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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with John Hodgin
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
February 3, 2003
Transcribed by Shannon Geach**

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

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone; I'm conducting an oral history
2 interview with Mr. John Hodgin. Today is February 3, 2003. Mr. Hodgin, you're in
3 Fayetteville, North Carolina and I'm in Lubbock, Texas at the Special Collections
4 Library in the interview room. Sir, if we could begin with some biographical information
5 on yourself, tell us where you were born and when you were born and a little bit about
6 your childhood.

7 John Hodgin: Well, Richard I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina on
8 November 4, 1936. I grew up really, high school and college in Burlington, North
9 Carolina. Went to Elon College from Burlington, that's where I joined the Air Force.

10 RV: So basically you grew up in Burlington?

11 JH: Yes. I lived for a couple years in Pennsylvania when my father was in the
12 war. Then I lived for four years in Wilmington. Other than that, it's Burlington.

13 RV: Tell me what your memories are of your childhood.

14 JH: Just playing around, having fun. No problem at all.

15 RV: You said your father was in the war?

16 JH: Well, he wasn't in the war, but he was making seaplanes up in Pennsylvania,
17 in Allentown for the Defense Department. He didn't have to be drafted if he was doing
18 Defense Department work.

19 RV: Were any of your other relatives involved in the war?

1 JH: My brother, an older brother was in the Navy for four years. He served on a
2 ship. He got out I think just prior to the Korean conflict. He wasn't really in a war.
3 RV: He wasn't in the theatre of action. He was in after the war basically?
4 JH: He was in after the Second World War and prior to the Korean War. So he
5 was there during a peacetime.
6 RV: How many other brothers and sisters did you have?
7 JH: Ok, I've got another brother who joined the Air Force about a year after, no
8 several years after I did. His first overseas base was over in England. He died over there
9 in a car wreck while I was PCS (Permanent Change of Station) to Okinawa. That's the
10 only other ones that were in the military.
11 RV: Did you have any siblings who did not serve?
12 JH: No, that's it. I had a sister, she didn't serve of course.
13 RV: Right. Do you have any memories of World War II as a young boy growing
14 up in Burlington?
15 JH: Yes, when I was really young the only thing I remember when I was young
16 in Greensboro, before I moved to Burlington was that they would come by and tell you to
17 cut off your lights and everything because they were having these warnings, you know?
18 They had black outs so that the towns wouldn't show up. I can remember that, that's the
19 only thing. I was really, really young then.
20 RV: How much contact did you have with your siblings who were in the
21 military? The one that was older than you that had joined...?
22 JH: The Navy?
23 RV: Yes, sir.
24 JH: He would write to us now and then. He'd come home. I was impressed with
25 his Navy uniform. He gave me one of those white Navy hats that I could wear. It
26 impressed me. In fact, I had planned on joining the Navy if I ever had to go in.
27 RV: Was he a pretty big influence on you as far as joining the military?
28 JH: No, he wasn't at all.
29 RV: How about your parents, what did they do for a living?
30 JH: My father back then, in fact his whole life was a supervisor at a hosiery mill.
31 RV: Did you mother work?

1 JH: No, she didn't.

2 RV: Would you describe your childhood? Were you guys well off financially or
3 were you middle-income class?

4 JH: No, we were middle-class. I'm not sure, but it was probably a little bit lower
5 middle-class.

6 RV: You said you spent five years in Wilmington, is that correct?

7 JH: Yes.

8 RV: Was that during your high school years?

9 JH: No that was during grade school years. My father was transferred down to a
10 hosiery mill there. It was up until the seventh grade, from the fourth grade to the seventh
11 grade.

12 RV: After the seventh grade, where did you guys move?

13 JH: We moved to Burlington, that's where I ended up.

14 RV: Tell me about your high school years, what do you remember most about
15 them?

16 JH: High school was there in Burlington. It was a new high school, Walter
17 Williams and really a beautiful high school. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed high school. I met a
18 lot of friends who I still meet and play around with.

19 RV: Did you participate in sports?

20 JH: No. I was not into sports other than ping-pong. I ended up being a State
21 Champion ping-pong player. Also I was interested in chess back then so I didn't play
22 any of that other stuff.

23 RV: How did you become so good at ping-pong?

24 JH: I got a job at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in Burlington.
25 I was running the snack bar and there were two ping-pong tables there. I just played it
26 everyday and we got some good players down there. Some people who were qualified to
27 be state champions were my opponents. I just played so much I got good.

28 RV: You got good enough to be state Champion.

29 JH: I ended up being a three-state champion. North Carolina, South Carolina and
30 Virginia.

31 RV: Wow. Was this when you were in high school?

1 JH: That was the last year of high school and then through college at Elon.
2 RV: Were you a good student in high school?
3 JH: In high school I was better than average, not top.
4 RV: What were your favorite subjects?
5 JH: You mean there's a favorite subject?
6 RV: What were the subjects you could stand best, I guess?
7 JH: I enjoyed the Math. It was hard for me to keep the History in my mind. I
8 enjoyed the English and the languages. I took French in high school and then I took
9 Spanish in college. Today can barely say a word or two.
10 RV: Did you parents emphasize education? Was it expected for you to go to
11 college after high school?
12 JH: No, my father did not want me to go to college. I don't know why. Maybe
13 he didn't want to pay for it. He wanted me to join the Army and get that over with so that
14 I'd grow up. Then after I got out, maybe go to college.
15 RV: What year did you graduate high school?
16 JH: In 1955.
17 RV: Did you go straight to Elon after that?
18 JH: Yes.
19 RV: What was that experience like for you?
20 JH: I was living at home and driving over there everyday. It wasn't really like
21 being at a college. There's a difference when you're living home in Burlington. Elon of
22 course is only five miles outside of Burlington. It was just kind of an extension of high
23 school.
24 RV: Did you go four years and finish?
25 JH: I went three and half years and quit.
26 RV: Oh really?
27 JH: Yes.
28 RV: Were you like one semester short of completing?
29 JH: Yes.
30 RV: Why did you quit?

1 JH: My father didn't support me for college. I had to go on my own. I was
2 working at that time at Western Electric, night shift loading boxcars and sleeping through
3 college. So I was learning nothing and doing nothing and I didn't enjoy it. I said, "Well
4 I'm going to sit out until I make some money and then go back and finish or not go at
5 all." It's not doing anything for me. So I sat out for a semester. During the end of that
6 semester I decided, "Hey I'm going to get drafted if I sit out," because the draft was still
7 going on, "and I certainly don't want to be in the Army." So, I ended up in the Air Force.

8 RV: So you went ahead and volunteered?

9 JH: That's a fairly long story. While I was at Western Electric, there was a
10 young boy working with me who wanted to be a pilot. He said he wanted to do it real
11 bad. He was going to go over and take a test to join the Aviation Cadets and be a pilot
12 and would I go with him over to Raleigh to do that? I said, "No, I'm not interested in that
13 at all." He said, "Well, you know if you take the day off and go over there, you get
14 paid." I said, "What do you mean? Western Electric will pay me if I go over there?" He
15 said, "Yes, even if you pass it you don't have to join." I said, "Hey, I'll go with you." So
16 we went over there. He didn't pass the test, I did. They called me and said, "We'd like
17 for you to go down to Seymour Johnson for three more days of test, including a
18 physical." I said, "No, I'm not interested in joining the Air Force. My brother was in the
19 Navy and I'm probably going to join that." They said, "You don't have to join. Even if
20 you qualify you still don't have to join. It's up to you. And for that three days, your
21 company will pay you." Working on boxcars or going down there? They sent me down
22 to Seymour Johnson for three days. I passed the test and came back, still with no
23 intention of getting in the Air Force. Come September when my friends started going
24 back to school, I said, "I don't want to sit around here and I don't really feel like going
25 back to college." I called them up and said, "Ok, here I am."

