Buzz
23 Sawyer were shot down with Hasenfaf we had taken a poll. We were playing Cameroons
24 and old Southeast Asian dice game that we played. One of the Air Force pilots asked me
25 how long, he says, "Let's take a poll. How long do you think it's going to be? How long
26 are we going to go before we lose an airplane?" We'd come close so many times. We
27 had some real problems in the operation in that it wasn't a CIA type operation where you
28 had unlimited logistics and maintenance and support supplies and FIC with flights
29 following and all this. It was a bridging operation, which that's what we were told it was
30 by SECORD and his deputy, a fellow named Bob Dutton. They were hoping that we
31 could just keep the Contras alive until that Boland Amendment could be repealed, which

1 it had already been voted but Tip O'Neil was sitting on it on the legislation as long as he
2 could. Once it had been repealed the agency could go back in and take over and the hope
3 of SECORD was that he would just sell the assets that they had there to the agency and
4 then they would run it as a small proprietary and get us heaps of people in the airplane,
5 like a mini Air America. That's what Bill Cooper had really hoped for and in fact that
6 was his primary reason for being there. So what we were trying to do is just keep the
7 Contras alive, get enough of supplies down to them to keep them going until that dang
8 Boland Amendment could be repealed and the agency could get involved again.
9 However without the agency, without any good intelligence on where their guns were,
10 where their big troop movements were, we had no way to really do any intelligent
11 planning. And it became almost a game of chance rather than a calculated risk, which is
12 what we took when we were with Air America. We had a hard time getting parts and
13 support in because we had no government help in importing aircraft parts so as a result
14 we'd go to Miami...in some cases when we couldn't get them down fast enough we
15 would buy the parts, put them in our suitcase and bring them in and pay more than we
16 they were for our automobiles. Well you've got a generator for an airplane you know
17 how big that is, it's obvious it's not for an automobile, but we managed to get things in
18 that way. However there were things tied up that we needed desperately in customs that
19 we never received. As a result we flew the aircraft...we took airplanes on trips that if we
20 were in Air America would have never taken off with them. We were just coping. We
21 were trying to get the job done with the minimum of what we had. Radios were
22 terrible...SECORD spent a lot of money sending a guy down to install a civilian radio
23 package in one of the 123s and they took out the military radios and put in the civilian
24 radio and they were not compatible. The...let me see if I can give you exact
25 terminology...it had something to do with the wiring in the airplane and then jack boxes
26 that we were using that the impediments of something was different. So what would
27 happening is we could transmit clearly once or twice but every time we transmitted it got
28 worse to the point where we lose our communications totally. Then due to kind a sloppy
29 job of installation, there wasn't a trip we flew that we didn't lose one or more of the
30 navigational radios, which weren't of a whole lot of use for us on the south end but it did
31 help us to get back into Ilapongo. Quite often at night or in bad weather you needed to

1 make an instrument approach so we needed those radios, but I would say more often than
2 not they weren't working. So it was a challenge to try to get through it. We all knew that
3 everything was pretty well stacked against us and that sooner or later we were going to
4 lose an airplane. During this gallons humor where we decided...or everybody gave their
5 opinions as to how long it would last, the longest was thirty days the shortest was a week
6 and I think it was about eight or nine days later that we lost the airplane. So we were
7 kind of in the ballpark for when it was going to be. We did the best we could and it
8 didn't give me the feeling or the sense of accomplishment that Air America did because
9 with Air America everything was A.J. squared away and the crews were expected to be
10 every bit as good as the maintenance and the logistics and the FIC and down there we had
11 some excellent aviators with lots of experience but we had absolutely nothing else going
12 for us. We were like...I felt like street urchins begging for enough to get the darn...even
13 money, we'd have to pay the Salvadorian Air Force cash for the fuel and getting money
14 back and forth was a problem. In fact Sandy became a money moll for us. We'd get her
15 an airline ticket to run back and forth carrying ten thousand at a time, which is the
16 maximum you can legally bring out of the country without declaring it, so that we could
17 make two or three trips flying. Every time any of us were back up there for any reason
18 we always brought the thousand in cash back. Of course we had to pay for the houses
19 that we rented, we had to pay for the food and of course we had cooks and maids and
20 drivers for the cars and we had rental cars...they had a lot of expense and we were
21 always broke. (laughing) It was a real challenge. However, I never had the satisfaction
22 that I did with Air America. You felt...you know you knew you were out...another thing
23 you knew you were and out and out mercenary. We were completely outside the loop as
24 far as any support from the U.S. government and we didn't feel too good about that. We
25 felt we were doing the right thing, but we knew that we were. That was the only thing I
26 guess. And it didn't disturb me when Hasenfasf told everyone that he worked for the
27 CIA or he thought he worked for the CIA. I had played Cameroons with Hasenfasf
28 and...you know, night after night day after day and we all talked about hoping that the
29 agency would take over and then things would be so much better. We'd have logistics,
30 maintenance, FIC and it would be like the old days. He knew that, we all knew it, but to
31 cover his tail you know he said that he was working for the agency. Which I didn't

1 blame him for; when they're about to stand you up against the wall you can say anything
2 you want. He called me when he got back to the states, I think I was one of the first
3 people he called to apologize. I said, "Look. You're free, you're back, everything you
4 did must have been right, don't worry about it. We got a lot of negative press, but don't
5 even think about it." When you're a prisoner that's a whole different ballgame.
6 However, I don't know whether to blame Gene or his family, he wound up suing General
7 SECORD; he wound up suing the Southern Air Transport; anybody that had any money I
8 think and he should have won a lottery ticket for all of that. I wound up being a witness
9 for SECORD and for Southern Air against him, which I felt bad about because I had
10 flown with Gene down there and of course in Laos with Air America. I always thought he
11 was an excellent kicker, I always kind of liked him. I was disappointed that we found
12 ourselves on opposite sides of a courtroom. But it was an interesting experience and I
13 think we served some useful purpose. We...well it's a democratic society and it would
14 have been if it hadn't been for the Contras so I guess all in all that I feel poor ol' Bill
15 Cooper and Buzz Sawyer who were killed never got any recognition. They were just a
16 couple of out of some Air Force general made an absolutely asinine statement to the press
17 that this was a...how did he put it...oh you know like a childlike group of people that
18 didn't know what they were doing; they had information on them linking them with
19 North and what have you. Well we never tried to hide anything because we knew we
20 were mercenaries and we didn't want to implement or implicate the CIA. We felt a sort
21 of loyalty to the agency and I said absolutely we had nothing to do with it and so did all
22 the other pilots, Gene was the only one who said it was a CIA operation. If it had of been
23 it would have been a hell of lot better then it was. But the Air Force guy... You know
24 when you're flying with the latest radars and INSs and night vision goggles and
25 everything else and you accomplish a dangerous mission that's one thing, but try it on a
26 Pientenpol 8 with half of the avionics gone and no navigational aids. It's a different
27 ballgame and it takes a far superior aviator to pull it off and that idiot that'd probably
28 never done a covert operation in his life had no idea what he was talking about. In fact,
29 the gal from 60-Minutes, Leslie Stall...I was listening to the hearings when they were
30 interviewing Bob Dutton and Leslie Stall was doing the interview. They showed him of
31 course the actual hearings and then during the break she'd make comments. And we call

1 ourselves the over the hill gang because the youngest person down there was in their
2 fifties outside of Dave Johnson. Dutton was talking about the operational problems. He
3 came down and actually flew a drop with me, I've got to give him credit for that. We
4 were explaining to him the problems we were having and that it was the rainy season
5 over the isthmus and at night it was solid thunderstorms and early in the morning it was
6 all fogged in. So trying to make the drops undercover darkness there were a lot of
7 negatives to it. You like the idea that there's some cover, but the negatives out weighed
8 the pluses. For instance, the airplanes were not the best maintained. I'd brought back
9 aircraft with feathered props; I'd drug loads all the way from southern Nicaragua back to
10 Alpongo at a hundred and five or ten knots is just above a stall because I didn't want to
11 dump the load out in the middle of the jungle and brought the load back because they
12 were valuable with an engine feathered or a propeller feathered. So Dutton actually went
13 along to see our problems and of course he saw them in a hurry and he was explaining
14 during the hearing the problems that we had and at the break Leslie Stall scoffed, "Huh,
15 thunderstorms in the day and fog in the morning. Sounds like the gang that couldn't fly
16 straight to me!" it was such a slap in the face to all of us and particularly to the man
17 that's dead down there who's an old carrier pilot and had flown years for Air America;
18 probably had more covert operation experience and that type of operation then probably
19 any man alive. And here's this airhead blonde you know make these flippant remarks
20 that really, really irritated me. Every time I see her the hair stands up on my back and my
21 neck. But that was the end of the Contras operation.

22 SM: Well can I ask you some clarifying questions?

23 JM: Sure.

24 SM: Take a step back to just before your time working on the Contras.

25 JM: Okay.

26 SM: The North Carolina base where Jim Ryan worked, can you tell me where
27 that was?

28 JM: There's still an operation, I really don't think I should.

29 SM: Okay, good enough. I didn't know if you didn't mention it because of that
30 or...

31 JM: Yeah that's the reason I didn't mention it.

1 SM: Okay, that's what I thought. Okay. Let's see. When did you start, what
2 year if you can remember the month that would be good too, when did you first ferry that
3 aircraft, the first 123 to El Salvador?

4 JM: It was in the early, early I'm going to say probably April maybe even March
5 of '86 and of course that shoot down was in...oh man, I really feel bad that I can't
6 remember when Bill was killed, but it seemed to me it was September/October.

7 SM: Of '86?

8 JM: Of '86 yeah.

9 SM: When did you... That was your first mission, was flying that 123?

10 JM: Yeah I ferried the airplane down and the next day the next mission was we
11 flew up drums of fuel down to the base in Costa Rica to set it up for operation.

12 SM: Okay. So you basically helped set up what became the support network for
13 the Contras, the air support network?

14 JM: Yeah. Of course we never really got to use that airfield very much, that's a
15 whole new story. I could go on for hours about all those details, which would bore you to
16 tears, but we... yeah we immediately started working. The next thing I did was actually
17 starting to train the pilots. I checked out Bill Cooper in the 123, not Bill Cooper. Bill
18 Cooper had already flown it, although we did fly together some. I checked Buzz Sawyer
19 out in the 123 and I checked Frank Hines out in the 123, neither one of them had ever
20 flown it before. I checked out the co-pilots in the airplane and I checked out quite a bit of
21 flying. We even did some...we had some logistics problems that required almost
22 recalculating the manual. For one thing we didn't have 115 and 145 fuel we had a
23 hundred low lead. We had to re-do all the power settings and then we started clogging up
24 fuel lines with a material that we determined was the reticulated foam baffle that had
25 deteriorated while the airplanes were sitting out in the bone yard. They got so bad that
26 they would clog the lines completely! Of course then your jets and your reciprocating engines are shut
27 down and so as a temporary measure we took all of the baffle out of the airplane, which
28 was a...you can't believe what a difficult job that was in the field. We could only work
29 through small openings and we got all those baffles out and flushed the tanks out first
30 with water from the fire trucks of the Salvadorian Air Force and then with fuel and then
31 we'd put it all back together. Then we discovered that the engineers had a real reason

1 calling it a baffle, it was a baffle and the minute you got down to about a half a tank and
2 those long bathtub, 700 gallon tanks, if you raised the nose all the fuel ran to the back of
3 the tank and the nose pitched up instantly, if you lowered the nose it all ran forward and
4 the nose went down. It became a real nightmare handling the airplane so we decided that
5 we had to have the foam put back in. We ferried the airplanes up to Miami and they,
6 Southern Air, reinstalled fresh reticulated foam baffles in the tanks.

7 SM: That's quite an undertaking. How many aircraft total are we talking about
8 here?

9 JM: We're talking about two 123s and two C-7s.

10 SM: Okay. How long did it take them to get the foam put back in?

11 JM: Oh about a week or ten days.

12 SM: How much time did you spend on the ground in El Salvador, and anywhere
13 else in Central America?

14 JM: Oh the months that we were there, you mean when we weren't flying we
15 were on the ground, but...

16 SM: Right. So you were there, I mean it was kind of like your with service in
17 Laos.

18 JM: Oh yeah. We ate on the local economy, we ate at the safe houses that we
19 had of course, but then we would go downtown and eat at the local restaurants for a
20 change of pace. We just lived on the El Salvadorian economy and when we were in
21 Aguacate we had to take almost... We ate at the military mess hall where the troops
22 where training down there, where they were training counter troops and the food was
23 terrible. So we would take things like canned sardines and crackers and peanut butter and
24 bread and stuff like that and that's what we would eat when we were down there.

25 SM: Now how long did you stay total in El Salvador?

26 JM: Well I'm gonna say probably six or seven months in-country.

27 SM: Okay, so from March until the end of '86?

28 JM: Well I was down there after the shoot down. If you recall there was a lot of
29 press about the 123. I'd flew another 123 up to Southern Air to get an engine changed
30 and they had gotten the engine changed, but then of course the shoot down came and the
31 airplane was sitting on the ramp and of course it got into the press and the press is out

1 there taking the pictures and they were saying that Southern Air was an old CIA
2 proprietary. It was really embarrassing to President of Southern Air Bill Lincoln who
3 wanted that airplane the hell out of there, which I don't blame him. So we went up to get
4 the airplane, but no body knew where the heck it was going to go. At first we were told
5 to take it up to a small strip, a general aviation airport in Pennsylvania where the guy that
6 was kind of the logistic, who made the payrolls and what have you...I can't think of his
7 name...but he called his company Corporate Air Services. We were going to park it at an
8 airport of his up there and I said, "You know, if you're trying to be low key parking a
9 military type transport on a small general aviation airport, that's going to be, there's
10 going to be the press all over it almost instantly and the local police and everybody else.
11 That's going to stand out like a sore thumb." They agreed and said, "Well, let's take it
12 back to Aguacate and leave it there." So now we were under so much scrutiny from the
13 FAA, from the state department, from everybody was on our case. So we decided what
14 we'd do is we'd sneak out to the airport about two o'clock in the morning and take off for
15 Aguacate, but I had this Air Force pilot friend with me on that trip. I said, "Well what
16 ever we do we've got to do it 100% legally! We got to file a legal flight plan." Now
17 Aguacate didn't have any identifier to even file a flight plan to you, it was just a strip
18 built by the military down there along the dirt. It was seven thousand foot dirt strip. So
19 we had to pick the nearest airport to it that had a legal identifier that we could file an
20 international flight plan on and say we were going there and then when we got down
21 there we would call the local center and cancel out and go on direct to Aguacate. But I
22 wanted to make sure that everything was done legally and of course I put my legal name
23 on the flight plan and then of course that was all over the newspapers immediately
24 because it was public record. We went out to the airport early in the morning and I had a
25 light colored sport jacket as we were heading to the airplane, I thought 'geeze this thing
26 will get greasy and dirty and all we're going to do is leave it and come back
27 commercially.' I had my commercial airline tickets in my pocket and I had my passport,
28 but John and I both decided we didn't want to wear our sport jacket so we went back to
29 my car and left our sport jackets in the car. Well his passport and tickets were in his
30 flight kit, my passport and tickets were in my jacket! That was a major problem, I left
31 them in the back of my car in the parking lot of Southern Air. We get in this 123 and fly

1 it to Aguacate and when we get down there we were met by Dave Johnson in the mall to
2 ferry us over to Ilopango where we're going to get on a commercial flight and go back to
3 the states. When I realized I didn't have a passport or tickets was when Dave says, "Well
4 where are your bags and stuff." I had just a little overnight shaving kit thinking one
5 night, I said, "This is all I'm carrying. We're going right back." He says, "Well, okay.
6 You've got your tickets and everything." Then it hit me like a ton of bricks! My god I
7 don't have any airline tickets and worse then that I don't have a passport and here I am in
8 the country. I came in on a general deck, which is legal, but now I'm going from this
9 country to El Salvador...I'll be in El Salvador illegally. We pondered that and I thought
10 'well, no options now. What I'll do is go to the embassy when I get there and tell them
11 my stupid story and see if they can get me a letter to get me out.' So we got in the mall
12 with David and flew to Ilopango and when we landed at Ilopango I thought the world'd
13 came to an end. They had that horrible earthquake down there that killed hundreds and
14 hundreds of people. You might recall it in '86; the city of El Salvador was almost
15 destroyed. Clouds of dust building up in the air, the roads were disrupted; I mean it was a
16 mess, both of our safe houses just crumbled into rubble. The house, the building, a
17 bodega we called it, a shed that we stored all the ammunition and arms and stuff in was
18 partially collapsed, the ammunition and everything was scattered all over, but it was a
19 place to get you in out of the weather. So we all spent the night in that bodega and now,
20 we said, "Well now I've got a reason for not having a passport." The house is destroyed,
21 the U.S. Embassy is destroyed, we just bought some airline tickets I had the cash and
22 went to the airport and played dumb. I told them you know, "My passport is gone."
23 "Well go to the embassy." "The embassy's destroyed!" I made a nuisance of myself and
24 the immigration people said, "Go on through!" And they let me through. So I managed
25 to get out of there without a passport.