26 RV: Was this 1958 or '59?

27 JH: That was in '59.

28 RV: You went ahead and enlisted?

29 JH: Yes, into the Aviation Cadet program.

30 RV: Where did you go when you first enlisted?

1 JH: They sent me down to San Antonio for the first part of my training. It lasted
2 a little less than a year. The last two or three months probably, were down at Harlingen
3 Air Force Base, but the first part was down in San Antonio.

4 RV: What was that initial training like for you?

5 JH: It was weird. They were really tough on you. Get you up against the wall
6 every day and sit there and fuss at you for about a couple of hours. The rest of the time
7 was either, cleaning up your room and putting everything one inch from each other or
8 else outside marching.

9 RV: How did you deal with that military discipline?

10 JH: I dealt with it very good. I think I'm a type of perfectionist anyway. I had no
11 problem with meeting all their requirements. As a matter of fact I was probably the only
12 one; I never marched while I was there for a penalty. That was your penalty if you did
13 something wrong, march for an hour or two.

14 RV: What kind of training did you have? Was it more physical and just mental
15 or did you have some classroom?

16 JH: I had the classroom training. It was physical and mental. They taught you
17 Air Force policy. They taught you navigator policy because it was a navigator training.
18 Then we had training flights that we had to pass, classes of everything we had to learn.
19 Had to learn the name of all the stars and all that stuff, you know.

20 RV: How did you adapt to all that?

21 JH: I enjoyed it really. I didn't get enough sleep every night. I didn't get enough
22 food to eat everyday. But I had a lot of good friends, and I got along pretty good in that
23 program.

24 RV: What would you say was the most challenging aspect of that training?

25 JH: Most challenging was, I don't know what the most challenging was.
26 Probably the physical part of it.

27 RV: Had you wanted to fly? Did you have a desire to fly before?

28 JH: No, never had a desire to fly. I wasn't scared of it. It was just there was no
29 interest there.

30 RV: How did you deal with your first flights, what was it like for you?

1 JH: They were interesting and hard. I had a hard time figuring out where we
2 were. I think throughout my life I had that same problem.

3 RV: Were you training to be a navigator?

4 JH: Yes, navigator. The reason was, when I was down in Seymour Johnson
5 getting my physicals they had discovered astigmatism in my eyes and said that I did not
6 qualify to be a pilot because of my eyes. I was accepted as a navigator.

7 RV: Were you as a navigator able to improve up in your lack of direction and
8 finding out where you were?

9 JH: Throughout the years I did. I learned that if a pilot ever asked you where you
10 are don't ever say, "I don't know." Say, "Oh, 50 feet left of course." That makes them
11 feel good. Although deep inside you have no idea where you are.

12 RV: When you went to Harlingen did you do more flight training there?

13 JH: Yes. I did some more there and that was the final part where we graduated.

14 RV: This was in 1960?

15 JH: Yes.

16 RV: From Harlingen where did you go?

17 JH: Harlingen they gave me orders when we graduated to go to B-52 training. I
18 was ranked 13th in a class of, I don't know about 250 people. Then they got some
19 operational assignments down there that they had to fill. They didn't know how to do it,
20 so they called us all into an auditorium and said, "We're going to take away all of your
21 assignments and we'll start all over. We're going to go down by class ranking and let
22 you pick where you want to go." They didn't do this before because people didn't enjoy
23 B-52s. B-52 people were at the bottom of the class always and the Air Force didn't like
24 that. Anyway for this particular one since they got the operational assignments they went
25 down the list. When it came to me, there was an assignment to Pope, North Carolina. I
26 had no idea what kind of airplanes or anything. But it was North Carolina and I took it.

27 RV: What planes had you been training in up to this point?

28 JH: Those T-29s.

29 RV: So when you go to Pope, what were you trained in?

1 JH: Pope had C-123s. They had moved over a few years before that from C-
2 119s, but they had C-123s, which were propeller driven airplanes that had no
3 pressurization. So you couldn't go too high.

4 RV: These were more transport, supply aircraft.

5 JH: Transports, yes.

6 RV: This is 1961 or '62?

7 JH: That was in September of 1960 when I arrived at Pope.

8 RV: Were you able to see your family at all when you went back to North
9 Carolina?

10 JH: Yes, that was the good part of it; I was so close to them. I was within an
11 hour and half drive to my family.

12 RV: Were they supportive of you being in the military at this point?

13 JH: Yes they enjoyed that. They were impressed that I was an officer.

14 RV: Tell me what your training at Pope was like? You were trained as a
15 navigator in the C-123s?

16 JH: Yes, I was. Our usual missions were we'd fly maybe three or four days a
17 week. We'd fly an hour, an hour and a half course around to the Ft. Bragg drop zones,
18 drop out these paratroopers and come on back. It was map reading around and drop them
19 out and come back. We did that most of the time. We'd go TDY (Temporary Duty)
20 down to Panama. On weekend trips sometimes down to Bermuda or down to Puerto
21 Rico. Our daily routine was usually dropping the paratroopers.

22 RV: How did you find it? Were you getting better at becoming a navigator or
23 was it difficult?

24 JH: Yes, I fit in. I wasn't outstanding, I wasn't bottom. I just fit in pretty good.
25 I was the newest person at Pope. They didn't get many 2nd Lieutenants there. I was
26 learning stuff as I was going on.

27 RV: What would you do down in Panama, you said you went down there?

28 JH: We went down there, it was Army exercise. A week or two. We dropped
29 paratroopers on some drop zones down there.

30 RV: So, you're mainly hauling men around?

31 JH: Hauling men around mostly. Sometimes we'd just haul cargo around.

1 RV: How long were you at Pope?

2 JH: Until I retired.

3 RV: That was your home base, basically.

4 JH: That was my home base. But I was overseas a lot. Probably more than I

5 was back at Pope. That was the only stateside base after my Cadets that I ever was at.

6 RV: Ok, so tell me what happened as far as where was your first deployment;

7 serious, overseas deployment while you were at Pope?

8 JH: That was for the Ranch Hand.

9 RV: What year was that?

10 JH: That was in 1962.

11 RV: Were you going to be flying C-123s?

12 JH: No, we took off in November of '61 but we didn't get to Vietnam until '62.

13 RV: Was this in C-123s?

14 JH: Yes.

15 RV: Can you describe what that was like when you went overseas and how you

16 felt about that?

17 JH: We started out, we were picked. People came down from Air Force and

18 picked some volunteers to go over there. I remember I had a meeting with the Wing

19 Commander. He talked to all of these volunteers for about five minutes and wanted to

20 know if we'd volunteer for a top-secret mission. He said something like, "If you get shot

21 down, the country may even say that you were acting on your own accord. Where you're

22 going you can't tell anyone, including your family." It was really interesting to me. I

23 said, "Sure I'll volunteer," just because it was exciting. So he said, "Ok, well where

24 you're going to be going, if your selected is to South Vietnam." Well, I had heard the

25 word South Vietnam, just like Djibouti you have no idea where it is. I went home and

26 looked it up in the encyclopedia. It said, they have monsoons and they have rubber and

27 they do this and this in Indochina. So, it didn't impress me.

28 RV: Had you been keeping up with U.S. policy and kind of our slow evolution of

29 involvement in Southeast Asia?

1 JH: No, I had no idea other than the name South Vietnam. I had no idea what
2 they were doing. I didn't learn until after I got over there and started studying about Dien
3 Bien Phu and all of that other stuff.

4 RV: How much did the Air Force tell you about what you were doing?

5 JH: At that time where I was going and everything?

6 RV: Yes, sir.

7 JH: Zero.

8 RV: It was deemed a top-secret mission?

9 JH: Yes.

10 RV: How many people volunteered?

11 JH: I'm probably guessing around up to 50, I don't know counting the pilots.
12 They came down and they were going to send six airplanes over. Back then it was called
13 Operation Farmgate, later changed to Ranch Hand. Six airplanes over and they wanted
14 six navigators. One would stay over there and the other five would come back. They
15 only needed one navigator to lead formations over there. They gave us all check rides
16 and tests and everything. I was chosen to be the one to stay over there. I don't know
17 why. Maybe because I wasn't married. I was impressed being a 2nd Lieutenant going
18 over there and being the navigator chosen. That's the way it was. They told us later on
19 that we would be running spray missions.

20 RV: How long after you'd been there did they tell you this?

21 JH: They told us before we left, but it was secret and we weren't allowed to tell
22 anybody. Of course when we left with the spray planes, we had all the stuff there
23 already.

24 RV: How did they describe the spray to you? What did they tell you about that?

25 JH: Before we did it?

26 RV: Yes, sir.

27 JH: They just said, "You're going to go over there for two or three months and
28 test spraying some jungles to see if we can get a better view of the enemy when they walk
29 through it." I said, "Ok."

30 RV: Did they tell you what was behind that, exactly what would happen to the
31 vegetation and things like that?

1 JH: No, and I'm not even sure they knew. Before that they'd sprayed mosquitoes
2 with that outfit. We didn't know when we were going over there other than we were
3 going to be spraying the jungle.

4 RV: Were they giving you combat pay for this?

5 JH: No, it wasn't.

6 RV: We weren't technically at war, but...

7 JH: No, we were not even supposed to be over there. You know the Geneva
8 Convention said, you could only have what, 800 and some people over there. They were
9 sneaking all these people over there. We weren't even allowed to say that we were over
10 there. We couldn't even write home and say that we were over there. When we were
11 over there we were "assisting" the Vietnamese, we weren't doing our own job is what
12 they said.

13 RV: How did you guys actually get over to South Vietnam? Did you fly the 123s
14 over?

15 JH: Oh yes, that was an interesting thing. We took off from Pope the day after
16 Thanksgiving, 1961. We were going to fly all the way over to Travis Air Force Base,
17 California. The 123s couldn't fly that far. They couldn't even fly probably to Texas,
18 without stopping to refuel. They used that spray tank inside to have gasoline in it. Since
19 they didn't have enough oil, they added a 55-gallon oil drum inside that you could hand
20 crank to put oil in the engines. The first test of that was to see if we could make it all the
21 way to California. We did. That was a long flight. The longest flight was supposed to
22 have been the one after that when we went to Hawaii, which was supposed to be around
23 17 hours of flying. It ended up 17 and half hours. It was really interesting.

24 RV: What were your duties there, on board the plane?

25 JH: I was the navigator. When we were going, since 17 hours is a long time for
26 anyone to navigate, they switched it off. We'd fly formation and the navigator from one
27 of the adjacent planes would navigate the whole group for a while, then I navigated for a
28 while.

29 RV: Where did you sit in the plane, what was the C-123 cockpit and all that like?

30 JH: The cockpit, the C-123 had the pilot and the co-pilot up there. The navigator
31 sat down in the cargo compartment for takeoff. Soon after take off you got up to a seat

1 that had been added way up at the top of the cargo, the front of the cargo compartment,
2 with a desk way up there and a seat that turned around and would fit into the doorway of
3 where the pilot and co-pilot sat. You could use their instruments and you had some
4 instruments too.

5 RV: So you were very close to the co-pilot and pilot?

6 JH: Yes, a little bit further than just reaching out and touching them probably.

7 RV: So you had good communication with them and you could see all the
8 instrument panels that you needed to?

9 JH: Yes.

10 RV: When you arrived in Hawaii, did you just refuel and take a nights sleep and
11 take off again?

12 JH: Yes, that's what we did. From Hawaii, we flew to Johnson Island, off of
13 Hawaiian Island, from there up to Wake Island, then over to Guam and into the
14 Philippines.

15 RV: Were you based out of Clark in the Philippines?

16 JH: Based out of Clark. When we got there, they didn't have the permission for us to go
17 into Vietnam. We sat there for over a month doing nothing other than we'd go and
18 practice spray flights, without spraying, just formation to have something to do.

19 RV: What was your formation like? What were the tactics like there in spraying?

20 JH: We would fly at 150 feet. 130 knots or somewhere in that area. Try to stay
21 in formation so that we wouldn't leave gaps in the spray if we were spraying. Since we
22 weren't spraying we had no idea whether we had gaps or not. Then we'd practice what
23 would happen if someone were to lose an engine. We practiced everything. We really
24 had no idea whether that was what we should be practicing or not because no one had
25 ever done it before.

26 RV: How much defoliant would each plane carry?

27 JH: When we were in Clark of course, we carried no defoliant. After we had the
28 tank held 1,000 gallons. When we'd spray that's how much we would carry.

29 RV: About how long was your run spraying?

30 JH: When we were spraying, the actual spray run I'm guessing would be around six or
31 seven minutes. It wasn't long at all. We would go back and forth. We had to double

1 spray it because we only put out a gallon per acre. And we needed, later on a gallon and
2 a half per acre. We needed twice that much to kill the trees over there.

3 RV: Did they give you any other training, like survival training, in case you were
4 shot down?

5 JH: No, before I went over there, I was even selected. I went to the survival
6 training class down at Nellis, close to Las Vegas, that everybody goes to. It had nothing
7 to do with going to Vietnam.

8 RV: Did you feel pretty prepared in case anything like that happened?

9 JH: No, I didn't feel like I was not prepared, or prepared. I just felt like it was
10 another mission. I wasn't worried about a war over there, I really wasn't.

11 RV: What did they tell you about what was happening inside the country?

12 JH: They just said the Viet Cong were fighting against the Vietnamese and we
13 were going advise the Vietnamese on how to do it. There was really no emphasis put on
14 us getting shot at, or getting shot down.

15 RV: President Kennedy was the President at this time.

16 JH: Oh, yes.

17 RV: What did you think of President Kennedy and his policies?

18 JH: You're trying to get me to say whether I'm a Democrat or a Republican.

19 RV: No, sir. No I'm not at all.

20 JH: I thought President Kennedy was an exciting President and I enjoyed him a
21 lot.

22 RV: I'm leading up to really the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of '62. You
23 were at Clark at this point, is that correct?

24 JH: No when they had that missile crisis I was already in Vietnam. That was
25 early, '62. I got to Vietnam in January of '62.