26 SM: Did you guys lose anybody in the earthquake?

27 JM: No. We didn't lose anybody in the earthquake. They all had the hells scared
28 out of them. Jerry [?] told a horror story, said they thought that house was falling down
29 around them as he ran out in the yard. But no, we all got out of it with no injuries. It was
30 an exciting period of time, I wouldn't want to relive it though. (laughing)

1 SM: Well, while you were doing all of this, when you moved to Florida I assume
2 that you moved with Sandy and the family.

3 JM: Well you know, I don't know if Sandy told you this, but Sandy and I were
4 divorced for several years.

5 SM: Oh no, I didn't know that.

6 JM: Oh yeah, Sandy and I were divorced during this whole period of time, in fact
7 long before I sold McAllen Aviation. But like I told you that she was bringing money
8 down to us, we had started dating again. But one of the reasons you know I was always
9 gone in aviation totally and here I am doing the same thing, but Sandy was a gutsy little
10 broad, she'd come down there and bring them money and would stay in a nice hotel in El
11 Salvador and it was kind of like the old times I think that brought us together. And well
12 in fact we decided we were going to get remarried during that Contra deal. We remarried
13 on the same day that we were married the first time. We were married in September 4,
14 1954 the first time and we were married in September 4, 1987 the second time.

15 SM: Now was that done to make it easier for you?

16 JM: Well we thought that we'd keep track of our dates that way. I could never
17 forget my anniversary.

18 SM: (laughing) That's what I mean.

19 JM: Yeah that's funny.

20 SM: I didn't realize that, but it's nice that you guys...

21 JM: Yeah it all worked out fine and we're back together and we just had a
22 four/five year vacation from each other.

23 SM: Yeah. Now when did you, let's see, concerning your time again down in El
24 Salvador Central America did you work...as far as when you spent time of the ground
25 was it pretty much exclusively El Salvador?

26 JM: Yeah. We did spend a week at a time at the ranch, I mean not the
27 ranch...Aguacate.

28 SM: But there was a ranch down there too right?

29 JM: Well we call that the ranch. Yeah the ranch...no I think that, yeah I think we
30 called Aguacate the ranch and I think we called the strip in Costa Rica the plantation.

1 Although I'd have to go through my notes, I might have them reversed. We had code
2 names for all the bases, which I don't know why.

3 SM: Well who else did you train besides U.S. pilots? Did you train any other
4 foreign national pilots?

5 JM: No. Now there was a book written by a guy named Terry Reed who claims
6 that he trained Contra pilots and that he knew me and he knew Bill Cooper and that he'd
7 met with us and we'd partied and all that...There's not a word that he said that's true.
8 Time Magazine checked him out and said that he's got a hell of a story to tell, but the
9 only bad thing about is that not a word of it is true. He's a pathological liar. This book
10 has gotten wide dissemination. I've had friends call me from all over and say they'd read
11 about me in that book and of course that we were involved in drug smuggling is what he
12 claims. But I never met the man. What he did...there was what they called a chronology
13 of events on the Contra deal. We were in every newspaper, magazine, ah god every time
14 I turned around I saw my name in a publication some place. To put all this together
15 somebody wrote a paperback book called A Chronology of the Contra Affair and it listed
16 every time anything about the Contras appeared in a newspaper or a magazine or a book.
17 It was listed in there. So a person could take that chronology, read through it and get
18 enough out of it about all the major players like Bill Cooper and myself, Ramón Medina,
19 Felix Rodriguez, all the central players...and he wove this...I think the guy was kind of a
20 Walter Mitty spy wanna-be. He convinced his wife he was training Contra pilots and
21 flying missions for the CIA...I'm going to have to say this is my opinion, but I believe
22 the man was a drug smuggler. The reason I say that is that his allegedly very good friend,
23 was the drug smuggler who had been convicted and was killed in New Orleans at a half-
24 way house and who owned the first 123 that SECORD managed to get for our operation.
25 Now that man flew one mission for the agency. The agency on a plea bargain with him,
26 the DA and the agency got him to fly a trip to Nicaragua with hidden cameras in the
27 airplane filming high-level Sandinista people loading drugs in that airplane to prove that
28 the Sandinistas were in the drug smuggling business not the Contras. That was a
29 successful mission and for that I don't know whether they were going, they probably
30 going to give a few years off his sentence, but the guy was going away for a long time
31 there was no question about that. This Terry Reed claimed that this guy was his best

1 friend and he worked, he was really a CIA operative and one trip on a plea bargain was
2 his CIA operative days. This Terry Reed guy is so bad I can hardly believe it. We were
3 going to sue him and then we decided that's a waste of time. Then it was like a Castillo
4 that was writing absolute garbage about us that we were going to sue him and we decided
5 we're not in the educational business, it's too expensive so we dropped all that. This guy
6 claimed he meet me in Guadalajara and I was in a... Sandy said when she read the book
7 she knew instantly it wasn't true because I wouldn't be caught dead in an orange flying
8 suit. You know he really descriptive, you'd think this guy really knew what he was
9 talking about. What I looked like and I was wearing this orange flying suit. Of course he
10 could see what I looked like my god I had pictures all over Time and Newsweek and U.S.
11 News and World Report, all kinds of magazines so that was no problem. Felix Rodriguez
12 he said was his handler with the agency. Felix never met the man in his life. Felix is a
13 good friend of mine and never met the guy. Of course he knew Oliver North and he
14 knew...He smoked marijuana with Bill Clinton and oh the guy is...It's a big thick book
15 and the damn thing is selling. It makes me so made. Do you recall, let me think of the
16 guys name, oh it's the same as the man that wrote the Bright Shining Light. Sheehan?

17 SM: Oh Sheehan, yeah.

18 JM: Well there's another Sheehan who's an attorney in California, not the Neal
19 Sheehan that was the reporter. This Sheehan is the president or was the president of the
20 Christic Foundation. Have you ever heard of them?

21 SM: No.

22 JM: The Christic Foundation were out soliciting money from churches to do
23 good Christian work, which was extremely left wing and anybody on the right he would
24 try to tie them up in lawsuits so that they wouldn't be able to do what he thought was the
25 country's mischief. Like General Singlaw, and General SECORD, and Felix Rodriguez
26 and lots and lots of other people. He would sue them and he would go from district to
27 district until he found a sympathetic judge that would take these absolutely ridiculous far
28 out conspiracy things to heart and of course he'd lose the case then he'd just reopen it
29 somewhere else. A woman who, for her PhD wrote a book called Legal Terrorism; it was
30 about the Christic Foundation. They finally took it to the wrong court and the judge in
31 that court got him for frivolous lawsuit and I think he got a judgment for the plaintiff

1 against him for two million dollars. So they disbanded the Christic Foundation and the
2 next garbage gets printed under Christic something or other in Canada and that's where
3 that damn book Compromise came out of. But talk about legal terrorism and legal liars
4 that's the darndest group.

5 SM: Have they come after you?

6 JM: Oh...no...they did in the book. In the book they said I called the, well he
7 was saying that I was telling him what a great job he was doing training the "beaners"
8 you know. I've lived in central and south America and on the Texas border and I don't
9 refer to Mexicans or Central Americans or anybody as a "beaner"...and that I was totally
10 drunk and inebriated McRaney said this and inebriated McRaney said that and my god
11 anybody that knows me that while I will drink socially no one has ever seen me drunk,
12 not since I was maybe thirty years old anyway.

13 SM: The Castille guy?

14 JM: Oh Castille? Castille was a DEA guy in Central America.

15 SM: Yeah, but you mentioned that he came with...

16 JM: He obviously got a lead on some of the people that flew a Colonel
17 Bermudas, which was a Contra operation out of Aguacate and they had oh I don't know
18 eight or ten pilots they were all ex-Sumas Air National guard pilots. These guys that they
19 wouldn't have smuggled drugs for their own gain not to sponsor the Contra war,
20 would've surprised me. Evidently he got a lead on some of them and it wouldn't be too
21 hard find out who all they were they file flight plans and what have you and he did some
22 checking and he said that every Contra pilot was a Class A cocaine smuggler. Now
23 whether I can't say that all of those Sandanista pilots were involved in drugs, but that
24 maybe some of them were and possibly all of them I wouldn't be a bit surprised. But
25 now he thinks that this is the entire Contra operation and that it's CIA run. Now those
26 guys would occasionally come up to Ilopango for R and R and they would park their
27 airplanes at the CIA ramp or the CIA hanger and you know being that the airplanes had
28 been given to them by the government it wouldn't surprise me that even though the
29 agency wasn't supposed to have anything to do with the operation at that time, it
30 wouldn't surprise me that they would keep the airplanes for safe keeping. But anyway,
31 with this information he determined that all Contra pilots were drug smugglers. Well you

1 know there were so many different groups flying for the Contra...General Singla put
2 together special groups, there was a guy in Arkansas that put together special groups and
3 chartered from the states. The state department sponsored non-lethal aid and hired a
4 number of independent Central South American and American companies to fly non-
5 lethal aid from the states to Aguacate. Not into Nicaragua to actually airdrop like we did,
6 but to fill up the warehouses in Aguacate and then Colonel Bermudas's group would or
7 us would drop them into Nicaragua. Well all of these groups became CIA Contra groups
8 and they definitely proved in congressional investigations that some of these groups had
9 been involved in the drug trade. One of them landed a DC-4 at Homestead Air Force
10 base and got caught. But they were flying a non-lethal aid into Aguacate and then they
11 were going of and doing their own thing and getting what ever they did afterwards.

12 SM: Basically they were using flying the non-lethal aid in its air cover for their
13 drug activities.

14 JM: This guy, Terry Reed, claimed that they had a secret airstrip just outside of
15 Mina Arkansas, not the Mina main airport, but just outside it that they trained the Contra
16 pilots and they named all the people from our operation that were up there helping and
17 there was no training going on... Why in the hell would we train pilots in Mina, Arkansas
18 when we could train them at Ilopango or Aguacate for crying out loud? It was just
19 absolute nonsense. Then he said that the reason that the agency got him in the first
20 place... he'd obviously worked in machine manufacturing in some little way and he
21 became a manufacturing expert and that they hired him in Mina Arkansas to take parts
22 from the Mina army guard for M-16s and he would manufacture the serial number pieces
23 like the receivers, use the guard parts and combine them, and make weapons for the
24 Contras and then that we would fly drugs in the 123s, pick up the weapons and take those
25 back to Central America. I mean it was so far out. Number one, I dropped a lot of
26 weapons to the Contras, I never dropped anything but AK-47s. They were bought on the
27 international market and they used them because that's what the Sandinistas used and if
28 you're fight a guerilla war it's real nice to be able to use the enemies ammunition and the
29 enemies weapon. So all the guns that were dropped were AKs, there was never a M-16
30 down there. They guy is just full of it right up to his ears. This guy Castillo who might
31 have seen some of these guys, he lumped all the Contras together. He lumped the North

1 Secord group together, of course he never met any of us, didn't know what the hell we
2 were doing, he saw our airplanes parked on the ramp down there, but he... what it is is
3 that old thing about perception. If you can see a guy that is running around the jungles
4 down there trying to catch the bad guys, he gets the lead in on a few bad guys and learns
5 a little bit about that they're in a Contra operation well that's run by the CIA, they'll let
6 the CIA that's sponsoring it and the next thing you know he's blown it into a big
7 conspiracy and he literally can't see the forest for the tree. The man was not a very good
8 investigator and here he is still... every time, about once a week there's a letter to the
9 editor in the McAllen paper that this idiot has written about some political thing.

10 SM: Did you ever met Oliver North?

11 JM: Only met Oliver North one time and that was at a book signing long
12 afterwards. I introduced myself and he knew me immediately and we talked a little bit
13 and asked about Dick Secord and... I wish him well, you know, I didn't know Ollie from
14 Adam. I have to say one thing for the guy he sure got things done though. He captured
15 the terrorist in that incident that almost ran into a major incident in Italy where they land
16 in the Italian kept the Americans from capturing the terrorist, but he did things anyway
17 whether... I know they call him a lose cannon, but god damn I'm so tired of these arm
18 chair generals that won't do a god dang thing that when you find a lieutenant colonel that
19 will do something it's heartening.

20 SM: How about Richard Secord? How well did you know him?

21 JM: Oh I've known Dick for along time. I consider him a friend. He's an
22 honorable man, he did what he thought was right, he saw there was some money to be
23 made, but my god Dick Gad and all kinds of people that had been helping the U.S.
24 Military in the peripheral made lots of money I don't see any reason why he shouldn't
25 have made some money doing something that was really good for the country. Of course
26 he never did it just cost him money.

27 SM: Well you mention that obviously the CIA maintained a hanger there, more
28 then likely at the time they needed to keep their hand in things to a degree.

29 JM: Their job was to keep track of what was going on. They knew everything
30 that we were doing, but they weren't helping us or aiding us in any way. In fact the guys,

1 I would see guys that I knew for years to come through there they'd look the other way
2 when they say us because they weren't...you know they'd been threatened with their job.

3 SM: These were agency people?

4 JM: Yeah, you know there's a story... probably the only guy that really got hurt
5 in that deal was the station chief in Costa Rica. We had a trip early on that we shouldn't
6 have made, but we did where we tried to get a drop in the real early days before they got
7 the 123 running in a Caribou. Buzz Sawyer flew captain and old Ernie Cooney flew co-
8 pilot. They were going to fuel out of the ranch out of Costa Rica, but they got down there
9 and they had real high oil consumption in one engine and right after making the drop they
10 had to feather the propeller. In the middle of the night, in nasty weather, they though
11 well the only option they had at that time was to go into...oh hell the capital of Costa
12 Rica...anyway they went into the international airport down there. Now they had this in
13 emergency you can contact this guy at the embassy and the guy was the CIA station
14 chief...let me think of what his name was...if you follow, all you have to do is look in
15 the Contra things he was the only one that got his retirement and everything else. The
16 poor guy was doing his job just as a citizen and as a state department and nothing else.
17 They came in there with an airplane with an emergency and he arranged to get them fuel
18 and turn them around and get them out of there. Now you'd do that for any American.
19 Well unfortunately these guys were Contras and it cost him his job. I felt bad, I felt sorry
20 for him. Poindexter, everybody else got off, but not him.

21 SM: Why did they choose him to be the scapegoat?

22 JM: Well you know here they had these big senate hearings; they've got to have a
23 coonskin on the wall as old LBJ used to say. They needed...somebody had to pay for
24 this. It came down to probably lowest guy on the totem pole that had the least to do with
25 the whole thing.

26 SM: All the responsibility, but no authority.

27 JM: Yep, yep.

28 SM: What...in terms of the CIA and how they were still participating or active
29 in...

30 JM: Well in the early days they used to actually make the drops before the
31 Bolling Amendment.

1 SM: Before the Bolling Amendment, but during, even during that time period
2 where...

3 JM: They would monitor what the heck what was going on, I mean it's their job
4 to do that, but they didn't take any active participation.

5 SM: Now how much do you think, how much of a role do you think they played
6 in direction and then also providing you guys with information? How would you know
7 where to make drops?

8 JM: Well we did that all internally. We did it...Colonel Bermudas was the head
9 of all the friendly forces in Nicaragua and he would radio...It's funny you should ask that
10 question because when I was called in for hearings the actual operational people was
11 closed door hearing and we took our depositions from an army of government lawyers in
12 private so that we wouldn't compromise any friendly foreign governments that might
13 have helped us, who did help us along the way. So they were in private, but one of them
14 was...a particular night drop they were interested in and they thought this guy in Costa
15 Rica gave the coordinates; I got my coordinates from Felix Rodriguez. Now Felix was
16 retired from the CIA and he wasn't with them, he was working for the Salvadorian Air
17 Force tracking down terrorist. That was his big deal, he developed a helicopter anti-
18 terrorist operation in Vietnam that he used in El Salvador and very successfully. He
19 managed to capture one of the real head terrorists that was smuggling arms and
20 ammunition into the communist troops in El Salvador. A real gutsy guy and fiercely anti-
21 communist, he lost his country to Castro and he hates communist with a passion. But he
22 lived in a little BOQ in the Air Force base, they gave him the rank of Lieutenant Colonel
23 in Salvadorian Air Force and he had permission from the U.S. government to do this. In
24 fact you know he had had a couple of conversations with the vice-president Bush at that
25 time and of course the hearings tried to make that out that what he was talking to Bush
26 about was the Contras, but it wasn't, it was about his anti-communist operation down
27 there. Everything he did for us he did...of course he'd of helped anybody that was
28 fighting the communist, he'd of helped the Attila the Hun, but he knew what we were
29 doing and he was there to help in any way he could. He sat up in his COQ every night
30 and monitored the HF radio incase we got in trouble down there we could call him and
31 tell him what was going on. He met the airplane, when I'd come in whether it was the

1 middle of the night, early in the morning, in the rain, he was always there at the runway
2 to welcome us back...good guy. But...it...what the heck were we talking about?

3 SM: Well you know, just talking about I guess the behind the scenes role that
4 CIA played and of course where you got your information.