26 RV: So you were actually based in Vietnam?

27 JH: Yes I was in Vietnam when the missile crisis happened because I remember
28 that. We were going to fly that morning. We had gone in to 2nd ADVON (advanced
29 Echelon) to get our intelligence briefing. Everybody was glued around the radio. I think
30 that's when Kennedy was making his speech about that. Everybody was worried that we
31 were going to have this nuclear crisis and maybe the Soviets were going to start a war

1 and then bomb us. All I remember about that, I was saying, "Oh boy, I'm glad I'm here
2 in Vietnam. They won't bomb here."

3 RV: You were probably right. Were you based at Clark when you were doing all
4 your spray missions?

5 JH: No, I was based over in Saigon. We just stayed at Clark a month or so until
6 they got approval for our airplanes to move over to Saigon.

7 RV: Do you remember who they had to get approval from?

8 JH: I had heard, but I don't know that it was the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff.

9 RV: So you moved over to Saigon, tell me what it was like when you first got
10 into Saigon. What were your impressions of the country and what was happening?

11 JH: Since we were still kind of a secret outfit, they parked us down in President
12 Diem's parking lot. It was way off base where you couldn't get off of the main runway
13 part. You couldn't get to it unless you had permission. They parked their airplanes. I
14 think we only took three of them over there to start with. They parked us over there.
15 Vietnam to me, when I got out I noticed that it was hot. I figured it was going to stay that
16 way. They put the enlisted people in tents over there. They didn't have much of
17 anything for the military in Saigon. They had a Mess Hall, another office building for
18 people who ran the place. Then they had all these, this tent city for the enlisted people.
19 We were told to go downtown and find hotels or apartments and live on our own. On the
20 way down I noticed the Vietnamese people were of smaller or statue, stature. The girls
21 wore those ao dais which were nice looking dresses. They all looked good, intelligent
22 and they were nice and friendly. I enjoyed them.

23 RV: Did the government pay for your lodging at all there?

24 JH: Yes, they did. We were TDY so they gave us our regular pay plus an extra
25 \$16 a day, which back then was really something else. It was really a lot to go with.
26 Because the whole hotel or where we stayed, the apartment cost practically nothing. In
27 fact, going down and drinking a beer was only nine cents. Eventually after we got over
28 there it went up to fifteen cents.

29 RV: Still a bargain it sounds like. Did you take all the markings off the planes?

30 JH: No. They were going to do that and they talked about it a lot. They said,
31 "You know, the Vietnamese don't have any of these airplanes. It'll be kind of dumb

1 because they'll know that it's our airplane, even if we put their markings on it." We
2 didn't take the markings off. We couldn't fly unless we had a Vietnamese on board, who
3 was going to be the person that was flying the airplane and we were advising them.
4 Although, since the Vietnamese pilots were so scarce, there never was a pilot. They
5 always sat in the back. At the last part, it was just some young soldier who had never
6 flown on an airplane before and they usually just threw up.

7 RV: Really?

8 JH: I can imagine what it'd be like if we had crash and we said, "We were just
9 assisting this Vietnamese pilot," and it was that young guy. We had to do that to fill in
10 the blanks.

11 RV: Tell me a little bit about where you lived in Saigon and your impressions of
12 the city.

13 JH: I went there many different tours. The first one, I lived in the Vo Thanh
14 Hotel down there. While I was there, I was 2nd Lieutenant. While I was there I made 1st
15 Lieutenant and rented the roof and had a party. Rented a band and had a catered service
16 for all of my friends. The whole thing cost me \$100.

17 RV: Wow.

18 JH: Which was a lot of money for me.

19 RV: Right. Was this when you first arrived?

20 JH: No. I made 1st Lieutenant in March of '62. Of course I arrived in January of
21 '62. So it was a couple months after I'd been there.

22 RV: So you lived in this hotel. Were you the only one there?

23 JH: No. I had three or four other people that were sharing I think two bedrooms.

24 RV: How much did it cost do you remember?

25 JH: No, I have no idea. It couldn't have been much.

26 RV: Did you have service from the local Vietnamese citizens; did they make your
27 beds and cook for you and things like that?

28 JH: Since it was a hotel I think the hotel made the beds. I don't remember that.
29 Maybe we told them not to. All the times after that I always had a maid.

30 RV: What were your initial impressions of Saigon the city?

1 JH: Saigon City was beautiful. Back then when we first got there, most of the
2 things were run by the French. They slowly backed out until there were none of them
3 left. The restaurants, the bars were mostly owned by French.

4 RV: What would you do for entertainment there?

5 JH: We would meet downtown at a restaurant, have dinner. Usually a French
6 restaurant and then hit four or five bars. That's it.

7 RV: The Vietnamese civilians you said they were relatively friendly to you?

8 JH: They were very nice, very friendly, very nice, very intelligent.

9 RV: Tell me exactly a typical day for you. What was your typical day?

10 JH: It was hard; when we first got there we had to have so much approval before
11 we would do a spray run that we went a long times without spraying. Sometimes I would
12 be just the duty officer who stayed down at the squadron to answer the phone.
13 Sometimes I would be back at the hotel with nothing to do. Go visit around Saigon. The
14 only exciting parts I guess were when we would fly the missions.

15 RV: Tell me about your mission days, what were they like?

16 JH: The first mission we had was to practice the spray run down, just south of
17 Saigon on Highway 15. Our Commander who was Captain Marshall and Captain
18 Robinette and myself as the navigator flew down there and practiced the spray runs.
19 They were going to test it to see whether it really worked or not. Flying that low was
20 interesting and a little scary. I got used to it. There was, no one shot at us. No one did
21 anything, it was just really nice. That was my first mission. That was on 13 January of
22 1962.

23 RV: Do you want to continue talking about what the spray missions were like
24 themselves? When you finished your practice runs, you actually started spraying more
25 relevant areas of the jungle in the area?

26 JH: While we were still practicing our spray runs before we went into the actual
27 defoliation part is when we lost our first airplane.

28 RV: What happened?

29 JH: It was in February of '62. February 2nd. I went down to the squadron. I was
30 supposed to fly with Fergus, Groves and Larson on a practice spray run, south of Saigon.
31 When I went into the squadron Captain Marshal was over talking to some civilians. He

1 called me over there and he said, "John I know you're supposed to fly with Groves and
2 Larson, but these people are from *Life Magazine* and they want to take some pictures of
3 the Delta. They need a navigator to show them around. So could you fly with," I think it
4 was Captain Hagerty, "with him? Groves and Larson can fly their spray run on their
5 own." I said, "Ok, fine." I went with the *Life* photographers. They wanted to go down
6 to the Delta. I thought maybe if I were a photographer I'd rather take a picture of the
7 mountains. They went down there and they took a picture of the sun rising off of the
8 Mekong River, some beautiful shots around there. We were circling. One of them
9 pointed out to the distance there and said, "What's that big pile of smoke over there?" I
10 said, "I don't have any idea. You want to go over there?" They said, "Yes, maybe a
11 hamlet on fire." I told the pilots to go over there where the smoke was. When we got
12 over there all we saw was a crumbled airplane on the ground. We could see by the tail
13 number that it was one of ours and that it was my crew, the ones I was supposed to fly
14 with that day. I just had to sit down and sit there. We stayed over it. It was burning
15 pretty good. We stayed over it until the helicopter came down and checked it for
16 survivors. All of them were dead. We went on back and landed at Saigon. That was a
17 bad thing since that was my crew and I was supposed to have been on it.

18 RV: Right. What happened do you know?

19 JH: They still don't know. They never found any bullet holes or that it was shot
20 by the enemy. My personal opinion is that it was pilot error and they crashed. But they
21 were still listed as uncertain.

22 RV: They had a navigator on board, in your place?

23 JH: No. I was the only navigator there. I only flew in the lead airplanes. The
24 rest of them followed. They wouldn't even fly if I was sick. I had to be on it. When
25 they were doing their practice runs, they didn't need a navigator at all. The navigator was
26 just for the actual runs. He had to be in the lead airplane.

27 RV: Why do you say pilot error, what leads you to believe that?

28 JH: It was a very hard mission. You would almost stall out every time you'd
29 make a turn. They were just learning how to do that. Talking it over with the other pilots
30 we kind of felt like they stalled it out and they were too low to the ground to level it out.

1 You know that's just personal opinion. I don't want to get into it. When they had the
2 investigation, they didn't see any enemy contact.

3 RV: Any other incidents happen when you guys were practicing?

4 JH: Yes, since it was so long between spray runs, they took the spray nozzles and
5 the tank out of a couple of our airplanes and put us hauling cargo back and forth because
6 they needed so many people to haul cargo. I went down to a squadron to fly with Captain
7 Overman and his [\[co-pilot\]](#) navigator Wally Frankson. They had a mission to go to; I
8 think it was to Dong Ha. Anyway it was way north of Hue, which was a long flight. I
9 really didn't feel up to it. I looked at my log and found that because I had been flying
10 those cargo missions so much I'd already gone over my limit. Which is ok, in Vietnam
11 you can do that and it's no problem. I went to our Commander and told him that, "Hey, I
12 was over my flying time, and why don't I just stay home for this one?" Overman who
13 was the pilot said, "Ok, we don't need you." Frankson who was his co-pilot said, "Hey, I
14 used to be a navigator. We can find that. All we got to do is go to Hue and follow the
15 railroad." So I said, "Ok," so I went on home. They took off and went up there.
16 Anyway, I got a call from our Commander said, "Put on your flying suit and come on
17 down. Frankson and Overman have crashed." I went down and we went up to Hue and
18 took a helicopter up [\[to the crash site\]](#). What happened is they had got lost, landed at the
19 wrong runway and it was too short for them. When they realized it was the wrong
20 runway, they tried to take off and there was a mound of dirt at the end. They didn't have
21 enough time and they hit that mound of dirt and it put them up in the air. They slammed
22 down onto the ground. It didn't hurt anybody, other than tore the airplane completely up.
23 It was gone. I was thinking there's six airplanes, two of them gone already and both of
24 them are the ones I'm supposed to be on. I sure don't like this. So that happened.

25 RV: So they both survived that crash?

26 JH: Yes with no injuries at all.

27 RV: Seems like you had a lucky streak there.

28 JH: Looked like it was getting pretty lucky. Let's see. That's about all that
29 happened on that first tour other than I woke up one morning to a bunch of gunfire. I
30 went outside into the patio of the hotel there at our place. There were the policeman
31 down below who were the ones who were acting instead of the stoplights [\[directing\]](#)

1 traffic], tell you to go here and go there. Were shooting up in the air! I looked up there
2 and there was a couple airplanes flying, dropping bombs. There was anti-aircraft fire
3 shooting at them. There was bullets hitting the top of our buildings around there. I could
4 hear them going clink, clink. I was thinking what in the world is going on? I jumped
5 into my clothes and went down and caught a taxi and went over to the base. Ran into my
6 squadron there. Said, "What's going on here?" Some guy said, "Hey, they're having a
7 coup d'etat." Being a young Lieutenant I said, "What's a coup d'etat?" Two fighters had
8 bombed the palace there. They didn't get Ngo Dinh Diem. But they had torn up the
9 palace pretty good.

10 RV: That's interesting. You're first tour from January '62 to January '63?

11 JH: First tour that was all TDY. That first tour we left the States in November of
12 '61 and came back to the States in June of '62. But that's including spraying locusts in
13 Afghanistan and Iran.

14 RV: Before we get there, tell me what did you know about the South Vietnamese
15 politics?

16 JH: I know very much now. At that time I didn't know anything other than the
17 fact from talking to the Vietnamese, which I enjoyed, they did not like Ngo Dinh Diem at
18 all. But what they really hated was his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, who ran the secret police
19 and his brother's wife, Madame Nhu. Who was acting as Ngo Dinh Diem's first lady.

20 RV: Do you remember what they said about them?

21 JH: They didn't like him at all. They hated him. They wouldn't talk about it, but
22 I had the impression that they liked Ho Chi Minh.

23 RV: Really?

24 JH: Yes.

25 RV: What led you to that conclusion?

26 JH: They would talk about, "If we had only had an election and Ho Chi Minh had
27 been the President we'd have been a better country." Ngo Dinh Diem also being
28 Catholic, most of the people there, 85% or so were Buddhists. They didn't like each
29 other. They didn't get around each other very much.

30 RV: Did you get a sense that the civilian population there understood the
31 differences between communism and democracy and things like that?

1 JH: No. They were for nationalism. Anybody that wants to unite a country and
2 they are part of our country other than being French or Japanese or American we're for.
3 You can't blame them for that. No matter where you're from you love your country.

4 RV: You sensed the deep love for the country first?

5 JH: Yes, the love for the country first.

6 RV: What other impressions of the civilians did you have? You obviously had
7 some time to talk with them? Where was this at the bars?

8 JH: At the bars, everywhere. Even the cyclo drivers, the pedicab drivers we
9 would talk. The taxi drivers or other people. Plus I was trying to learn some Vietnamese
10 and so I wanted to talk to them anyway.

11 RV: Did you try to practice Vietnamese?

12 JH: Yes and I even got books and studied it. Overall, it only ended up being
13 pidgin Vietnamese.

14 RV: You said sometimes you had a long wait between your spray missions.
15 What would you do? You said you went on base.

16 JH: I took tennis lessons at the Vietnamese country club. I went and played
17 duplicate bridge over at the French country club, La Circle Sportif, which was an
18 interesting place. I'll get to it later. Seeing if I could hit every bar in Saigon and every
19 restaurant in Saigon and the nightclubs.

20 RV: Did you have any particular favorite bars or restaurants?

21 JH: Yes, the ones down on what they called Catinat, which was Tu Do, later
22 changed to Tu Do Street were probably the most famous. They were probably the ones
23 we went to most. They were closest to the best restaurants anyway and walking distance
24 from the restaurants. That's probably why we went there.

25 RV: What was your favorite food while eating there?

26 JH: French, only French. Boy, I just loved French food. I'd get in there; eat
27 French bread, French onion soup and a nice filet mignon or something. I didn't care for
28 Vietnamese food. I really couldn't stand that fish sauce they use.

29 RV: The nuoc mam?

1 JH: Nuoc mam, yes. Oh lord it was horrible. In fact, I threatened when I was
2 over on the second or third tour, my maid who would cook it up in her kitchen, that I was
3 going to fire her if she didn't wait until after I ate before she even got that stuff open.

4 RV: What would you do as far as getting news from the United States, were you
5 able to find out what was happening back home?