5 JM: Oh, no, no, no. We never got out information, if we'd had gotten
6 information from the CIA I don't think we'd every lost that airplane. We never knew
7 anything, they didn't give us any intelligence briefings at all. The only thing we would
8 get was from what Colonel Bermudas would learn and he had some secret sources, he
9 managed to get a little bit, he could tell us where some of the radar sights were, what
10 altitude we could go to without getting picked up, but there was no real good intelligence.
11 Bermudas told me one time to really be careful crossing the river and never cross at the
12 same time because I made a trip to his little fortress, which was actually south of
13 Aguacate, in fact Felix RodriguEASY flew me in there in a helicopter. Bermudas was
14 worried about us on the southern front because they really were geared for bear down
15 there and he said be careful coming across the river because my intelligence tells me
16 they're floating anti-aircraft guns on barges and positioning them on the Nicaraguan side
17 all along the river and as you come across you can get shot down so make sure that you
18 never cross at the same place and then when you cross come back in a different place. Of
19 course that was good intelligence and we certainly did that, but that's about the only kind
20 of intelligence we ever got.

21 SM: Okay. And how about interaction with CIA personnel? Anything at all?

22 JM: Nothing, absolutely nothing. Oldest and closest friends ignore us.

23 SM: Okay. How about after the fact?

24 JM: Oh afterwards, yeah it's an open book after the fact. We were all buddies
25 again.

26 SM: Right, okay. How much shooting occurred during these operations? When
27 you were flying these missions how often would you get shot at?

28 JM: Well we would try our darndest of course to use the cover of clouds as much
29 as possible. We tried...we'd pick our way from one thunderstorm to another. It's the
30 only time in my life I've deliberately looked for thunderstorms so that we wouldn't be
31 venerable to ground fire because we were particularly worried about the SAMs, the

1 surface to air I guess SA-87. We saw a tracer ground fire on a few occasions, but the big
2 thing that we were really concerned about were the SAMs and the Hinds Helicopters.
3 Those were the two things that gave us the most heartburn while we were down there.
4 Not that I ever was shot at by an SA-87 or Hinds helicopter, but the potential for it was
5 always very great.

6 SM: Now did you ever see any Hind Ds?

7 JM: No! You know one night we made an airdrop on the southern front near the
8 coast and we were so close to the airport that we could see them sitting on the pads of the
9 ramps so that's the only time I saw them, they were on the ground.

10 SM: Okay. How about migs, have you ever seen a MiGs on the ground?

11 JM: No, no.

12 SM: Other foreign nationals participating in this, of course in the Vietnam War
13 you [?] nationalist Chinese, Soviets...

14 JM: They hired a couple of ex-CIA operatives, now when I say they I'm talking
15 about SECORD and Dutton, to help us and these guys were not employees of the CIA
16 they were just operatives of the agency had hired on a Contract basis to do various things.
17 One of them was a very, very interesting guy, his name is Raphael Quintero and if you
18 remember in the book Man Hunt and "The Death Merchant" about Edwin Wilson the
19 rogue CIA agent that's now in prison. Raphael played a role in that he thought that
20 Edwin Wilson was still with the agency when Wilson Contracted him to kill Carlos "the
21 Jackal" the international terrorist. Of course that was the kind of work that Raphael did
22 so 'heck, Carlos the Jackal I'll sleep well at night after doing that job!' He took the job.
23 Thank goodness that while this guy was supposed to be I believe in Beirut while Raphael
24 was looking for him. Now this is in the book either I think it was Man Hunt, that tells
25 well I believe both books tell the same story, the other book The Death Merchant I think
26 told the same story. That Raphael ran into another CIA guy and while they're having a
27 drink a bar talking about old times Raphael said he was there to kill Carlos the Jackal.
28 This guy said, "Carlos the Jackal! You know who he is? Do you have his picture?" He
29 says, "Yes, I have a picture. I was given a picture of him." "Let me see!" So old
30 Raphael gives him the picture and the guy says, "My god I work for this guy, he's my
31 boss! He's a CIA guy!" Raphael turned pale and says, "What? Are you sure?" and he

1 said, "Who gave you the picture and the job?" He said, "Edwin Wilson." Well then the
2 guy told him Edwin Wilson didn't work for the agency, in fact they were after him. He
3 was supplying arms to terrorist groups and his boss was hot on Edwin's heels and also on
4 some of the other guys that were supplying weapons Moammar Khadaffi and that he's
5 been set up. Well now Raphael was a very dangerous man to setup, he went looking for
6 Edwin Wilson and like the people in the book said that Edwin was very lucky that he was
7 caught by the government before he was caught by Raphael. But anyway, they hired
8 Raphael to work with us coordinating with Bermudas and with troops in the field he
9 would go in and out and try to get where the troops were and get coordinates and stuff
10 like that. So he was one of the guys that we went to on a regular basis for information
11 that was Raphael. The other one was another quite a colorful character, we knew him
12 as...let me think what they called him...we knew him as Ramon Medina. What was his
13 real name, Sandy? Oh yeah, we knew him as Ramon Medina, but it turned out his real
14 name was Louise Placada and Luis Placada was another Bay of Pigs CIA operative that
15 got out and waged war against Castro from then on and spent a number of years in a
16 Venezuelan prison. Never convicted of it, but accused of blowing up the Cuban airliner
17 that killed I think it was a soccer team that was on the darn thing. But he was down there
18 and he worked...oh he did a number of things, translating, working on the safe houses,
19 riding herd on the cooks and the maids and things like that for us. Then of course we had
20 local people doing the cooking, doing the cleaning, driving the automobiles and what
21 have you that were Salvadorian. But Ramon and Raphael were both Cuban, those were
22 the only third country national that we had worked with. Oh wait a minute now, we did
23 use a radio operator for translation to help find out way to the drop zones that were
24 provided by Colonel Bermudas that were either El Salvadorian or Nicaraguan. They
25 were considered Contra soldiers.

26 SM: Okay. Now who would do the vetting of these individuals, the personnel that
27 worked with you? In terms of you know security reasons and did anybody do any betting
28 of the people that worked, the Americans that worked with you? Was it or just in term...

29 JM: Well the Americans that worked with us we all knew through the grapevine
30 through the Air America Association. We'd all known each other for years like Bill
31 Cooper... Now one of the ones that was really close to us that wasn't ex-Air America

1 was Buzz Sawyer, but Buzz flew us...he left Southern Air Transport. He was flying 1-
2 30s for Southern Air to come down and fly for us on a permanent basis. They didn't give
3 him leave of absence; he quit to come down there. He had been an ex-Air Force pilot.
4 He flew Spectre gunships in Vietnam and a hell of a nice guy. He was the one that
5 was...he was the co-captain with Cooper when they were shot down. Everybody else
6 with the exception of a few Air Force people and Ernie Cooney were Air America.

7 SM: Okay and so they didn't need background investigations...?

8 JM: Well to an extent that somebody vouched for them, somebody knew them
9 that we trusted. In the case of the two Air Force people who later also flew with me in
10 South America on the war on drugs thing, they were high class, they were first class
11 people both of them. They're both retired colonels and patriots.

12 SM: Okay. Well, how did you get paid and by who?

13 JM: We got paid by...that was Bill Cooper's job to get the money. The guy that
14 would give us a base paycheck was corporate air services would send it to Bill Cooper
15 and Bill Cooper would give them out, but the actual pay for making the drops was made
16 in cash by Bill Cooper.

17 SM: And the money came from?

18 JM: Well it came from SECORD's office. He set up a bank account and he setup
19 one bank account right in El Salvador, but we could only get Salvadorian money we
20 couldn't get U.S. green on that one, but we did use that for rental cars and things of that
21 nature. But the cash would all be brought down like Sandy and her money moll days.
22 All of us would bring ten thousand apiece drawn on a bank account at the general setup
23 in Miami.

24 SM: Okay. Now in terms of your pay, you described the transition of going from
25 North Carolina back to Florida and then of course getting called to fly that C-123 from
26 there to El Salvador, it's a very short time period. Was a Contractual agreement
27 established? I mean did you...how did...?

28 JM: Well it was very, very lose. Almost all of us were... At that time I had just
29 sold my business and I considered myself independently wealthy until I found out how
30 fast money can go. (laughing) Money was the last thing that was on my mind. When we
31 got down there we did sign an agreement with I think it was called Corporate Air

1 Services. A very simple you know, rather rudimentary Contract. Bob Dutton brought
2 down some security things one time that he wanted us to sign, but they really didn't have
3 any teeth in them, it wasn't a government entity you know and we wouldn't dispose it,
4 but that we took with a grain of salt.

5 SM: What were you told about secrecy and confidentiality?

6 JM: Well you know naturally we were going to go out and tell the world what we
7 were doing down there, but the world knew and we really didn't, we weren't very tight
8 about it. You know if it had really been conscious of careful about it we would never
9 have carried any identification with us or anything like that, but we did. We carried our
10 normal billfolds and our... In fact we had talked about what you would say... I was quite
11 upset that they had captured Hasenfaf. He was close to the border, I mean my god in one
12 day he's walk and he'd had been in Costa Rica and we could've flown down and picked
13 him up, but he hung around the crash site. He made himself a hammock and hung around
14 there until they captured him and it's like he was in shock or something. I was really
15 disappointed in him in that respect. He was an ex-Marine pathfinder, if anybody ought to
16 have been able to escape and evade he shouldn't have been able to and if had headed 180
17 straight south for oh I'm going to say 25-30 miles, my god he could have done that in a
18 day. He'd had been at the river, cross the river you're in a neutral country and then go to
19 any hotel, restaurant, or what have you and make a phone call to El Salvador and we'd be
20 down there within a few hours to pick him up. He didn't do that. In his defense, he was
21 very, very close to Bill Cooper. Bill was like a father to him and had been seen the
22 Laotian days and seeing his friend go down in flames like that I'm sure that got to him.

23 SM: While we're on the subject, why don't you go ahead if you will describe the
24 circumstances of the crash. What was that mission in particular for? Was the crash site
25 ever investigated? Did they ever determine why the aircraft...?

26 JM: Well we know why the airplane crashed. It was hit by a surface air missile.

27 SM: Okay, that will do it.

28 JM: Yeah. It was hit in the right engine and it obviously probably came right up
29 the stack of the recip and blew the engine apart and the propeller ran away. When
30 Hasenfaf explained it to me he said, "It sounded like a World War II movie," you know
31 that loud whine you get. Well that's a runaway prop and the airplane of course loaded

1 heavy and he was fairly low altitude. I believe he was only, he was going into the drop
2 zone, he was only two or three thousand feet and didn't have the jets on the line yet. I
3 had a firm...I taught all my pilots never to descend below to five thousand feet without
4 starting the jet because if you do need it, and that's where you're going to need it, it takes
5 too long to get them on the line and you might not have time. That was a firm rule that
6 we had in Laos too, we always started the jets descending through five thousand feet. We
7 were critically short on fuel on a lot of trips because we had to do a little searching for
8 DZs and what have you and of course with the jets burning you're burning a lot of gas
9 down there low. But Bill was so concerned about fuel that he'd hold off to the last
10 minute. He'd be almost in the drop pattern before he'd start the jet. Of course if you get
11 then you're not going to have time to get them on the line. Now with a runaway prop and
12 a heavy load the airplane was going down at a fairly steep angle and according to
13 Hasenfaf they were both busier the hell. You could see the hands flying around the
14 cockpit, they were trying to get those jets started, but they obviously didn't get them
15 started before it hit the ground. Now if the jets would have been on the line he could've
16 climbed the airplane out of there, slowed it down as slow as he could fly and maintained
17 altitude and flown in on into Costa Rica and made an emergency landing, but without the
18 jets you're going down hill and you're going down hill fairly fast. So that was just one of
19 those things, the ground caught him before he got the jets on the line. I don't imagine
20 they were...You know it wasn't an uncontrolled crash, but it was a crash in a heavily
21 forested area so they certainly didn't survive.

22 SM: But one person did?

23 JM: Well Hasenfaf bailed out.

24 SM: Oh because he was in the back, he was the kicker?

25 JM: Oh yeah he was getting ready to make a parachute drops and actually had his
26 parachute on. He just went to the other door and jumped out right across from where the
27 fire was coming in.

28 SM: Oh goodness. Okay. Now do you know what they were carrying?

29 JM: They were carrying ordinance and weapons.

30 SM: So fire...

1 JM: Yeah it was the stuff we carried on almost everyone. Sometimes it was all
2 ammunition, sometimes it was a combination of ammunition and guns, sometimes we
3 even carried some uniforms and stuff, we carried boots and uniforms. Whatever the
4 troops in the field needed.

5 SM: What kind of combat experience did Hasenfaf have?

6 JM: What kind of what?

7 SM: Combat experience.

8 JM: Cockpit?

9 SM: Combat, combat.

10 JM: Oh combat! I don't know that he'd ever saw any real combat. He had done
11 a tour in the Marine Pathfinders, then he had been a kicker for Air America for years so
12 he darn sure had been shot at before, and he was very confident kicker/load master...he
13 was a good man, but he for some reason or another he didn't...the training wasn't not
14 intense enough to be rote with him otherwise he'd a got out of that area A.S.A.P.

15 SM: So the missile took out the engine, didn't take off the wing?

16 JM: No, no. It hit the engine and of course the airplane was on fire, there was a
17 lot of flames coming out, it's obviously fuel line had been severed and I'd imagine the
18 whole accessory section probably separated from the engine and the propeller was just
19 spinning free and he had a bad situation. Now if the jets would have been on the line he
20 could have climbed out of there, gone to cross feed, dropped the nacelle tank and the fire
21 would have gone out and flown to Costa Rica. But sometimes you're more concerned
22 about running out of fuel or getting shot down I guess you know, whatever you think
23 most likely to happen.

24 SM: Now when did you find out the specifics of the crash and that fact that...?

25 JM: About where they were hit and by what? When Gene Hasenfas called me
26 after he got out of prison just right around Christmas time.

27 SM: Christmas of 19?

28 JM: 86.

29 SM: Of 86, okay and by that time you were of course back in the states.

30 JM: I was back in my apartment in Melbourne, yeah.

31 SM: Okay. Was that the heaviest weapon that was fired at you guys?

1 JM: The SAM-7, yeah.

2 SM: SAM-7. Were there any other crashes after that?

3 JM: No that was the end of the operation we didn't do anymore flying, they shut
4 it down. I was...when the airplane was actually shot down I was in Florida with, I had
5 flown the airplane up there the press was photographing so intensely at Southern Air.
6 Sandy had brought money down to us and was going to go back with me on that airplane
7 when I was ferrying it back for an engine change and the night before we were supposed
8 to go back we got an emergency call. Raphael Quintera and Felix Rodriguez called me at
9 the hotel and said that they had this emergency drop and they had called Bill and Bill was
10 not feeling good and he said to call me at the hotel and that they needed an air drop as
11 soon as possible and a location on the southern front and could I make it. I said, "Well
12 yeah, I can make it." Sandy was there with me and I said, "Well, you can stay with the
13 guys at safe house during the next day and watch the," this was Saturday I believe and the
14 Cowboys were playing the next day on Sunday, "so you can watch the Cowboys game on
15 satellite T.V." So she went to the house with Bill Cooper and all the...she knew them all.
16 She knew Bill, and Jerry, and Jack Weerel from Southeast Asia days. So went to watch
17 the Cowboys game with them and then the other, the two colonels I took one of them.
18 The first time I had ever flown with him, the one that had been a prisoner of war. We
19 went out to the airport real early in the morning to make the drop as soon as possible and
20 we found we had a back jug. The airplane didn't check out, we kept messing with it...the
21 weather was bad that day, it was raining and we didn't get off the ground until...oh gosh,
22 three or four o'clock in the afternoon I guess when we finally got airborne. But it was
23 important that they get the stuff so we kept at it until we got the airplane flyable and we
24 took off and flew down there. We made the drop, we saw the signal fires they had and
25 we dropped on them and by the time we got back of course it was really getting late and
26 was raining and the weather was nasty, and we were minimum fuel. I remember that last
27 night was a bad night and of course Sandy and all the people were really worried at the
28 safe house because we should've been back hours ago, they didn't know about all this
29 maintenance problems on the airplane. When we finally got in old Felix, the good ol'
30 guy he is was waiting along the runway and he drove us home so everybody was glad to
31 see us. The next morning Sandy and I were going to fly the 123 back and I started having

1 heartburn about that. I said, “You know, this airplane is really sick. I’d prefer you go
2 back in the airline.” So she went back on Taka and I ferried the airplane back with, Buzz
3 Sawyer I think flew with me as co-captain on that...and Felix Rodriguez came with us
4 too as a matter of fact. He went back for a little R and R, he rode back in the jump seat.

5 SM: Do you still have contact with him?

6 JM: Oh yeah I see Felix all the time. Felix, he’s been a guest speaker at one of
7 our Air America Association deals.

8 SM: Okay. Well, a couple of particulars I wanted to clarify. You mentioned
9 earlier in our discussion that sometimes things did get tied up in customs.

10 JM: Oh yeah.

11 SM: What kinds of things typically would get tied up?

12 JM: Oh you know major engine parts. I remember we didn’t have an APU for
13 one of the airplanes, you know they had an engine, an auxiliary engine that we could start
14 and get a 300 amp generator on the line to help start the recipis. That damn thing went out
15 and of course it’s big and bulky and we couldn’t get it in the country in a suitcase so we
16 tried to get it through customs and the thing was shipped down there and I bet it’s still in
17 customs to this day. We could never get it cleared through, they wouldn’t let us have it.

18 SM: Did you ever encounter any kind of corruption, black marketeering,
19 anything like that?

20 JM: No I can’t say that I did. It could’ve existed except that the commader of the
21 airbase was a close personal friend of Felix Rodriguez, his name was General...oh heck, I
22 think he was about the number two or three ranking person in the whole country under
23 the president...Bastille, General Bastille. He seemed to be a pretty straightforward guy.
24 He, through Felix’s efforts he got a security pass to get in and off the base without getting
25 shut down all the time. There was one brief period when there was a little growl between
26 Felix Rodriguez and General SECORD that they shut down the operation, but Bastille
27 wouldn’t let us fly, wouldn’t let us on the base. I always managed to be neutral. I found
28 out throughout the years you don’t get too factionalized it you want to get along in a third
29 world country. I mean I stayed friends with the general, I stayed friends with Felix, and I
30 stayed friends with General Bastille, and Colonel Bermundas, and all of them that I had
31 to work with. Old Bill Cooper got sidewise with Felix and that was a big mistake. They

1 wouldn't even let us on the base and after a few days Felix came to me and said, "John, if
2 you will come and apologize to General Bastille he will reissue the passes and let you
3 guys back on the base. He knows that what you guys are doing is in their best interest
4 and in the best interest of the U.S. as well as El Salvador, but you have to apologize for
5 everybody." I said, "Okay, I'll be the fall guy." I went in and stood at attention and got a
6 tongue lashing and said we were very sorry for our indiscretions and they let us back on
7 the base.

8 SM: Okay. Now how much... of course in Latin America I guess you could
9 equate some of the Machismo culture with face-saving culture and Asian cultures. Did
10 you encounter similar...?

11 JM: Well I think that's what I went through when they threw us off the base and I
12 you know, a little tizzy that they ran at the moment and then they said, well you know we
13 really shouldn't have done that so how are we going to get it back on course then.
14 Chewing me out, chewing the chief pilot out and get him to apologize is the way you do
15 it even though I had nothing to do with it.

16 SM: Because that their side saves face.

17 JM: Yeah. Yeah.

18 SM: Okay. Let's see. Well other comparisons to your earlier experiences. What
19 were the hazards like compared to the...that is the hazards in El Salvador and flying for
20 the Contras versus the hazards you faced in Laos flying for the Royal Lao Forces?

21 JM: Well the thing that made it much more hazardous was that our equipment
22 wasn't maintained the way it was in Laos and of course it was a lot older then it was
23 when we were in Laos and we didn't have the FIC, that's the Flight Information Center,
24 to give us you know all the detailed reports to where the enemy were and we didn't have
25 the logistics to get the parts that we needed you know and the equipment we needed so
26 that was a problem. Everything combined you know and not having 115/145 fuel, which
27 didn't even manufacture anymore. There were just...there was so many things that we
28 had to cope with that we didn't have to cope with in Laos. In Laos we had everything as
29 much in our favor as possible, which was a very comforting feeling and all we had to do
30 was go out and fight the bad guys and the weather.

31 SM: And you got all the intelligence that was available.

1 JM: Yeah, yeah. You know sometimes they didn't have it exact, the gun might
2 have moved since the last time they saw it fire, but we knew the areas that were bad. Of
3 course if you were the first guy to get shot at it was kind of then your intelligence helped
4 the next guy, but for the most part our briefings were just well, they were good and in
5 Central America they were almost no existent.

6 SM: Now what did you know I guess prior to, during, and then after I guess you
7 learned a lot as you were going through the hearings and what not, but the Iran aspect of
8 this and that is the goods for hostages?

9 JM: I didn't know anything about it, I didn't know anything about it until after
10 the fact. We knew they were working on other things. Bob Dutton I know was busier
11 then hell and I kind of got on his case one time when he was down there you know and he
12 made the drop with me. I said, "For crying out loud you know, our logistics is lousy, and
13 this is lousy." He said, "We're doing the best we can. You know we're not the
14 government anymore it's not like I was in the Air Force and can get us through channels
15 and then we've got a lot of other things we're working at." It's the first time I realized
16 that we're doing something other then the Contra deal.

17 SM: Well and how about U.S. Military, did you ever encounter any U.S. Military
18 personnel down there?

19 JM: Well yes. There was a colonel down there that was very pro our operation
20 and knew what we were doing and even came and briefed us about terrorism in the city
21 that we had to look out for; where they bad areas where and what have you.
22 Unfortunately I think he was career was ruined because early in the operation before
23 SECORD could get all the Air America people down there the Gad people hadn't made a
24 drop and they were really desperate. So Gad set up a drop for a couple of Southern Air
25 pilots that kind of like went on vacation and were hired by him and a Southern Air
26 airplane that was leased by him, went down and made an airdrop in a 130. This colonel
27 who was in charge of the military assistance/El Salvador, went on board checked the load
28 and what have you and that was a big mistake on his part because I understand he was on
29 the fast track to general and after that I think he got a post in Nome, Alaska. That kind of
30 ruined his career.

31 SM: He was the only military overfly?

1 JM: He was U.S. Air Force or he might have been Army, he might have been
2 Army. I...let me think, I believe he was Army.

3 SM: And the only openly military U.S. military person you knew?

4 JM: Yes. Well we saw military people there. There was a few U.S. Military
5 people training Salvadorian pilots on helicopters out there. Yeah there were a lot of
6 military assistants around and we saw them, but we didn't come in contact with them.

7 SM: Okay. Any Green Berets?

8 JM: There could have been, but I didn't see them. In fact I know Green Berets
9 were down there, but I didn't come in contact with them.

10 SM: Yeah I didn't know if maybe you had contact. Well, speaking of that, did
11 you guys ever drop people?

12 JM: Well see, we were briefed pretty well. SECORD and Dutton hired lawyers
13 to checkout what we could do and what we couldn't do to become in violation of the
14 Neutrality Acts and none of us wanted to lose our citizenship. We knew on this one that
15 we were mercenaries and we had to be very careful. Now we could drop supplies in there
16 all day and that wasn't in violation of the Neutrality Act believe it or not, but drop one
17 person in there and you are in violation. Or set foot in there yourself to aid the people
18 that are in there and you're in violation of the Neutrality Act. So it would've been shot
19 down. My modus operandi I always wore a pair of dark street slacks and a long sleeve
20 white shirt and I said I'm just going to get out of the airplane, pick up a bible, and I'm
21 suddenly going to become a missionary and walk to the border.

22 SM: Okay. Were you ever threatened? You mentioned that this military officer,
23 the Army officer colonel advised you of some of the hazardous places. Did you guys
24 ever encounter any dangerous threats or...?

25 JM: No. I can't say that we did. I was downtown with Buzz Sawyer and a
26 couple of the other guys one night when we were having dinner and a jealous boyfriend
27 took exception to Buzz. Other than that we never had any trouble with the local people
28 down there.

29 SM: Or how about government officials?

30 JM: Well outside of being kept off the airport.

31 SM: Yeah that one time.

1 JM: And of course the customs people that weren't very friendly.

2 SM: Well is there anything else that you'd like to discuss with regard to your
3 time supporting the Contras?

4 JM: Well I'd wish I could tell you who the two Air Force people were because I
5 became friends during that and afterwards with them. I still stay in touch with both of
6 them and I know they both openly gave, in fact you can look up an old Newsweek where
7 they both gave interviews to Newsweek concerning the operation and see who they were,
8 but they're both good people and I enjoyed flying with them. I flew with both of them
9 down in South America, in fact I upgraded one of them to captain in the 123. Both of
10 them only flew as first officer in Central America.

11 SM: Did the both of them have Southeast Asian experience as well?

12 JM: Yeah. They both...one of them did two tours, one in 105s and one in F-111
13 and of course the other one was shot down on his first tour.

14 SM: Oh he was five years prisoner.

15 JM: Yeah.

16 SM: Okay. Can you give me the time frame for that Newsweek article?

17 JM: Let me ask Sandy. I'm going to tell you...let me see when that was. The
18 reason that it was given is that there was all sorts of stuff about us being involved in
19 drugs that really burned me up. In fact what set me off was on the front page of the New
20 York Times, and I think Castillo was the one that supplied that article...not the, yeah the
21 New York Times...Saying that Contra pilots involved in drug smuggling. Old Jake
22 Wayrel know a writer for, a reporter for Newsweek and he said he trusted the guy. I said,
23 The last thing we want is one of these horror war stories where it's "kick the tires and
24 light the fires." What we want is somebody that will just give me the facts man and let us
25 tell them you know that we weren't involved in drugs and how to shot down these
26 ridiculous things. Like Terry Reed saying we were flying drugs up to Mina Arkansas and
27 gun back from Mina. Well number one a 123 would have to make at least two tech stops
28 en route, wouldn't be able to do it non-stop and the ridiculous thing is that we didn't use
29 M-16s down there and dang we had better things to do then haul drugs to Mina Arkansas.
30 So he got a Newsweek guy and I agreed to talk with him. There was a gentleman and I
31 wish I'd had talked to him because he was by far...I'd held the press in disdain over the

1 years for very good reason. People like our Leslie Saul, they just grated me, but there
2 was one reporter that worked for I think it was Mike Ritter that he worked for, who was a
3 hell of an investigative reporter. This guy could have been a detective! He was the one
4 that went into the local telephone company down there and told them that he wanted to
5 pay the bill. You know he was sorry that they were late and he paid the telephone bills
6 for the two safe houses. Then he got all the numbers we were calling and called all those
7 numbers and got all kinds of information and of course he knew who was who. He tried
8 to get me to talk to him, he even...we went to work for Rosenbaum, which was the
9 operator of the DC-8s for Emery, Emery Airfreight. The reason I went to work for them
10 is just to keep the press off my back. I was going to live out of hotel rooms and fly
11 around the world with Emery and if anybody wanted my address I'd give them the
12 license plate off of my car in the parking lot at Dayton Ohio. This guy even tracked us
13 down and caught us while we were going through training on the 8th in Ypsilanti
14 Michigan! He was... and I never would give him the time of day. I was friendly to him,
15 but I just wouldn't talk to him. Then we gave it to those idiots in Newsweek and what we
16 got was what I thought we would get, you know war stories right up until the end where
17 he said oh yeah by they way they say they didn't smuggle drugs.

18 SM: Oh for crying out loud. You want to give the timeframe for that article? Do
19 you remember?

20 JM: I'm going to say that it was probably about March or April of...somewhere
21 in the spring of 1987. I know I was flying for Rosi at the time. Then there was...let me
22 think...there was a U.S. News World and Reports really screwed up. When Dutton was
23 down there we were worried we were going to be intercepted by T-37s with wing
24 mounted guns on them. We'd been given some information that that was possible. Of
25 course that airplane isn't must faster then we are and it's a light airplane so they rigged
26 up a mount and an [?] rear door to defend ourselves with a M-60 machine gun. We were
27 joking amongst ourselves, well you know the C-123 started out you know just C-123B,
28 then they put spray booms on them and everything for the Ranch Hands and they call it
29 the utility C-123, UC-123K, and now we put machine guns on it so it's become the
30 fighter utility cargo 123 K and of course that's spelled you know what. And they put it
31 on a big sign board and we took pictures of all of us around the 123 with this sign and

1 damned if U.S. News and World Report didn't pick it up and publish the damn thing!
2 (laughing) Another thing while we were down there, one of the Air Force types who was
3 quite a character, came up with a name for the company. He said, "We can't call
4 ourselves corporate air services you know with these old military airplanes and they're
5 heavy transports anyway. Let's call ourselves Old Southern Hemisphere International
6 Transport," which was appropriate...O-Shit! (laughing)

7 SM: Oh no. Well, let's see. Is there anything else...well actually, have you
8 come across any books or any articles that have done a good job of covering this topic?

9 JM: I haven't seen anything that told what we did down there except you know,
10 the Iran part of it kind of over-shadowed what we were doing and we just became yeah
11 we had an airplane shot down and...one of the things I said I was disturbed that poor old
12 Bill never got his dues at all. The man died as kind of hero as far as I was concerned not
13 a mercenary and there hadn't been anything positive about him anywhere.

14 SM: What a shame. Have you read Nightingale Song?

15 JM: Who?

16 SM: A book called Nightingale Song?

17 JM: No I don't believe I have.

18 SM: Okay. Good enough. Well I'm going to go ahead and pause for a minute.
19 This will end the interview with Mr. John McRainey.

20

21 SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. John McRainey on
22 the 25th of June 2001 at ten o'clock...10:05 Lubbock time. I'm in Lubbock Texas and
23 Mr. McRainey is in McAllen Texas. Sir why don't you go ahead and discuss what
24 happened after you finished supporting the Contras and came back to the U.S.

25 JM: Okay. After the Contra operation everyone in the world was trying to
26 interview us, all the media...and to try to lay low and stay away from that a friend of
27 mine was the chief pilot of Rosenbam aviation, which had a Contract flying the DC-8s
28 for Emery Airfreight...Asked Jimmy Person he was an old Air America pilot. I called
29 Jimmy and asked him if he needed any pilots that there was a few of us down there. Jerry
30 Stimwadel and myself particularly that would like to fly for him. He said, "Oh yeah!
31 They've got a class starting come on up." So anyway, we went up to Detroit and went to

1 ground school in DC-8 and basic in doc and...another old Continental pilot, Steve
2 Stevens was with us and towards the end of our program another Air America pilot,
3 Dendsley, Ben Dendsley came in and it was kind of like old home week. They already
4 ha... Pete Parker was flying for them and oh let's see who else...There were Jose
5 Konda...there were several Air America pilots there so it was kind of like old home
6 week. Anyway, during the period I was flying with Rosie and old friend that I'd known
7 for years was in the FBO business and knew me well...called me and asked me if I would
8 like to go to work for American Airlines. They were starting a chain of FBOs, some
9 fixed base operations around the country and he wanted somebody to work with him. He
10 was the vice president in charge of it and he wanted a director to go out and find the
11 FBOs and help get them into the system and train and standardize and so forth. So about
12 that time I, Sandy and I were already planning on getting married and she of course
13 would've felt a lot better about me not being in the cockpit flying around the world, the
14 idea of an executive job and living in one place really appealed to her. So we...I left
15 Rosenbaum in November of 1987 and went with AMR Corp. They formed a...I was
16 working for a division called AMR services, which did ground handling for third party
17 airlines and ACSs so for American in some cases. They were the ones that bought AMR
18 Combs. They bought the Combs Gates operation, which I believe there were six FBOs
19 combs and I came in just before they made that acquisition and so we became known as
20 AMR Combs. After about a year, say by '88 anyway, late in '88, the chairman, president
21 and chairman of the board Bob Crandall expressed his concern that the company was
22 acquiring all these independent ma and pa charter operations around the country. We had
23 one in, we bought Northern Air in Grand Rapids Michigan and we bought Memphis Aero
24 in Memphis Tennessee. Jet Co in Birmingham Alabama and AMR Combs had a charter
25 operation in Denver. So he was concerned that if any of the light corporate type aircrafts
26 had an accident it would be just like a DC-10 because all the headlines would say
27 American airlines had an accident and he wasn't comfortable with all these little
28 operations doing their own thing. So the flight operations was getting big enough that
29 they decided we were going to combine them all and then there were several options on
30 which way we were going to go. Whether we were going to buy a fleet of corporate jets
31 and expand the charter business that way or which way we were going to about it.