6 JH: No, it was usually late. It was usually straight from the *Stars and Stripes*. If
7 there were anything happening like the missile crisis or anything we'd find out kind of
8 immediately from the intelligence people. Other than that it was just late from the *Stars*
9 *and Stripes*. I don't recall even having a radio or if there was an English station.

10 RV: How about contact with your family, were you writing back and forth to
11 your parents?

12 JH: No, we couldn't to start with. For that first tour, I think during the middle of
13 that first tour, they relented and said, "You can write your folks, but don't tell them
14 anything about what you're doing." We did write back. I wrote a couple letters just to
15 say, "Hello, I'm still doing fine."

16 RV: You left Vietnam in June '62 or a little bit before?

17 JH: Let's see, when I left I departed Saigon on 2 May of '62, but instead of going
18 straight back to the States they sent us over to Iran to spray locusts.

19 RV: What was that experience like?

20 JH: From Saigon we went over to Calcutta, India and then over to Karachi,
21 Pakistan, then over to Tehran, Iran. We sprayed locusts down in the Kermanshah Valley,
22 which is southwest of Tehran. I stayed there, I don't know two or three weeks before...
23 Then when that was finished, they sent us from there over to Kandahar. Which is famous
24 now, but wasn't then. Kandahar, Afghanistan, which was back then owned by the
25 Soviets. We would buy our gas from the Soviets. They were over there spraying too.

26 RV: What were they spraying?

27 JH: They were spraying locusts at the same time. They had a small bi-wing
28 airplane, but they weren't spraying. They were dropping pellets or a dust or something
29 instead of us. We were spraying with spray that in my opinion was completely
30 ineffective. I think it dissolved before it ever got to the ground.

31 RV: Really? How far off the ground were you spraying?

1 JH: I don't know, but if you wanted a guess, I'd say around 1,000 feet. Over
2 their wheat crops which were just being completely torn up by those locusts. The locusts
3 would come over and it would just be like a big cloud coming over. The whole place
4 would get dark. I've never seen so many grasshoppers.

5 RV: Was it effective at all?

6 JH: No.

7 RV: How about in Iran?

8 JH: No.

9 RV: Were you able to spend any time on the ground in these various places?

10 JH: Yeah. At Tehran, we spent a lot of time over there on the ground, and in
11 Afghanistan too. We lived down at the USAID (United States Agency for International
12 Development) compound. We stayed there for a couple weeks or a month. I don't know.

13 RV: What was Iran like?

14 JH: Iran back then the Shah Pahlavi, was that his name?

15 RV: I believe so.

16 JH: Was running the country. It was no problem at all as far as Americans went.
17 We weren't allowed to spray. We had to take the rank off of our uniforms. We wore
18 these black fur hats like those Russians would wear.

19 RV: Did you wear the markings on the airplane?

20 JH: We kept the USA markings on the airplanes. Lived downtown hotel in
21 Tehran. Then we went over to Afghanistan and we lived down at the USAID mission.

22 RV: What were the Iranians like, the civilian population?

23 JH: They mostly ignored us. A couple people went out of their way to say, "Hey,
24 I'm glad to meet you, an American." As a general rule, the others could care less. It was
25 not a very friendly place. They weren't enemies like they probably are now.

26 RV: What about the Afghan people?

27 JH: Same. The women, you didn't know if it was a woman or a man because
28 they had on all that stuff that you couldn't see anything. The men were no different from
29 the Iranians as far as I go. They were not friendly. They just didn't want to talk to you.

30 RV: Were you able to travel in the cities, walking around the cities into
31 communities?

1 JH: Yes, that was no problem. I went down and I would go to the shops. I even
2 bought a gold, Russian coin from one of those people. He had it hidden up under some
3 stuff. He only showed it to me because I was an American. They'd have the places
4 where they'd sell fruit and stuff.

5 RV: You were obviously out of uniform?

6 JH: Yes. We went around in civilian clothes. In fact we did that everywhere if
7 we weren't flying.

8 RV: After you hit Afghanistan and Iran you came on back to the States?

9 JH: Right. From there we came on back to the States by way of France and the
10 Azores and that, which ended up being the only C-123 who ever flew around the world.

11 RV: How were your navigation skills? Were they improving?

12 JH: They were improving a lot flying around the world.

13 RV: Right, I can imagine.

14 JH: Yes, I was pretty slick at navigation by then.

15 RV: You went straight back to Pope is that correct?

16 JH: Yes, and arrived there I think in June of '62. June. About two and a half
17 months later in September I took off again, same place.

18 RV: Did you have to volunteer again to go?

19 JH: Yes, I volunteered to go back to Vietnam to spray again.

20 RV: Did they come pick you out and say, "Lieutenant Hodgkin you've had a lot of
21 experience?"

22 JH: Yes, the pilots from Langley called me and said, "Hey, we're going again,
23 why don't you go with us?" I said, "Fine." So we went. Each time we'd go it would be
24 for six months. It would be TDY (Temporary Duty).

25 RV: How many of these did you go?

26 JH: I went on I think about four. Then at one time I was PCS over there.

27 RV: So initially these first four TDYs you went for six months each?

28 JH: Yes.

29 RV: So those were almost back to back. What did you do when you got back to
30 North Carolina? How long, you had what three months or so before you went back.
31 What did you do at Pope?

1 JH: Well when I got back the first time to North Carolina, I don't think I did
2 anything other than just what we usually do, carry the Army around.

3 RV: Were you able to go back to Burlington and visit your folks?

4 JH: Yes, I took a couple weeks leave. Other than that, it was only about a month
5 or so before I had to go back over there. I remember my mother saying, "Hey I don't
6 care what happens. Just don't go to Vietnam."

7 RV: Were you able to tell her?

8 JH: I told her I was going on the second one, but after that I would tell her I was
9 going to the Philippines.

10 RV: Did they ever know you were in Vietnam those initial two years?

11 JH: Yes. Yes, they did. After I got back from the first one, it was no secret
12 anymore and we could tell.

13 RV: Your mother was worried I take it?

14 JH: Yes.

15 RV: Why was she worried more about South Vietnam?

16 JH: After the second tour, around the second tour, that's when the Americans
17 started getting killed over there and she was worried about it because it was in the news.

18 RV: How about your father?

19 JH: It was a job to do, you do it.

20 RV: Real practical.

21 JH: Yes.

22 RV: When you went back in September '62 was it basically the same routine,
23 you stayed in Saigon at the hotel?

24 JH: September '62 I didn't stay in the hotel. I went down to the French bar there.
25 I was staying in a hotel a couple of nights with another guy in another guy's room
26 because I had to look for a place to stay. The rest of the people were staying in an
27 apartment. Usually at 62 Tran Huong Dao. I was going to try to get an apartment. I
28 went into this bar and there was a bargirl there who was living with a Special Forces guy.
29 She said, "Since I'm living with him, my apartment is empty, why don't you let me rent it
30 to you?" So I rented an apartment from a bargirl. I stayed there for this second tour and
31 the third tour.

1 RV: What was that apartment like, do you remember it?

2 JH: Yes, it was a kitchen. There was an outside room for a maid that was before
3 you go inside. Then as you go inside there was a kitchen, a bathroom and a living room
4 and bedroom together. It was kind of a small apartment.