1 During that period of time corporate aviation was really at a low point in the United
2 States, corporate jet sells were down and corporate charter sells were down. The flight
3 departments were being disbanded right and left and the flight departments that were
4 active weren't flying very much. So I came up with a plan that I call the alliance
5 program where we would take Fortune 500 companies preferably, large corporations that
6 had nice corporate aircraft that just weren't being utilized properly that would like to put
7 them on our charter certificate and operate under our rules and regulations and we would
8 provide the marketing get charters for them and then we would take a commission for the
9 charters that we provided and if they picked up a charter on their own we would take a
10 smaller commission. The pilots would be on our...we would train them in basic in dock
11 and it was quite an expensive program. We had to come to an arrangement with the FAA
12 as to how we would operate this fleet because we had airplanes scattered all over the
13 country and I worked out a plan that was kind of a combination of 121 and 135 operation
14 that the FAA liked very much and went to Washington and explained it at lengths to the
15 head of operation and maintenance and for years they had been trying to put a part
16 together called 119 where they would merge the two into one operation. So they say this
17 plan as kind of a four-runner of things to come and being we were going to have a large
18 number of aircrafts scattered over a large area they called this the first mega 135
19 certificate and they assigned a certificate management office to us like they would an
20 airline. I was somewhat dismayed by the time we got all the certificate approved because
21 it wound up that we had a FAA office that had more personnel then I had in the
22 management in the actual operation. But at any rate it worked out very well for us. We
23 had air...we even had airplane space overseas. We had U.S. registered aircraft...and of
24 course I won't bore you with the problems involved in dealing with the countries and
25 dealing with dealing with the FAA and dealing with foreign civil aviation authorities, but
26 it was challenging to say the least. Some of our first...we had aircraft, oh gosh...at one
27 time I had an airplane down in Siberia for an engine change; I had the first airplane to
28 land in Kuwait at the end of the fighting over there...I had...the operational problems
29 were challenging to say the least, but we managed to cope very well, the program worked
30 well and after it was running smooth I was called to...by an old friend of mine down in
31 South America to please come down and help him. He was having some problems with a

1 state department operation that he was flying through an independent Contractor to the
2 state department in that the DEA was unhappy with him, said that they weren't running a
3 safe operation and were going to refuse to let their personnel ride on them. I thought that
4 to go down there, I wanted to, but my wife was adamant that I stay out of the cockpit.
5 But after several months he kind of won me over and I went to my boss named Rick
6 Genice that was the president of AMR services and said, "I'd like a years leave without
7 pay and if you could give it to me I'd like to get a South American to fly this operation
8 snowcap war on drugs." He said he had to go up the ladder to Crandall with it you know
9 to get a leave of absence like that and Crandall thought it was the right thing to do and let
10 me go. So during 1989 I took off from AMR and went down to Lima Peru and flew as a
11 chief pilot of the 123 transport operation down there. Flying over the Andes and into the
12 upper Wyaga Valley of Peru on the drug eradication program. And again it was all ex-
13 Air American, in fact several of the ex-Contra pilots were down there to so it was like all
14 homely. Sandy came down and lived with me and...plus of course everyday that I'd take
15 off and be gone she'd worry and she kept saying she wanted to go home and she didn't
16 have long to wait. About seven months after I was down there the company called and
17 they needed me back so I left and went back to AMR. When I got back to AMR they had
18 a new task for me. While I was gone Rick Genice had left as president of AMR services
19 and they knew a president was in charge but they had divided it, it had grown so large the
20 spun AMR worldwide flight operations off separately, which they latter sold to
21 Bombardier and it became their porter share program for selling their jets. They spun the
22 FBO program off separately called AMR combs and it became a part of signature FBOs
23 and they had just he airline services company division being run by a fellow of the
24 president and that was Jim Singer. Jim wanted me to run a division of it called the
25 international division where we would set up third party airline services in third world
26 countries and it was a broad spectrum of airline services. Everything from freight
27 handling, ground handling, passenger service, maintenance, flight operations, anything
28 they wanted we would provide for them anywhere in the world. We wanted to get our
29 foot in the door with a lot the emmerging third world countries, particularly countries that
30 had been spun off by the old Soviet Union and we were also very interested in Vietnam,
31 getting in there, we thought there were a lot of economic possibilities there. So I started

1 traveling for AMR services and setting up third party airline operations. We had
2 operations scattered over quite a wide area. We operated the entire airport at Warsaw in
3 Poland, we took it from a third world Laos run airport to a twentieth century first rate
4 airport in ninety days. We had, we set up a company in Habersk in the Russian far east
5 for airline services. That one was in conjunction with, oh what the heck...a large
6 construction company, Parsons Construction and to a smaller extent, Hughes electronics
7 division. We worked, I made a number of trips back to Vietnam, but we could never get
8 anything together with the Vietnamese. They were as difficult to deal with as they had
9 been when I was there with Air America. We travel in all the -stans...Khazakhstan,
10 Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan. We had operation in Turkey. It was an interesting job, but it
11 kept me in an aluminum tube at high altitude for years! In December of 1989 AMR had a
12 major cut back, down sizing I guess you call it and they spun off a number of more
13 divisions including the international division I was in. At 59 ½ at that time, in
14 December...that would have been in December '94 with my retirement package, it was
15 probably April before I wasn't on the payroll anymore, but for all practical purposes you
16 could say I retired about April of '95. I settled back in the Rio Grand Valley where'd I
17 had my FBO and where I still owned several rental properties, houses that I had rented out
18 and I have been down here just managing a few rental properties and taking life easy
19 since.

20 SM: Okay. Well, let me ask you some clarifying questions.

21 JM: Okay.

22 SM: When you first went to work with AMR and you set up that program with I
23 guess with the major corporations...

24 JM: On the jet program?

25 SM: On the jet program.

26 JM: That was called the Alliance Program.

27 SM: The Alliance Program, thank you. When you set that up and you started
28 working you mentioned that you also had overseas, aircraft based overseas.

29 JM: Yes.

30 SM: What were some of the major challenges you faced there in terms of
31 working with [?]?

1 JM: Well there are a number of agreements that foreign countries have for
2 allowing foreign aircraft to operate in their country. For instances, when I had my
3 Mexican charter certificate I could take American citizens or a Mexican citizen for that
4 matter as long as he was in the United States, I could take them to Mexico and bring them
5 back, but I couldn't go into Mexico and pick people up from Mexico and take them out of
6 the country. Or...what a minute, I could take them out of the country but I couldn't take
7 them from point to point within the country because that would have been in
8 consideration of the...it was the various freedoms they had, 1 through 5, of what you
9 could do. So the most serious one issue, you couldn't pick up people in the country and
10 take them somewhere else within the country because that would be considered to be in
11 competition with the local operators in that country. My first overseas, the airplane we
12 first bases overseas, we based a challenger that belonged to a corporation in North
13 Carolina that had two of them and the one was just kind of surplus to them. Of course
14 aircraft sales were bad at the time and they were anxious to put it to work and we had
15 work for it in the UK, but I had a heck of a time negotiating the necessary freedoms to
16 operate the airplane as an N-registered airplane on a foreign certificate in the UK. But
17 we managed to overcome it. Almost all the flights were international because the UK
18 being a relatively small country, the business been going to France, Germany or
19 somewhere else, and the fact that they didn't have that type of aircraft or that class of
20 aircraft on charter certificate...we managed to negotiate an agreement with them. We
21 couldn't go anywhere within the UK with the airplane, but that wasn't a problem for us
22 because most of our flights were international anyway. We operated that airplane
23 for...oh, it was still under operation when I left, I believe that operated over there for
24 about two years. As a matter of fact that was the airplane that lost an engine on its
25 charter into Russia!

26 SM: Whoa! How about working in Russia at the time. What were things...?

27 JM: Well I spent a lot of time in Russia trying to set up Dow Transits
28 Corporation that we set up in Habersk. There were a lot of challenges in getting it
29 together, I made some very good friends, I have a lot of respect for the Russian people. It
30 would be very easy to transition from capitalism to communism, but the reverse is
31 extremely complicated because the government owns everything and to try to get it back

1 into private hands is a real...is a real job. We had the deal with all these little
2 bureaucracies that control segments of the economy. Like, oh they had the banking
3 people; they had the land people that actually owned the land; they had the engineering
4 people that approved any changes or new structures; they had a numerous, about fifteen
5 different agencies you had to go through to do anything. But what we did is try to get all
6 these people to buy in to the program when they had been spin off as private indemnities,
7 we tried them to buy small amounts of stock, we offered them sweat equity in the
8 corporation to come into it, and that way we eliminated the resistance to somebody
9 coming in and competing with them. I found on our board, we had eighteen board
10 members as I recall, and on the U.S. side we had Parsons Hughes an AMR representative.
11 Now the Russian side we had all the various government entities involved that were no
12 long government entities, they were privatized, but it was really interesting. I believe the
13 Russians we had...I know we had over ten PhDs, they were very well educated and at
14 first we had some concerns that, you know, the quality of their work might not be up to
15 western standards and they were dispelled very early. I know Parsons who has a
16 reputation for excellence all over the world gave them some engineering work to do on
17 reconstruction of the airport in Haberask and they gave them the work that they thought
18 was just the fluff off work because they were afraid to give them any serious work for
19 fear it wouldn't be up to standards and as the drawings and engineering work started
20 coming in they were amazed at how professional that the Russian group was. They
21 eliminated any other partners in doing the architectural work and engineering work, they
22 turned it all over to the Russians. They were very, very confident. Same thing held true
23 with the backing and all the other divisions we worked with. They were very confident
24 people. They were honest people. We did run into some problems where corruption
25 from other sources that created problems in doing business over there...very, very
26 difficult, they kept throwing obstacles in our path, but we were sticking with it, when I
27 left they still had it. I assume, well I know it's still there, I know Parsons is still a partner
28 although AMR when they downsized everything they divested themselves with their
29 share, but the company was still viable. I even believe that the people that took over our
30 Polish airport operation took over AMR's part of Powtrans as I recall. But it was
31 challenging, it was interesting, I felt very sorry for the Russian people. Saw a lot of, you

1 know, people that had retired on government salaries that, my god, you couldn't pay a
2 days rent with their monthly salary after the wild inflation that took over on the Ruble.
3 They had a hard road to hoe and I'm sure it will be a generation or two before they come
4 out of it.

5 SM: Yes sir. You mentioned corruption, were there expectations by some of
6 your bureaucrats to receive compensation? That is bribes?

7 JM: Yeah, well. Getting things in, for instance if you wanted to import
8 something that generally come in through port at Vladivostok and the Russian Mafia
9 control the port and of course they wanted a huge percentage of the value of the
10 equipment or the equipment would just disappear, stuff like that. In fact I believe that
11 one of the early success of a Russian company was a Russian security company that
12 started business to provide security for Russian and foreign companies that were having
13 trouble with Mafia and government and what have you. This company was started by a
14 bunch of ex-KGB guys, they were pretty bad dudes and they became kind of their own
15 mafia I believe, only they took on the bad guys and if they were the security for your
16 train load of stuff you can be sure the stuff got there because if anybody tried to intercept
17 it they were going to disappear.

18 SM: Well was this the equivalent of one protection racket replacing another?

19 JM: Well except they ran it like a business and I understand they didn't renege on
20 their Contract.

21 SM: Right, but I mean basically hire us or your stuff's not protected.

22 JM: Yeah your stuff was protected and you paid a reasonable price compared to
23 what the mafia was charging you.

24 SM: Okay. Was that your only dealings with the Russian mafia?

25 JM: Yes, yes. The only ones that we had was that the problem was trying to get
26 anything through the port at Vladivostok.

27 SM: The bureaucracy that you had to deal with, do you know if any of those
28 representatives were basically FSB, the representatives of the [?], the successor, excuse
29 me, KGB?

30 JM: I really don't know, I don't know. The obstacles, the government obstacles
31 were fought by our own people, the Dow Trans people who had a best at interest in the

1 company. They were the ones that negotiated with the government entities once we got
2 the company established anyway. I'm really not sure, I couldn't tell you too much about
3 what they had to do to overcome some of the obstacles thrown in their path.

4 SM: Okay. Was anybody ever or were you ever interviewed about the business
5 you were conducting there by Russian officials?

6 JM: Well we had numerous meetings and various government offices. We had to
7 meet with all the government officials from both Moscow and from the local government,
8 the...I can't remember what they called them they were like, you know like we might call
9 a state or county they had a name for the area and we had to meet with the governor of
10 that area and then we even had to meet with the mayor of our city or Haberask and
11 everybody had to sign off on what we were doing. But the people that we met with in the
12 early days all seems generally interested to get us in there and as helpful as they could be.
13 Once we got in there then additional obstacles started cropping up, but initially the
14 dealing that I had they were all very, very friendly.

15 SM: Good. Now did you ever have to travel to Moscow and to the major cities to
16 work with officials in higher positions then the region personnel?

17 JM: The Moscow end of it was handled by it by the Parsons director and I
18 handled the local, the Haberask end of it. Jim Chappelle was the representative at
19 the...he was based in London, it was fairly easy for him to get back and forth from
20 London to Moscow. But you know it's 11 ½ time zones from western Russia to eastern
21 Russia, it's along ways across there.

22 SM: That's right. And this is, just to clarify. This is during the time when AMR
23 was expanding its third party air operations.

24 JM: That's right.

25 SM: Okay. Going back a little bit before that. How much about your
26 participation in Lima Peru can you talk about?

27 JM: Oh yeah I can talk about anything you know, it's just a...it was a fairly easy
28 operation.

29 SM: How many aircraft were they flying?

30 JM: Oh lets see how many we had. They were mostly helicopters, which I didn't
31 have a whole lot to do with except brining in supplies to them. They had a lot of the Bell

1 2-12s, the twin-engine Bells and on the transport in I think we had three 123s, was the
2 maximum. Right after I left they replaced the 123s with Convair 580s and then since
3 then they've replaced them with I think it's called a C-27, it's a twin engine turbo prop, I
4 believe it's Italian built. The U.S. Air Force bought twelve of them years ago and finally
5 retired those twelve and the state department picked them up and they're using those
6 now. They look like I guess a 123 but with turbo props, they're a little smaller I believe
7 they only gross 50 or 52 thousand pounds.

8 SM: This was a state run, a state department run operation or DEA
9 involvement...how was that?

10 JM: Well you know when Bush, first president Bush, formed this war on drugs
11 task force there was a lot of infighting between customs, DEA, Coast Guard, CIA. All
12 the various entities that had interest in drugs were always fighting for turf and money and
13 what have you. They wanted to make this a joint use where everybody got their nose in it
14 and so there were...DEA, there's always DEA agents assigned to every embassy, they
15 call them narcotic assistance unit and they work with the local narcotics people. In Peru
16 there were a bunch of them because that's where, at that time anyway, they figured most
17 of the cocaine was grown. They made a raw paste out of it there and transported that to
18 Columbia where it was refined into powder and then next imported it into the U.S. or
19 wherever. The concept of the program was to eradicate the cocoa at the source and the
20 upper Wyaga Valley, which is really the Amazon Valley, but it's you know, oh I'd guess
21 the elevation might be two to three thousand, two to thirty five hundred feet in there. The
22 foothills of the Andes on the Amazon side was where most of the cocoa was grown. We
23 would fly what they call a CORA... agricultural workers that had been given some
24 training in how to recognize a coca plant I guess... into areas that they found the thing
25 growing and the helicopters take them to the fields and they'd chop down the plants and
26 burn them, stuff like that. The helicopters did spraying on the early part and the Peruvian
27 government raised so much hell about spraying that they actually went to chopping stuff
28 down instead. I believe we were doing spraying in Columbia also or we had a smaller
29 operation and I believe they're still spraying to this day in Columbia.

30 SM: Do you know what they're spraying?

31 JM: Well it's some kind of herbicide, something that kills cocoa plants.

1 SM: Okay. But it doesn't leave the soil destitute?

2 JM: No, not to my knowledge it doesn't. You know there's stuff that heck we
3 spray defoliant on cotton in the United States to defoliate the plant before they harvest it.
4 So I don't know what type of herbicide it is, but it's obviously something that is
5 expectable for the Columbian government.

6 SM: Okay. Now, do you know if they did any kind of...tried to introduce any
7 kind of crop substitution?

8 JM: You know I wasn't involved in that end of it and I really don't know. I
9 believe that they did. The people that we worked with in the field were primarily CIA
10 and DEA. There was one old CIA guy that when we came in with a 123 he almost had
11 tears in his eye, said he thought he was back in Laos. (laughing)

12 SM: Okay. What role were the DEA and the CIA playing there, do you know?

13 JM: Well they were trying to find where the actually laboratories were and where
14 the actual crops were being grown and you know, they...I don't know how effective they
15 were. I always felt that it was kind of like urinating in the ocean to raise tide. I thought
16 we were throwing away our tax dollars, but we're still doing it so somebody thinks it's
17 important.

18 SM: Well how much of their work do you think involved not just the counter
19 narcotics, but also counter terrorism and counter insurgency and of course the...?

20 JM: Well in the early days I'm sure there was quite a bit of it there was roads
21 being cut and traffic stopped and extortion. They were extorting money from truckers
22 that were bring produce and things from the upper Wyaga Valley where there's a lot of
23 produce grown over he Andes and into Lima and the would stop the trucks and they
24 would claim they were taxing them, but they were just ripping them off...and these were
25 communists. We saw flags with hammers and sickles on them.

26 SM: Oh really!

27 JM: Yeah.

28 SM: Do you know if this was Sundero Luminoso?

29 JM: Yes it was.

30 SM: How much had you heard about some of that activity?

1 JM: Oh we had heard quite a bit about it. One of the agency guys that worked
2 with out of Tango Maria told us where the hot beds were, where the cities were that had
3 them, just as matter of you know, if you're going to fly low don't fly low over that town
4 and kind of gave us a broad overview of what the hell they were doing, you know if they
5 were going through.

6 SM: Did you ever get shot at?

7 JM: I can't personally say that I was, you know with small arms fire you rarely
8 know it until you find a hole in your airplane after the fact. I know a couple of our pilots
9 received holes in the airplane while they were flying and you know, when they got back
10 to base the maintenance found them. We lost some people down there in that, we lost
11 several Air America people, helicopter pilots, but I believe they were all operational
12 accidents. We lost one of our old legendary pilots, Hithchman was killed down there in
13 that war on drugs program, same program I was flying. In fact in 1989 while I was there,
14 May 20th I remember it because it was my birthday again. We had a caravan that had, I
15 can't remember how many people were on board that thing, I think about a dozen, most
16 of them were Air America or not necessarily all Air America, but some Air America
17 flight mechanics for the helicopter and some other American Contract personnel and
18 some local Contract personnel. The airplane iced up over the Andes and crashed at about
19 sixteen thousand foot elevation, of course killed everybody on board. That was the big
20 disaster while I was down there.