5 RV: Had Saigon changed any since you had last been there?

6 JH: No, there were so many more Americans there. They'd built so many more
7 things. You know they had an American movie theatre that they'd rented from the
8 Vietnamese. They had all these American Officer's Club downtown and the Hotel Rex
9 and had the enlisted billets down there and everything now they didn't have before.

10 RV: Did you talk to a lot of Americans or did you try to hang out more with the
11 Vietnamese people?

12 JH: I hung out with my crewmembers from my squadron. A lot of that was
13 taught. We had some Vietnamese pilot friends and all that. We did the same stuff as we
14 did before. I remember I was sitting at my apartment that I'd rented from that girl, sitting
15 outside. We'd sprayed that day and when I went home my pilot said, "Hey I'm going to
16 a movie. You want to go with me?" I said, "No, I'll skip the movie, but I'll meet you for
17 supper." We were going to meet at Aderbee's Restaurant in downtown Saigon. Later,
18 that thing got grenaded. That's where we liked to eat. He went to a movie and I went
19 home. The next-door neighbor came in and said, "Hey, have you heard they blew up the
20 movie?" "What?!" So I jumped in a taxi and went down tot the movie and I couldn't get
21 close to it. It was blocked off. People were running around asking for blood. I couldn't
22 get over there. I said, "Well let me go on over to Aderbee's and see if my pilot, my
23 friend Charlie Hagerty is hopefully not in that movie." So I sit down at the bar and
24 waited, it seemed like about an hour or two later. Charlie came in and sat down beside
25 me. We were silent there for a minute. I looked at him and said, "How's the movie?"
26 (Laughs) He said, "I don't know. I didn't get to see all of it." Anyway he said that he'd
27 been in the balcony of the movie when someone had run in with a bomb and set it down
28 there. Killed three or four Americans and wounded a couple of dozen. The whole roof
29 fell in, the sides busted out. He carried some wounded person out and that was it. He
30 wasn't hurt at all, being in the balcony. I think he was lucky there too, you know?

1 RV: Yes, sir. Did you guys understand what was happening? Why they were
2 actually bombing the movie theaters?

3 JH: Yes. Being young, we could have cared less. All you care about is what
4 you're going to do the next hour.

5 RV: Why were they bombing the theaters in your opinion?

6 JH: They didn't like Americans. They didn't like anybody who was against the
7 nationalization of Vietnam.

8 RV: Are you talking about the Viet Cong or the South Vietnamese?

9 JH: Obviously it had to be Viet Cong it couldn't be South Vietnamese. Being a
10 Viet Cong you can walk down the streets just as easy.

11 RV: Did it scare you guys to kind of think twice about going out?

12 JH: When we'd go into a bar, we'd have to look to make sure, because they were
13 hand grenading the bars. We had to look to make sure there was a... We'd sit toward the
14 back and make sure that there was a kitchen kind of thing that we could run into to get
15 out the back door if somebody threw one in, you know. We'd start thinking of things like
16 that. The restaurants, the same way.

17 RV: Did you try to sit closer to those back doors?

18 JH: Yes.

19 RV: Did other Americans do the same thing?

20 JH: I didn't notice them.

21 RV: What was the mood on the streets like? Was it getting more and more tense
22 or did it look like Saigon as normal?

23 JH: I think it looked as normal. The hate for the President increased though.

24 RV: Let's talk a little bit about your spray missions. Tell me exactly how your
25 day would go when you had your spray mission and it went through, and where you were
26 spraying.

27 JH: We found out that if we sprayed during the middle of the day the temperature
28 was so hot that the spray wouldn't even reach the ground. It would usually just rise and
29 drift off. So we could not spray above 85 degrees. Since the normal temperature is
30 above 90 in Saigon and down in the Delta, we ended up knowing that we had to spray
31 from when the daylight started until about no later than about 10:00. Because after that

1 the temperature rose too much. We also found that we couldn't spray if the winds were
2 blowing pretty good. Anything over 10 knots was too much. So the early morning spray
3 flights were the only things we could do because of the temperature and the winds. Since
4 we only sprayed in the mornings we had the rest of the day off and a lot of those other
5 Americans there were wondering if we ever had a job because we were just sitting around
6 all day. That's the way we would do it. Straight in the morning.

7 RV: Where would you go to spray, did it vary obviously?

8 JH: I was there before they started spraying way up north. Ours was mainly in
9 the Delta. We would spray the canals and the roads around areas like that. We did on
10 one mission I think, spray the mountains of Quy Nhon, which was a scary flight for me.
11 Other than that it was usually in the Delta.

12 RV: Tell me about the Quy Nhon flight.

13 JH: It was up and down mountains and the airplane was practically stalling out
14 every time we'd get to the bottom of the mountain and start up the other side. I didn't
15 enjoy it. At every run I thought we were going to crash. I told the pilot that at the end of
16 it.

17 RV: Not during the flight?

18 JH: No. (Laughs) I was just holding on.

19 RV: Would the plane stall because you were going so slow to spray?

20 JH: Well, it would stall because of an abrupt pull up at the end of the run because
21 if you turned around and came back the other way you wanted to know where the spray
22 was. You wanted to see it before it got to the ground.

23 RV: Right.

24 JH: When you pull up a C-123 and it starts to stall, they get what's called a stick
25 shaker. They wheel that the pilot's holding for flying, would start shaking violently.
26 That's built into the airplane, which tells you "Warning! Warning! You're reaching a
27 stall speed," or else the way the airplane is shaped, the way it is pointing. So if you were
28 heading up kind of, and you were losing airspeed quickly, it would start what is called a
29 stick shaker and tell you that you're about to stall. We would do that at the end of each
30 run, which was frustrating to me. I didn't enjoy it, but the pilots were used to it. They

1 ended up being the best pilots in the Air Force because of what they learned during those
2 spray runs.

3 RV: How would they deal when the stick started shaking?

4 JH: They would just turn and kind of level out a little. They didn't let them
5 bother them. They would do it at the end of every run. It didn't bother them.

6 RV: That had to be quite nerve rattling.

7 JH: Yes, it was to someone who's not a pilot. It's like your wife sitting beside
8 you, she doesn't know what you're doing and she's going to yap at you for every turn
9 you make. (Laughs) I'm sorry are you married?

10 RV: No, sir. (Laughs) Tell me how many runs you would actually make. You
11 had 1,000 gallons.

12 JH: 1,000 gallons and it depended on how long the target was or how wide it
13 was. If it were just a long canal, we would just run it until all our tanks ran out. I'm
14 guessing seven or eight minutes. If it were a wide swatch we'd have to go back and forth
15 and back and forth. The actual spray runs with the tanks turned on probably didn't last
16 for about 10 minutes at the most.

17 RV: How effective was the spraying? Did you have to go back and hit spots
18 again?

19 JH: Yes, we found out sometimes that the jungle was so thick that all it would do
20 was kill the top layer of trees. Then you've got a bottom layer of brush and stuff. So
21 they'd send us back over it. Usually we didn't have to do that. As far as it being
22 effective, when they first examined it they found that it wasn't effective at all. They had
23 to increase the amount of spray that was coming out and some other stuff to make it even
24 work. It was working more and more. They sent a lot of airplanes over there after I quit
25 doing it.