21 SM: But that didn't threaten the operation.

22 JM: No we kept on truckin', but they use that caravan going back and forth from
23 the sites in the upper Wyaga Valley and it only went back to base maybe once a week or
24 once every two weeks. They really shouldn't have been carrying a lot of personnel I
25 don't say. I thought it was a mistake, in fact I had voiced some concerns about the
26 caravan carrying people over there. I said, "You know, when the minimum in route
27 altitude is 23 thousand feet and you've got some of the worse icing I've ever seen
28 anywhere in the world, that's not a place for a single engine airplane to be full of
29 passengers. We went back and forth in the 123 with all four engines, two turning and
30 two burning and everybody sucking on oxygen and we carried lots of passengers, we'd
31 never had less the twenty or thirty on board. But my god with four engines and of course

1 a heck of de-icing system, two huge heaters for de-icing the leading edges of the wings
2 and tail and then of course we had electric de-icing on the inlets of the jets and we had
3 pneumatic boots on the ailerons because the water would come back from the leading
4 edge and freeze the ailerons. But even with all that we would flame jets out, lots of, I've
5 had several jets flamed up because a little ice would form on the inlet door. We had a
6 door on those J-85s that when you went into reverse it closed the door so that it didn't
7 suck in a lot of dirt from the dirt runway. That door had a little lip on it and I could look
8 out and see the ice forming on it and it didn't have to be very thick, I think an eighth of
9 an inch would flame a jet out and when it broke loose boom the jet was out. Man that
10 happened on numerous flights...but even then you know we only had a relatively small
11 window where we really had a problem with the altitude. The peaks were pretty high, in
12 fact about thirty miles north of course is a 23 thousand foot peak! But in our area if we
13 got half way over the Altoplano we could lose both jets and just cost down, we'd pull the
14 power back on recip and let it down with a 300 a foot rate of decent and descend into the
15 Amazon Valley with no trouble at all. If we were going the other way we could do the
16 same thing, half way across we could just head due west and descend over the mountains
17 into the Pacific and let down until we broke out so it was probably only a period of about
18 eight minutes that was really critical for us where we didn't have a whole lot of options.

19 SM: Was that the principle hazard or were those the principle hazards flying
20 in...?

21 JM: It was that particular type of airplane. The hazard was to lose a recip at a
22 critical part. Because we were loaded it maxed gross weight on every trip and at 23
23 thousand feet the 123 was kind of a lousy performer.

24 SM: What were you typically carrying besides passengers?

25 JM: Oh we carried fuel for the helicopters, we carried food for all the people that
26 were over there, we carried everything you need to sustain forty, fifty or a hundred
27 people so the airplanes were always loaded to the gill ever trip.

28 SM: Was it...were you able to utilize the experiences that you had gained as an
29 Air America pilot in Laos, in particular in flying in that mountainous terrain?

30 JM: Oh yeah, sure. We had some strips up in the mountains. We had Masomore
31 down on the southern end of the valley, which was a grass strip in the mountains

1 and...can't remember the name, we had one strip that was really high that provided some
2 challenges landing in that was I'm going to say the elevation was probably about nine
3 thousand feet, but there was real high mountains all around it so you'd have to kind of let
4 down in a figure eight around some terrain to get in there. It wouldn't have been a good
5 place to lose an engine on take off, but...and the strips were dirt strips. Some of them
6 were short. I opened up Santa Maria when they first built it, which was kind of an island
7 like a strip in the river. It was built like a firebase, it reminded me of an old Special
8 Forces type firebase in Vietnam. The security in that area was pretty bad so they really
9 had a lot of fortifications around it and they built a dirt strip. The first time I went in
10 there was some trees on the other side of the river that were really high and made the
11 approach a little difficult, but that was the whole purpose of going in there on a test basis.
12 Told them what to cut down, they just went out with the chain saws and cut them down.
13 After that there was no problem.

14 SM: While you were there were there every any terrorist acts committed in
15 Lima?

16 JM: Oh yes, yes! There were some explosions while we were in Lima. Security
17 was always a concern in Lima, you know we traveled around the time freely, our wives
18 did too, but there was always a possibility of a bomb going off. The electricity was...you
19 know they blew a transformer up or a power plant up and I would say that if you had a
20 electricity five days in a row you'd consider lucky while we were down there. We lived
21 on the twelfth floor of our apartment building and it was a pain in the neck when the
22 power went out you had to walk up twelve flights of stairs.

23 SM: Any other hazards?

24 JM: No not particularly. I would say it was very enjoyable flying, I loved it, I
25 took every trip I could get. I really enjoyed flying!

26 SM: I guess when you finished that you were called back to AMR working on the
27 third party air operations.

28 JM: That's right.

29 SM: You mentioned that the Vietnamese when you tried to start operations there,
30 the Vietnamese were just as difficult as they were back during the war.

1 JM: You know they had all the bureaucracy from the French when we were there
2 an then after I went back years later they had all the bureaucracy of the French plus the
3 bureaucracy of the Communists and they were almost childlike in there...I think they
4 were so devious they thought everybody else was devious. So they would pick a
5 Contract apart, every word they thought was a poison pen in the dad gung Contract and
6 as a result there was just no way that we could ever get anything together that a
7 responsible corporation would want to get involved in in sending a lot of expensive
8 equipment there and pouring in some money when there were so many potential pit falls.
9 I could never...you know normally you'd take those out with the Contract. You'd say,
10 "Look now we...you guys say that we can charge these rates and this is all the tax there's
11 going to be. Now if you turn around and raise the taxes we have to raise the rate for the
12 airline," and we'd put that in the Contract. "No, no, no, no, you have to guarantee this
13 rate." "Well then you guarantee you won't raise taxes." "Oh we can't do that!" I said,
14 "Well then you know..." It was always something like that we found it impossible to deal
15 with them.

16 SM: Okay. Now while you were trying to do this business with them, were there
17 still the stipulation that any foreign investor or any foreign company trying do business in
18 Vietnam had to have a Vietnamese counter part businessperson?

19 JM: I believe there was and we did have a...we had a company that was being
20 spun off of Vietnam Airlines and it was called VASCO, Vietnam Aviation Services
21 Company and they were going to have the domestic airline, they were going to have the
22 FBOs and the crop dusting and the off shore helicopter work and all the general aviation
23 type of flying plus the domestic airline flying and Air Vietnam was going to have the
24 international routes. This VASCO, the chief pilot was a black gentlemen who spoke
25 fluent French from Surinam, not Surinam, it's on the west coast of Africa...I think it
26 starts with a S...Senegal, Senegal. I made very good friends with him, he turned out to
27 be a really upstanding man. He had gotten there because he had ferried an airplane to
28 them. They had bought, I can't remember what it was, I think it was a Shorts 330 or 336,
29 and he ferried it in and of course their pilots, he was supposed to train a couple of their
30 pilots. While he was there instructing the pilots the Vietnamese authorities or the people
31 that were running the company realized that he was a real good man and they offered to

1 hire him as their chief pilot. And they were smart to do that because he was an excellent
2 man. He had gotten his pilot's license in the United States. He was from an upper
3 middle class family in Senegal, wanted to be a pilot, they sent him to the U.S., and he got
4 all of his ratings. In fact he even did a little flying for a U.S. company for a while, but
5 then he went back to Senegal and wound up ferrying that airplane to Vietnam, which
6 changed his career. But he was really a fine young man and I would assume he's
7 probably still well.

8 SM: Alright sir why don't you go ahead and discuss those business cards and the
9 stories that you had.

10 JM: Okay. I was looking through some of my business cards from my trips to
11 Russia and Vietnam and various other places while we had the break and I came across
12 some of the people that I had mentioned, I have their names now. I might mention that
13 who we use for interpreters in a lot of these countries were mostly American Airline
14 employees. With well over 100,000 employees American had people who could speak
15 dang near any language you could think of throughout the system. On my trips to
16 Vietnam we had a Vietnamese American who worked for American Airlines as a
17 maintenance manager in Paris. His name was Jean Claude Vo Van Nguyen and he of
18 course spoke fluent Vietnamese and French and he accompanied me on most of my trips
19 to Vietnam as an interpreter. The chief pilot of VASCO was a young man named
20 Christian Huchard, H-u-c-h-a-r-d, and I believe the H was silent...A real fine young man.
21 Jean Claude Vo Van Nguyen, his father was a doctor and they left Vietnam before the
22 fall thank goodness to Paris and that's where Jean Claude was raised. He was...oh he
23 was just a teenager when they left, maybe even younger than that. He became a
24 mechanic and eventually wound up with American Airlines in Paris, but his father had a
25 lot of good contacts in Vietnam and had even gone back and was accepted because...of
26 course they confiscated all of his land and everything when he left, but seeing he had
27 never really been with the government he'd always been a doctor and done private
28 practice they kind of left him alone and the communist didn't have any ax to grind with
29 him. So he introduced...Jean Claude's father introduced [?] to a couple of people that he
30 thought would be very helpful as consultants in my business in Vietnam and they turned
31 out that they both were extremely helpful. One of them was Thiet Vu, V-u, who was a

1 Vietnamese general in the North Vietnamese Army and the other one was Ho Quang
2 Hua, H-u-a, Hua was the chief negotiator during the Paris Peace Accordance and one of
3 the highest ranking generals in the Vietnam Army. Both Wa and Vu were at Bien Dien
4 Phu! Really, really and very, very pleasant people. They'd spoke French and
5 Vietnamese but no English, but of course with Jean Claude interpreting I've had many
6 real good conversations with him. They opened doors to the highest levels of the
7 bureaucracy in Vietnam. The top civil aviation authority man was, he was a general,
8 Nguyen Hong Nhi, N-h-i, who was a Vietnamese War hero. He was a fighter pilot who
9 was an ace and amongst some of his accomplishments he shot down a U.S. B-52, but he
10 was a real turkey to deal with. On one of my trips to Russia in Habersk I ran into a guy
11 that you heard me mention, Ernest Brace, he was the oldest held prisoner of war during
12 the Vietnam War and he was a civilian pilot who was captured in western Laos on...in
13 fact he was captured, again on my birthday, May 20th in 1965. So he spent over eight
14 years in...well I say in the Hanoi Hilton. He spent several years in Laos in bamboo cages
15 and caves and what have you. He wrote a book called A Code to Keep about his
16 experiences, but he said when he got to Hanoi Hilton he thought it really was the Hilton
17 because the of they way he'd been treated at the hand of the Pathet Lao for several years
18 earlier. Old Ernie Brace was a cell...he had a cell right next to the gentlemen that I flew
19 both in the Contras and in South America with that had been shot down and spent five
20 years in the Hanoi Hilton. So we had mutual friends to talk about. That's about all I
21 wanted to mention.

22 SM: Okay. When you were working with the Vietnamese did you ever fell
23 uncomfortable because of your experience?

24 JM: Yes, I'd have to say I did. I knew they knew who I was and what my
25 background was, there was no question about that. Oh I can tell you something else that
26 happened in Vietnam that was interesting to say the least. One of my trips to Russia, the
27 company was good they'd send me in the dead of winter to Siberia and then from there
28 directly to the tropics to Vietnam. One of my trips I went from Vietnam...I mean from
29 Russia to Vietnam and while I was in Vietnam I checked in with a company and they
30 wanted me to go directly to Turkmenistan from there and I'd already been there several
31 times, but I didn't have a current visa. You get your visas for a lot of the, in fact I think

1 almost all of the ex-Soviet block countries still through the Russian Embassy and of
2 course there's no getting in there without a visa. So I had to find a Russian Embassy and
3 I'm thinking now, 'well let's see, well I've got to go to Europe and back track, it's the
4 only way to get back to Turkmenistan anyway. So I would probably go to the Russian
5 Embassy in England or maybe Paris or Germany.' So I had to figure out where I was
6 going to get at visa. And then it hit me, my god there's a Russian Embassy right here in
7 Hanoi, I was in Hanoi. So I went down to the Russian Embassy and the gate people only
8 spoke French and Vietnamese, they didn't speak English. They went inside and wouldn't
9 let me in the gate until this tall, blond haired guy, looked like an American, he looked like
10 Jack Armstrong All American Boy, came out and his last name was Andrey, A-n-d-r-e-y,
11 and he was the council to the Russian Embassy in Hanoi at the time. He spoke perfect
12 English with all the clichés, you would never in a million years guess the man was
13 Russian. So obviously a KGB type that had lived around the world and he welcomed me
14 in with open arms. I mean he was a nice to me as he could be. He said, "Ga, it's good to
15 be able to speak English with somebody. Come on in!" He helped me, he was very, very
16 helpful and a real fine gentlemen really. Last thing I expected was an American like
17 Russian in Hanoi, but there he was.

18 SM: Do you think he was still working for the government?

19 JM: Oh yes, yes. He was the council of the Russian Embassy.

20 SM: No I'm sorry, do you think he was still working for the FSB?

21 JM: Oh I'm sure he was, I'm sure he was, but he... You know at that time the
22 Cold War was over at least on the surface it was over. He was very, very friendly and I
23 told him what I was doing, hell I didn't have any secrets you know, say American
24 Airlines. He didn't like Hanoi it was the worst assignment he'd every had, he hated it.
25 He says all he did was bail his comrades out of jail for running over some Vietnamese on
26 motorbike. (laughing)

27 SM: (laughing) Oh no. Did that really happen?

28 JM: Oh yeah. I guess that happened with alarming regularity.

29 SM: Oh no.

30 JM: The Russians are famous for the Vodka I tell you. That was a big problem
31 that I saw all over the Soviet Union and of course I'm sure all the embassies had the same

1 problems. But he told me his major job was bailing his comrades out of jail for running
2 over some Vietnamese.

3 SM: Now when you were traveling through Russia, did you witness any
4 environmental problems?

5 JM: Oh god yes, everywhere! You can't drink that water anywhere in Russia,
6 it's polluted everywhere...it's really bad. The ecology is such in Russia that I don't think
7 it will ever clear up and it will take centuries to clear up, it's a mess.

8 SM: Anything else besides the water that struck you?

9 JM: Well, the way they went about doing just about everything added to the
10 problem I thought, but according to Jim Chappelle that I traveled with who was an
11 engineer he said, "Well you know, really if you look at it strictly from an engineering
12 standpoint they're doing it the right way. However when something breaks down
13 everything breaks down because of that." For one thing the city would supply all the heat
14 to all the house, like we have electricity piped in to the house. Well in Russia they pipe
15 the heat into the house and the hot water into the house and it all comes from a central
16 plant, the pipes are wrapped with insulation and what have you, but the system is old and
17 decrepit and as a result you rarely had water of any kind and then on top you rarely,
18 rarely had hot water and heat was very, very sporadic. So it was a mess, it was a
19 mess...felt sorry for the people.

20 SM: Yeah. How about oil spills things like that, did you witness anything
21 firsthand?

22 JM: I wasn't in the oil areas, but my friends that were told me that yes, leaky
23 pipeline leaking, they didn't take precautions in the drilling. So where we had isolated
24 holding pits for holding contaminated drilling mud and drilling water and oil, they didn't
25 it just went out on the ground. As a result the whole area is polluted. It's a shame, it
26 really is a shame. You wouldn't believe that that large a country could be so totally
27 polluted by, what 250 million people, but it is.

28 SM: Well, how would you compare that experience in Russia to what you
29 experience in Lima and Peru? How was Peru by comparison?

30 JM: Peru was much better by comparison. They'd dump their garbage in the
31 ocean and what have you, but the city itself seemed to have a fairly decent...well at least

1 the sewage wasn't spilling in the neighborhoods it was going in the ocean, very bad for
2 the ocean but not too bad for the neighborhood.

3 SM: Any other environmental issues you witnessed in Peru?

4 JM: Well they dumped the garbage right in the ocean too. The dump truck would
5 back up to the edge of the cliff and just dump it right in the ocean. It's amazing that they
6 would treat their environment that way, but I guess it's the rule rather than the exception
7 throughout the world.

8 SM: Did you witness any other environmental problems while you were flying
9 through Peru?

10 JM: I flew some of the ruggedest...you know the Andes are awesome mountains
11 so you really don't see a whole lot there, glaciers and those huge lakes that they had up in
12 the Altoplano. They had these gigantic fresh water lakes that...gosh I guess the elevation
13 13 to 15 thousand feet in there. In fact I believe Kasue actually did some research on
14 some of those fresh water lakes at high altitude in Peru. You could see slash and burn
15 agriculture on the upper Wyaga Valley that had done ecological damage to the jungles
16 that were growing up the side of the foothills of the Andes. They had a smoky season
17 there that was very much like the smoky season we had in Laos; real restricted visibility.

18 SM: Would that diminish you're operations when that season came through?

19 JM: Well no it didn't. The fellow that started that operation for the state
20 department was Ed Adams. Ed is an old Air America pilot and he believed that if you
21 gave him a job he was going to do it and he always did, but the DEA was scared to death
22 and made him look bad because they refused to fly day after day and Ed would do his job
23 day after day. So they jumped on saying he wasn't safe and that's one of the reasons they
24 wanted me to come down. Well we'll get a fellow from American Airlines down here to
25 straighten it out, but we still continued to fly minimums they wouldn't fly. They had to
26 have...they flew their operation like a 135 operation. A lot of those airports didn't have
27 approaches into them and you could only let down to the minimum en route altitude,
28 which at the foothill of the Andes was really high you know, but it was perfectly safe to
29 let down if you knew where the heck you were. You could use...you could triangulate or
30 you could use more than one standard broadcast station along there, position yourself
31 well over the Amazon and you could let down safely. Good grief you could let down

1 safely almost to the ground, but they wouldn't go down below the MEA and the Tang
2 Maria area was probably fifteen thousand feet, well you're not going to break out, you
3 could safely go down to four thousand feet there. Well we did and we always broke out
4 and they would go sometimes for week without getting in or doing their work and they
5 tried to make us look bad to the embassy and then when they brought me down there I
6 wrote manuals for them and we set up where there was no published let downs we
7 published our own let downs and where the MEA was fourteen thousand feet we would
8 have a transition area where you could go down to say six thousand feet safely. They
9 finally called us into the ambassador's office with their chief of air ops, a fellow that had
10 been a retired customs pilot, Peter...oh gosh I can't think of Peter's last name, but
11 anyway. He was the arbitrator anyway between the chief pilot of the DEA that came
12 down from the States and myself. The question I asked...when he was saying we were
13 doing all these dangerous things I mentioned to Peter and to the ambassador that you
14 know, "they're trying to run their operation like an airline, which does ensure a very high
15 level of safety, but if you're going to catch bad guys who fly in bad weather and go
16 below minimums you're never going to catch them because that's when they're going to
17 be flying. If we're going to get in their and do our job to catch these people we're going
18 to have to find a way that will give us a high degree of safety, but far exceed the
19 standards of 135 or 121. And here's how we do it..." I just laid out all the approaches
20 that we'd drawn up and the safety factors we had where we'd use more than one beckon
21 to ensure that we were past the mountains before we started the let down. It all seemed
22 very reasonable to Peter and it sound reasonable to the ambassador and the DEA chief
23 pilot went out with egg on his face. In their defense though I'll say this for them, the
24 DEA insisted that all their pilots be DEA people first and pilots second. As a result they
25 had a lot of very minimum, minimum time aviators that I would barely say were safe in a
26 Cessna 172 on a VFR day and to put them in that situation wasn't fair.

27 SM: No, they lacked experience.

28 JM: No, total lack of experience, yeah.

29 SM: So from your assessment when you arrived on the scene things were not
30 unsafe?

1 JM: No, god no they weren't unsafe they just didn't understand. What we had to
2 do was put it all on paper. You know he wasn't going through the motions of a full line
3 check, route check, instrument check with all the pilots and he didn't have the files set up
4 them. He didn't have the official let down, every pilot knew what the let down was in
5 their head but they didn't have it in writing and it was approved by us. All I did was
6 spend about two weeks in the office and I flew with every single pilot and I gave them
7 check rides, I put them on FAA standard forms, we put a pilot file together on each pilot,
8 we put an aircraft file on every airplane, and we published procedures for what you do in
9 route if anything happens over the Andes and alternate landing strips, etcetera. All it as
10 was lip service though. What they were doing...they were doing all that anyway, they
11 just hadn't gone through the mechanics of setting up the file.

12 SM: Okay. Now what about other activities in Peru? I was curious in our
13 discussion just now you prompted me to think about other types of operations you may
14 have run. Did you guys ever transport Peruvian military?

15 JM: Well I think we had Peruvian military on a lot of our flights. If they needed
16 to go over when we were going over, but as far as a military type operation I didn't, but
17 the helicopters did. They were the ones that actually went into the laboratories and what
18 have you and they would always work with either the Peruvian police or the Peruvian
19 military. Which of course compromised things because it seemed that they always...the
20 bad guys always seemed to know when these operations were coming up.

21 SM: Did they?

22 JM: Yeah.

23 SM: What kinds of things tipped you off for that? That they...

24 JM: Well they would go into what had obviously been a lab site, but all the
25 chemicals were gone and people were gone, they had moved it somewhere else.

26 SM: So basically they were getting tip offs?

27 JM: Yes, yes they were.

28 SM: How frequently did you think that happened?

29 JM: I think that happened a large percentage of the time.

30 SM: Do you think that was just he nature of the beast having to work with
31 another government?

1 JM: Yes. You know we had talked earlier when you were asking me about
2 Vietnam and what I thought about the way it was operating. I had a little tirade on them
3 how our state department is held in very high distain by almost all the foreign countries
4 of the world and by all ex-pats that live abroad and have to deal with the U.S. Embassy.
5 But one of the things about the U.S. way of working with foreign countries is they don't
6 do it in conjunction with the country, they do it through the country. In other words we
7 give the money and the supplies directly to the government and the government gives the
8 money and the supplies allegedly to the people in the Army, ecTetera and it rarely
9 happened that way where we had government officials who had large Swiss bank
10 accounts or offshore bank accounts and I think the U.S. government's lucky if they get
11 ten cents on the dollar for the money it spends. If they would go in directly like a lot of
12 other foreign countries do and they would run the aid program or the military program
13 and they would have counterparts working with them, for instance the way we worked
14 with the Koreans in the Korean War...it would have been a lot more successful. You
15 know the Marine commandant or the senior Marine general in Vietnam, if you remember
16 in the book The Bright Shinning Lie, he advocated that method of operation. Of course it
17 cost him from being the commandant because Westmoreland was really hacked at him,
18 but he man was absolutely right. It was...well we know it was a disaster, it didn't work.
19 We still treat Westmoreland like a hero, but as far as I'm concerned he was an absolute
20 turkey and far from being a hero. If we had run the war more like...I think it was
21 Kraddick, if we had run it like the Marines said to run it it would have been a heck of a
22 lot better off.

23 SM: Are you talking about General Krulak?

24 JM: I think that was who it was. It was the commanding general of the Marines
25 in Vietnam.

26 SM: Yeah, there was Lou Walt who was in there and I think also General Krulak.

27 JM: Yeah well he was the one that wanted the VNAF integrated into their units
28 rather than operating separately and on their own. That way they would've got...number
29 one they'd have got trained and number two the missions would have been accomplished.
30 The way it was the missions weren't accomplished and they weren't trained either one
31 and the money and the materials that were given to them wound up on the black-market

1 or wound up in the hands of the North Vietnamese. So it as a disaster on all
2 accounts...Westmoreland absolutely refused to recognize that. That happened in our
3 distribution of aid to countries all over he world, we insist on running it through the
4 government to make the government popular with the people. Look at the governments
5 we support, my god, we have supported the biggest despots. Look at Afghanistan; we
6 should have been supporting the ones the Russians were supporting instead of the Taliban
7 for crying out loud. We always pick the wrong side.

8 SM: Have you traveled to Afghanistan?

9 JM: Oh no. I've been all around it, but I mean...

10 SM: You mentioned that you've that you visited most of the -stans so I didn't
11 know if that was included.

12 JM: Yeah all the -stans. The only -stan I didn't get to was the one that was
13 supposed to be the prettiest of all of them that's Kyrgyztan.

14 SM: Okay. While you were traveling through the -stans, the Turkmenistan
15 and...

16 JM: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan.

17 SM: Yeah all the rest.

18 JM: The closest thing we'd ever come to putting together. We came close to an
19 airport project in Turkmenistan, but we were beat out by Lockheed on that one.

20 SM: Beat out by Lockheed?

21 JM: Yeah, Lockheed you know is big in the airport management business.

22 SM: Okay and they were competing with you.

23 JM: Well they were there before we were, we tried to change them, but we
24 couldn't get them changed.

25 SM: They were already entrenched.

26 JM: Yeah.

27 SM: But you weren't able to set up anything in any of the other-stans?

28 JM: No. They're pretty primitive yet they really...I guess the main reason is that
29 the economy was so bad that there wasn't a whole lot of money to be made there. The
30 rest of the world wasn't rushing in like they were into Vietnam, Russia, and places like
31 that. I mean you've got to be able to figure out a way to make a buck. Turkmenistan we

1 were interested in because they've got a lot of oil [and] they can't get it out, but when
2 you've got a lot of oil and the whole world wants oil they're going to find a way to get it
3 out. It's right on the Caspian. There was no doubt that Turkmenistan there was going to
4 be a lot of money going through there and particularly Oshkaba where we wanted to run
5 the terminal. I've spent some time across the Caspian in Afghanistan, not in Afghanistan
6 in Azerbaijan and of course they've got oil too and they've got an old pipeline that was
7 built I think in the 1800s, I didn't even know they had pipelines back that far. Naturally
8 it's not in very good shape, they're trying to build a new pipeline through Northern
9 Azerbaijan and through Georgia over to the Black Sea and I believe that they might have
10 started that project by now. I went over after I was retired on a aviation project in
11 Azerbaijan as a consultant for a couple of weeks and they were getting a lot closer to
12 pipeline then. I think they they've probably have got it under way by now. It was either
13 that or going through Iran from the southbound and of course that's not a very good way
14 to go, at this time anyway.

15 SM: What about other former Soviet States the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia,
16 Lithuania, Ukraine?

17 JM: The only other one that I spent any time in, I made a numerous trips to
18 Warsaw in Poland, but we did have some people...there's some people in our department
19 that were working in the Baltic states and I can't...I think it was freight that they were
20 interested in up there, but I don't believe that they ever did anything up there.

21 SM: How about the Balkans?

22 JM: No. No, we didn't do anything in the Balkans.

23 SM: Just too violent?

24 JM: What?

25 SM: Was it just too violent?

26 JM: Again I think it was strictly from an economy, we couldn't see a way to
27 make any money there at that time.

28 SM: Okay. You mentioned Turkey...

29 JM: Uzbekistan?

30 SM: No, you mentioned Turkey.

31 JM: Turkmenistan?

1 SM: No, Turkey proper.

2 JM: Oh Turkey, yeah, oh yeah. Yeah we had a number of projects in Turkey.
3 Of course Turkey's very prosperous, there's a lot of tourist trade, there's a lot of industry,
4 and I found Turkey to be...I don't consider it a third world country, I consider it to be
5 western [?]. I enjoyed Turkey, in fact it's one of the few places that I've traveled in for
6 AMR that I'd like to go back on vacation, I like Turkey.

7 SM: Were you successful in establishing business there?

8 JM: Yeah we did two or three things that were run out of the European office, run
9 out of...we had a pretty big operation in Paris and another big operation in England at
10 Heathrow. The projects that we ran in Turkey were run out of there. It seemed to me
11 that we had one that involved what they called a...where you put the money in, build,
12 operate, and transfer, BOT. You build it, you operate it for a period of time to get your
13 money back and then you transfer it over to the local control. They did a couple of
14 terminals that developing airports along the MED and in the interior and in fact they even
15 worked on a terminal expansion at...oh gosh...trying to think of a major airport in
16 Turkey, right on the Bosphorus...what the heck is it?...Istanbul.

17 SM: Okay. Where were you and what were you doing during the Gulf War?

18 JM: During the Gulf War? Well we were setting up flight operations in the
19 states, like I said at the end of the Gulf War the first airplane to land at the Kuwait
20 Airport even before...the first civilian airplane to land there, before they had the tower in
21 operation was a gulf stream IV on our certificate. It went in there to fly a ninety day
22 project for a Kuwaiti Airways to reorganize the airline and getting the aircraft and
23 equipment in there.

24 SM: Was that part of your project that you set up?

25 JM: Yeah, I negotiated the Contract. I went over to Kuwait and negotiated the
26 Contract and had the wire transfer a fund set up and I of course negotiated for the use of
27 the airplane to leave the United States. It was a brand new airplane and I had to talk the
28 owner into letting it go for ninety days...but yeah I put that together.

29 SM: Okay. Did you work at all in other Middle Eastern countries in terms of the
30 Saudi...?

1 JM: We had a project in Jordan. I talked to the principles, but I didn't actually go
2 on site. They wanted us to open an FBO in Jordan. They said that there was a big
3 demand for civilian flight training and civilian aircraft sales and what have you and it
4 really sounded good on the surface, but I couldn't convince our powers that be primarily
5 because at that time I was working for the airline services side and that really would have
6 belonged with the AMR combs side. So my boss wasn't too interested in that.

7 SM: How about other countries, Syria, Israel, Saudi Arabia...?

8 JM: No, no and I didn't do any business in any of the other mid-east countries.

9 SM: Okay. For all these different projects, as you were going to different
10 countries to see about conducting business there for AMR, how much of the specifics of
11 those potential contracts would have to be relayed through U.S. government channels?
12 Anything at all?

13 JM: No, no. I don't believe so. We ran everything through our legal department.
14 Of course American Airlines has got a...they've got a legal department that puts some
15 major law firms to shame for the number of lawyers they've got and of course they use
16 lawyers out in the field close to wherever they're needed as well as their company
17 lawyers. I had a fulltime lawyer assigned to all the projects that I went on and I ran
18 everything by him, all the Contracts and everything of course. I came up with a...for all
19 these third world countries we ran into a lot of things that we wanted to make sure that
20 we got into every single Contract and I developed a term sheet for if it isn't in your
21 Contract you better find out why type of thing. It made it easy for the legal department.
22 We all carried the term sheets and we would make sure that all those squares were filled,
23 then we'd turn that over the legal department they'd draw up a Contract.

24 SM: How about on site? When you'd go into these different countries was it
25 typical for you to make a stop in real quick to the embassy just to check in, let them know
26 that you were in-country conducting business?

27 JM: No I didn't. You mean with the U.S. Embassy?

28 SM: Yes sir.

29 JM: No. I'd become so disgusted with the U.S. Embassy in my dealings around
30 the country that I avoided them like the plague. My last experience with dealing with the
31 U.S. Embassy was...well actually it was on that project in South America, come to think

1 of it. I'd ferried an airplane to the U.S., my co-captain was an ex-Air America pilot. In
2 fact he flew my last trip, the last trip that I flew ferrying airplanes to Clark Air Force
3 Base this man was my co-pilot, now years later I'm flying with him in South America,
4 which was going to me my last trip I was flying back to Miami and then I was going back
5 to AMR. We had a real sick airplane, we were taking it back. One of the engines was
6 due for change and temps and pressure were running...pressure's running low, temps's
7 running high type of thing and real borderline. On the first leg of the trip we were
8 supposed to make a tech stop in...oh heck, the capital, not the capital but the seaport
9 city...I can't believe I can't think of that in all the time I spent there. Just north of Peru,
10 how's your geography? Goyaquil Ecuador! Goyaquil Ecuador was my tech stop.
11 Before I got to Goyaquil I lost a transfer pump that transfers fuel from the drop tanks to
12 the main tank and I caught it when there was only about a hundred gallon imbalance, but
13 if it had gone to four hundred gallons we'd have had a real problem landing with 425
14 gallons of fuel in one tank and the other one empty. So I could no longer use the fuel and
15 drop tank and limited my range significantly. So where I was scheduled to go from
16 Goyaquil to...oh heck...it's over on the northeast coast of Columbia...that was going to
17 be my tech stop for fuel before I jumped off. I was going to Jamaica and offload some
18 company cargo in Jamaica and then to Miami, but I couldn't make it without a tech stop
19 in route so half way was Kalie Columbia. Now I had to go to the embassy and work out
20 a clearance with the Columbian government to make a tech stop in Kalie and that was my
21 last time that I'd gone to the embassy and it was kind of interesting because the character
22 I met there was right out of a Graham Green novel, in the seersucker suit
23 and...(laughing)...he actually was very helpful, he was a friendly enough guy, but we
24 had to get the clearance and he had to get to several departments and talk to several
25 people in the civil aviation of Ecuador and Columbia on the phone, but he did negotiate it
26 and I managed to make a tech stop in Kali. Then between Kali and...Baronkia, Baronkia
27 was the place I was originally going to. Then in between Kali and Baronkia we lost the
28 engine that we thought was good. We're already three engine ferrying because one of the
29 jets was out, which happened to be the same side as the recip that we lost and now the
30 other engine we're running with the cowl flaps full open and the oil cooler full open and
31 the temps are still going in the red. We got a real bad situation on our hands and it's

1 dark, it's at night and we can no longer maintain the MEA, the minimum enroute altitude
2 in the mountains. So we look on the map for the nearest airport and there was an airport
3 right on the airway that had a instrument approach into it and was a VOR-DMA approach
4 and I said, "Okay, we're going in there." And I can't think of the name right now, but it
5 will come to me I'm sure in a minute. As we start...oh we tell Baronkia center next that
6 we've got an emergency and we're going to land at this airport and they said, "No, no
7 you can't land there because at night they turn off all the lights and the tower is not on the
8 air. You must go to..." oh it's a resort seacoast town on the northern coast of Columbia.
9 Anyway they told us to go there, well that was an hour and fifteen minutes flying time
10 from where we were at and we said, "No way we're landing at this other airport lights or
11 no lights!" We set up...while we were making all these conversations to Baronkia
12 center, an Avianca 727 that was hearing our conversation on the same VHF channel came
13 in and said that he would do a big orbit up there at 37 thousand feet and make sure that
14 we were safely on the ground and then relay to Baronkia that we were safe. We thanked
15 him and went ahead and made our approach and landed uneventfully, but when we
16 landed we could see all these guys with guns coming out towards the airplane. I told the
17 Avianca pilot, I said, "Ah, we've got a lot of guys out here that don't look friendly.
18 They've got guns..." He said, "Oh senior you're in big trouble!" I was like, "Can you do
19 me a favor? When you get..." He was going to Bogotá. "When you get to Bogotá
20 would you call the U.S. Embassy and tell them that the state department airplane is on
21 the ground at this airport?" and he said he would and he did thank god because we really
22 got the third degree there. The night commandant that we met was right out of a B Grade
23 movie. I'll tell you this guy hated Norte Americanos number one, number two he
24 thought we were druggies, which he didn't really mind because I believe he was a
25 druggie himself, but he wanted to rip us off. Then when he found out that we really were
26 international narcotics matters he got really difficult to deal with. Oh man, he split the
27 crew, took my co-pilot and my air freight specialist to the terminal building to interrogate
28 and he kept myself and our flight engineer...we carried flight mechanics on those
29 airplanes...out at the airplane while he was going through all of the cargo. They broke
30 open all of our suitcases, emptied the clothes on the floor, walked on them to show their
31 complete disdain for us, and every time I would show my displeasure I'd get a gun stuck

1 in my stomach. A very bad night, very bad night, but the next morning the federal police
2 were there and we were put on the first airline flight out in the morning and left the
3 airplane there. Federal police told the local police to guard the airplane, make sure
4 nothing happened to it until we could repair it and get it out. The day after we left it blew
5 up with a thermite grenade in the cockpit and burned to the ground. (laughing)

6 SM: Oh for crying out loud. And what happened after that?

7 JM: Well we went to Bogotá and awaited word from the company what they
8 wanted us to do. They finally told us to go back to Lima rather than go to the states from
9 Bogotá and so we went back to Lima and the crews that were still staying there went
10 back to work and I got on the airline about a day or two later and came back to the states.

11 SM: Okay. You knew that you'd be leaving?

12 JM: Oh yeah, I was supposed to leave...I had all my baggage and all the stuff that
13 Sandy had bought down there with me. It was kind of a funny thing. I had several boxes
14 of Alpaca rugs and sweaters and all kinds of junk that she had bought from the several
15 months that we were down there and I took them on the airplane because I was going to
16 Miami and I was staying back there. I was going back to AMR and it was just a way to
17 get all that stuff home without shipping it on the airline. Then when they told us to go
18 back to Lima I've got, oh about three or four suitcases and boxes full of Peruvian rugs
19 and Peruvian sweaters and all the art...you know the stuff you buy in Peru. When I came
20 back to Peru they looked through all this stuff and all the customs people were just
21 absolutely amazed. They pulled over to their supervisor and they looked at this stuff and
22 they look at me like what's this idiot bringing all this Peruvian stuff into Peru for!
23 (laughing) They said, "Peru?" and I said, "Yeah!" They just scratched their heads, "Go
24 on." (laughing)

25 SM: (laughing) Too funny. Okay, well is there anything else concerning your
26 time with ARM that you'd like to discuss?

27 JM: No I can't think of anything. There's all kinds of stuff, but I mean I think
28 we've covered the highest high part.

29 SM: Okay. Well, I guess we could close with some grander questions if you will.

30 JM: Sure.

1 SM: I was just wondering. In what ways was your service in Laos...in what
2 ways did it affect your life the most and would you do anything over again?

3 JM: Well number one I think all of us were doing the right thing in Laos. We all
4 believed in the domino theory...that was what our government certainly believed in at the
5 time and...we believed that the work we were doing in Laos was probably the way that
6 they war should've been fought in Vietnam because with a fraction of the U.S. resources
7 they were keeping several North Vietnamese division at bay for years while we were
8 getting chewed up little by little in Vietnam. In fact not little by little, big! We thought it
9 was an excellent holding action. I think we thought we probably could hold on forever,
10 but the real sad thing was that the most important resource that we had, which was the
11 Hmong men were being chewed up like cannon fodder and after we'd gone through the
12 majority of the Hmong Army there wasn't anything left to fight with. That was probably
13 the real disaster of the whole thing is we whipped out a whole generation of young men
14 up there. But...no we all believed in what we were doing I think to a man. Rather proud
15 of what we were doing, we thought we were doing something that not every Tom, Dick,
16 and Harry could do. I would say that my years in Laos when I'd get up in the morning
17 and shave, I'd look in the mirror, I wouldn't have traded places with anybody in the
18 world. I thoroughly enjoyed what I was doing. I felt quite a bit of pride in what we were
19 doing. If you're an aviator it was an absolute [?] flying in the world, you couldn't get, it
20 didn't get any better then that.

21 SM: Are there any lessons that you think we should take away from that
22 experience, things that maybe we haven't yet?

23 JM: You know, I spent the years that I lived in Laos and Vietnam with very
24 little...you know, no television, and newspapers and what have you...I did a lot of
25 reading and I went through Will and Aerial Durant's World History from one end to the
26 other and at the end they published a very small book called A Lesson from History and
27 that seems to be the way it is. We learn very little over the years from what we've done
28 and the U.S. seems to make the same mistakes over and over again. I guess I'm getting
29 cynical in my old age, but I cringe some of the things that we do, some of the statements
30 that our leaders make that I just can't believe what I'm hearing sometimes because we

1 haven't learned from mistakes that we've made in the past. I guess that's just human
2 nature, I'm not sure we ever will.

3 SM: Is there anything else, in addition...you mentioned earlier the way we
4 handled aid basically just like Vietnam that hasn't changed...

5 JM: Oh, now aid...No it hasn't changed and it should change. Our state
6 department is...it needs to be over hauled from top to bottom. We put in a new secretary
7 of state, but all those old winnies that do nothing...the average state department
8 employee, particularly the ones bases abroad, feel that the fact that they're living there in
9 that third world country or wherever it is that they're living is their job and try to get
10 them to do anything else. Try to get them to do what their job really is, like maybe help
11 you with a visa or help you with a problem that you have with the local economy or the
12 local police or a landlord or what have you...no way! They're not effective. They're not
13 effective at their job and their polices, other then suck, I don't know what word to use. I
14 guess one of the stories...I've never met the gentlemen but I heard if from other pilots...
15 In Vietnam there was an old well driller that was drilling water wells throughout the
16 central highlands in Vietnam and every village he went to that didn't have water he'd get
17 them water. He would teach them how to drill a well or help them drill the well and he'd
18 get the dang well drilled. Later on US-Aid became very bureaucratic and they decided
19 that this well driller that didn't even have a high school education just wasn't, he wasn't
20 educated and sophisticated enough to be working in the foreign service and they replaced
21 him with what we call the Tennis Shoes and Tommy Gun Crowd. They hired a bunch of
22 young college graduates, engineers and political scientist and what have you and brought
23 them in and...they were living a big adventure, but they accomplished absolutely
24 nothing. I understand after that old well driller left there was never another water well in
25 any of those Hamlets ever drilled again. I think that'd be just ethical of the way our state
26 department operates. In Laos we had that old pig farmer, as you know, you probably
27 have heard. We called him Pop Pule, Mr. Pop and he would have been in the same boat
28 except that by the time US-Aid realized who he was up country he was too powerful and
29 had too many friends to get him thrown out. But the people that were really effective,
30 they didn't fit the profile of what the state department felt that their Foreign Service
31 officer should fit, they were out. No matter how effective they were. So you get the

1 mind set and the same mentality and when they finally retire after doing nothing for
2 twenty or thirty years the people that come in are clones of them and they don't do
3 anything for the next twenty or thirty years. I think our state department needs to be
4 completely overhauled from top to bottom and the mission from the very top they could
5 change that overnight by just saying 'we are not doing things through the local
6 governments, we're doing it from the...if they want our help, we'll help them if we deem
7 it that we should, but we will administer the program, we will spend the money, we'll
8 decide who's going to do the building and who's going to do the farming, etcetera. The
9 local government won't make those decisions.' And if they don't agree to that I wouldn't
10 give them any aid. That way we wouldn't have so many foreign desplets living high in
11 Paris and various other places around the world with millions or hundreds of millions of
12 dollars in Swiss bank accounts.

13 SM: Well, do you think the United States should employ troops like we did in
14 Southeast Asia?

15 JM: I think that we had to. It all led to finally the end of the Cold War. If we
16 would have sat back and let them just run over Vietnam I'm sure Laos and Thailand, the
17 whole works would've gone. We needed to make a stand, it might not have been for the
18 right reasons, but we needed to make a stand. Our planning in that stand was poor, but I
19 believe it needed to be made.

20 SM: What about contemporary deployment or more recent deployments, things
21 like Haiti, Somalia, the Balkans?

22 JM: Well again, I'm not sure that they didn't need to be made, but again the
23 planning was poor. You know there's something that I don't understand from the very
24 top of our government down, it's a...we never address a problem directly because we
25 have preconceived ideas that go back for generations as to how these things will be
26 settled diplomatically, how they'll be talked out, and then if it runs into a military
27 operation how that's going to run. For instance, I'll give you a perfect example. We've
28 got a despot, we know that he's a drug smuggler; we know he's a criminal, in Noriega in
29 Panama. What do we do? We send in a war! We send in troops, we kill the local troops,
30 we kill the local civilians, we create all kinds of havoc to capture this idiot. But we know
31 he's the problem there's not question about that, we're willing to kill hundreds of people,

1 innocent people for it. Why not just send the Marine sniper team down there and shoot
2 the SOB? I mean that's the way I think we ought to conduct our business instead of the
3 way we're conducting it. I mean if there's absolutely no question he's the problem and
4 he'd got to go, then address your forces directly at him, not at the local soldiers and the
5 local populace. I guess that would have happened in the Balkans is Milosevic, if it'd
6 taken him out directly the war would've probably been over in short order, but
7 instead...oh look at all the havoc we brought over the whole dad gung country, but that's
8 find because it's just not nice to shoot a public leader, you can't do that but you can kill
9 all the women and children and bomb the Chinese Embassy that's okay.

10 SM: Is there anything else that you'd like to discuss?

11 JM: No not really. I guess I'm not all that right wing although I guess I sound
12 like it, but really I think that when we knew we've got a problem we knew exactly where
13 it is we ought to address the problem head on at the top rather than fight these stupid
14 wars. Why send all these troops out there and line up all these tanks when it isn't
15 necessary? You take out fifteen, twenty or a hundred people and the dang war is over.
16 We've got the capability to do that, but we don't.

17 SM: Do you think that would have been a better alternative let's say to the Gulf
18 War?

19 JM: Yes I think it would've! I think it would have concentrated right on
20 Baghdad and right on the president and his immediate staff I think it would have been
21 better than killing all those dang soldiers. You know, we like body counts like
22 Westmoreland killing all those stupid soldiers and they weren't the problem. They
23 problem was a handful of... It seemed to me that the PhDs that were on our IR program
24 they did a lot of little games of how to end the Vietnam War and they figured, they even
25 knew the names of about 1200 people, if you eliminate them the war is over and not only
26 is it over for tomorrow, but it's probably over forever. But instead of those 1200 people
27 we'll kill millions or hundreds of thousands of people because we've got it engrained in
28 us you just can't kill heads of states, I mean that's really a nasty way to play the game.
29 You can slaughter children and old ladies, blow up nurseries and what have you, but you
30 can't kill a head of state.

1 SM: Yeah, but none of those things are really condoned either. I mean there have
2 been mishaps for those things happen...

3 JM: But why aren't they condoned? If they are the problem, if they are the ones
4 that are waging war and they ultimately going to me responsible for killing hundreds of
5 thousands of people why don't you go after them?

6 SM: No I mean the killing of innocents, woman, children, old people.

7 JM: Oh but that's...it's inevitable in war. It's going to happen. Every war I
8 think that's ever been fought they get killed and it's a shame that it happens that way.

9 SM: But that was minimized in the war in Laos?

10 JM: Yes it was although I'm sure that the...we did a lot of bombing in Laos. B-
11 52s dropped bombs in Laos and some of those bombs hit villages and killed innocent
12 children and women you can be sure of that.

13 SM: While you were in-country did you hear specific stories about that?

14 JM: Oh I've heard a lot of stories about it, yeah. I can't give you any real
15 specifics, but I know they were. It's inevitable you know. Particularly in a B-52 in one
16 of those strikes when they're dropping tons of bombs you know and they stretch for a
17 mile or so, anybody that's in that range that happens to be there...if it's a farmer and his
18 rice paddy or a mother fixing dinner for her kids, she's going to get hit.

19 SM: Well, what was... I guess what was the most positive thing you took away
20 from your experience?

21 JM: Well, I... Well I really have never given it any thought as what positive thing
22 I've personally took away from it. A real sense of accomplishment I think in that we did
23 a very difficult job and I think we did it very well. It's hard to put something positive
24 when the outcome was not what you wanted at all. You know we left a lot of good
25 people there just like we left in Vietnam. Did you happen to read, I believe it was
26 Schleisenger that was the...he held a cabinet post under Nixon and then Ford inherited
27 him and when Ford told him to get all the third country nationals, get every airplane
28 available and get them out of Vietnam when he thought it was going to fall and he just
29 turned his back on that and never did it, nothing happened to him. Why not? He
30 should've under a prison somewhere as far as I'm concerned, he disobeyed a direct order
31 from his Commander in Chief. I've read that in a historical book so I assume it's true.

1 He also disobeyed a direct order on the Mayaguez incident where the Cambodians
2 attacked our ship and held [?] prisoner and of course we send in the troops, the Marines
3 and they freed them and then old Ford ordered him to make retaliatory strikes to really
4 teach them a lesson and he didn't do it because he just didn't think it was proper. I can't
5 understand that. I know that if an officer had given me, if a superior officer would've
6 given me an order and I didn't do it there's no doubt of what would've happened to me,
7 why isn't that turkey where he belongs.

8 SM: Well, I guess when I asked you if there was anything positive in addition to
9 the pride you felt I know the outcome wasn't what you wanted...

10 JM: No I think that that they only thing that you weight positives then you can
11 probably put on it is that we probably freed up some additional forces in Vietnam and
12 maybe saved a few lives of the people over there and of course we did save the life of
13 some military airmen that they picked up in Laos. We probably all in all I would
14 probably say from the poor people that we directly affected it was more negative then
15 positive unfortunately. Vang Pao's living in the United States and there's several
16 thousand other Hmong living in the United States and for them I guess life is better, but
17 for all the ones that were left behind it sure wasn't or the ones that were left for
18 generations in the refugee camps in Thailand.

19 SM: Speaking of people left behind, to your knowledge were any Americans left
20 in Laos.

21 JM: I don't...you know I thought that Ritter and Townlee and Wisenbock may
22 have been prisoners but as time wore on I'm convinced that they probably died with their
23 airplane. I think that there were prisoners in Laos a lot longer then we thought, but I
24 can't imagine them being alive after reading books like Ernie Brace's A Code to Keep
25 and the other Air American helicopter pilots and the guy that was with him on their
26 Report to be Alive book. I don't know if you've read that or not. They were on a H-34
27 that was shot down and they were captured. They conditions they lived under you just
28 couldn't...I don't think an American could live that long. On my trips to Vietnam a
29 friend of mine, Brian Johnson, you probably know Brian...I knew he's not one of your
30 friends I'm sure...but Brian went to Hanoi, rented a car and driver and drove all the way
31 to Saigon a few years back and in Saigon he looked up his old...the man and woman that

1 worked for him as their housekeeper and gardener and he found them. They had spent a
2 couple of years in a reeducation camp and they were living in poverty and of course they
3 sure as well weren't happy with the way things went, but they said something that was
4 very, very profound. They said that if we had won the war and the North Vietnamese
5 would've been defeated, there might have always been this thought that maybe
6 communism really was something that was great and an opportunity that they missed, but
7 now that the Americans had left and they had lived under communism there was
8 absolutely no doubt in their mind about what a bad thing it was and it doesn't work. So
9 from that standpoint I guess, although they're still communist, nothing positive's come
10 out of it yet.

11 SM: But they are trying to open the economy, they are making...

12 JM: They're very slowly...they've let up and a lot and they're economy is
13 opening up and maybe someday they'll be a democracy again, but boy it's going to be a
14 long time I'm afraid. The old hard liners hang on real tight, they're hanging on real tight
15 in Laos too.

16 SM: Have you been back to Laos?

17 JM: I haven't been back to Laos but I have several friends who have. Of course I
18 talked to the people in the MIA/POW thing about their problems with operating in Laos
19 and they're still hard liners that are hanging on to their old beliefs.

20 SM: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

21 JM: Oh, not really. Not that I can think of.

22 SM: Okay. Well let me put an official ending on this. Thank you, this will end
23 the interview with Mr. John McRainey.