26 RV: How much were you exposed to the actually defoliant itself?

27 JH: Got it on me completely, practically everyday.

28 RV: Really?

29 JH: We didn't have air conditioning. We had to fly with the doors open and with
30 the windows open. If we were making a run and turned around to make a run right
31 beside it, we would get the spray just coming in the window there. I wore sunglasses to

1 keep it out of my eyes. If you were down near that tank, there would be liquid around it
2 from when they loaded it or something all the time. No one paid any attention to it.
3 Because after all, all it was a defoliant that they'd used in the States for years and still
4 used for years. It was no big thing. Plus what they had, one gallon per acre? How much
5 of that's going to hurt you?

6 RV: What did the government tell you about the toxicity of it?

7 JH: Zero. Not toxic. I had heard people down there who tasted it. A shot club
8 they had that people said that they drank it.

9 RV: You didn't ever do that?

10 JH: Oh, no. Wasn't anything against it. I just didn't hear of that club.

11 RV: So the government basically had no warning about?

12 JH: No warning or anything.

13 RV: You said, "That's fine. I believe it and no questions."

14 JH: It didn't even come up. It was like to me, what if you spray olive oil? Have
15 I got to ask somebody will it poison me? No, it was nothing.

16 RV: Did you ever encounter any civilians on your flights when you were
17 spraying?

18 JH: Did I ever?

19 RV: Did you ever fly over them when you were spraying?

20 JH: Every now and then it seemed like there would be a hut or something down
21 there that we paid no attention to. I don't know if anybody was living in them or not.
22 But at least, that would be weird. Usually it was just straight jungle.

23 RV: Did you ever take ground fire?

24 JH: Yes. The first six months I went over there it was very seldom. After that it
25 really picked up so bad that every time we'd land we'd have to go around and look for
26 holes.

27 RV: Were there any close calls with that?

28 JH: I had a hole shot through my desk and it just ripped my map all to pieces. I
29 didn't like that. What really scared me was one went through the bottom of the airplane
30 and through our garbage can we had in the cargo department. It sounded like a bomb had

1 gone off. "Boom!" It was just the echo from in that garbage can. That scared me. As
2 far as hitting me, it never did.

3 RV: Did you ever have any armor plating underneath your seats?

4 JH: They ended up putting, of course the engineer they put a metal box for him to
5 sit in while we were spraying. The pilots and co-pilots they put metal plating around
6 their seats. I didn't have one for myself. I sat on top of a flak jacket.

7 RV: Really?

8 JH: Yes, I was given a flak jacket to wear. I said, "Well you know the bullets
9 don't come in sideways, they come in from the bottom. So I just sat on it.

10 RV: Did you ever get wounded or was anybody on your crew ever wounded?

11 JH: No. Not in that. Later on in another episode of when we talk about dropping
12 leaflets and using loud speakers, my roommate got shot up.

13 RV: The defoliant in your estimation was relatively effective after they made
14 some initial adjustments?

15 JH: Yes.

16 RV: What did you think of the Vietnamese countryside as you were flying over
17 it?

18 JH: I thought it was beautiful. Down there in the Delta of course you had so
19 many rice crops. The rest of it was, other than some villages on the different rivers,
20 especially the Mekong and the Saigon, not very populated at all. Mostly just straight
21 jungle. It was a beautiful area. Then when you fly to the north of Saigon into the
22 mountains they were gorgeous. The most gorgeous part was where the mountains and
23 the ocean met. That's always pretty anyway. I thought the whole country was beautiful.

24 RV: You were over there for quite sometime, kept going back. Did it become
25 less beautiful with all the spraying and defoliation that had gone on?

26 JH: No. I didn't consider that. As a general rule we didn't usually visit those
27 areas again. There wasn't any need to. As far as the beautifulness of it, I probably got
28 used to it and quit looking at it later on, because after that, you couldn't even fly without
29 getting shot at.

30 RV: What kind of weapons did you carry in the planes?

31 JH: We had issued to us, these Carbines that I never had shot. These rifles.

1 RV: The M-14?

2 JH: Yes, in fact. For the enlisted people. The officers had .45 pistols that we
3 could carry. They were big and clumsy. When we started doing those cargo missions we
4 would take supplies up to the Special Forces at Montagnard villages and everywhere else
5 where these Special Forces had collected all kinds of neat weapons: Swedish K,
6 Thompson sub-machine guns, and P-38 revolvers and all like that. We would trade
7 canned hams and stuff and they'd give us guns. We kept a locker full of guns down there
8 in our squadron. Before a mission, we'd go in there and get one. I wore a shoulder
9 holster with a P-38 under it and carried over my shoulder a Thompson sub-machine gun.
10 That was just for show. I didn't know how to shoot and I'd never shot either one of them
11 and never did shoot them.

12 RV: Did you ever carry your .45 with you in addition?

13 JH: No after I got the P-38 Luger, I didn't use the .45 anymore.

14 RV: You never shot either one of them?

15 JH: We went to train in those when we were back at Pope. Every unit had to
16 shoot all that stuff. We'd shoot the .45s and we shot the M-16s then. But when I was in
17 Vietnam I never shot any of them.

18 RV: Tell me a little bit about when you left. Did you go six months over there?
19 You were there until March '63?

20 JH: The second tour I was over there until January of '63.

21 RV: Did you make any other stops like you did the first time?

22 JH: No, then we came straight on back. Then after the second tour, that was
23 January of '63, one month later less than a month, in February of '63, I went back over
24 there was a volunteer, but not with Ranch Hand, but with Mule Train. Which was the
25 straight cargo people.

26 RV: Were you still flying the 123?

27 JH: 123, yes. That's all they had at Pope at that time. So I was in Mule Train
28 from February '63 to July of '63.

29 RV: Tell me about that, what did you do?

1 JH: We would carry cargo around; sometimes we'd make very few air drops of
2 some Vietnamese. Sometimes we would go over a village and drop out a pig or a couple
3 chickens straight out.

4 RV: With parachutes?

5 JH: No, just low level and let them hit and smash, because they were going to eat
6 them anyway. That was kind of interesting. Other than that, it was just carrying cargo
7 here; cargo there; cargo here.

8 RV: So you were a navigator on these flights?

9 JH: Yes.

10 RV: How many crew were on board the 123?

11 JH: They had the pilot and the co-pilot and the engineer. Then they had a
12 loadmaster also and a navigator. There was one interesting flight that I had while I was
13 in that Mule Train outfit. We took off and we had mission to go to Cambodia, to go to
14 Phnom Penh.

15 RV: Were you base out of Saigon?

16 JH: Yes.

17 RV: I'm sorry go ahead.

18 JH: To go to Cambodia, to Phnom Penh. Drop cargo off and pick up cargo and
19 come back to Saigon. Then the navigator would get off. The navigators, they didn't
20 have a navigator for each airplane. They were more valuable. The navigator would get
21 off there and the pilots would go over to Thailand and fly about a week over there.
22 Which was easy missions because they had the radars and the radios that they could go to
23 easy and they didn't need a navigator. We were flying those. There was one interesting
24 mission that I went on. My pilot was, hold on let me see here, I got this written...Ok, my
25 pilot was named Lieutenant Hadlestat. We went over to Cambodia and picked up a
26 person who had worked at the Embassy. They were kicking him out of the country
27 because I don't know why. We were to carry him back to Saigon where he could get a
28 flight back to the States. He got on board and that was all we were bringing back to
29 Saigon. Being in the cargo department when we took off, I briefed the guy who got on
30 board from the Embassy how to use the parachute. That he could fit it up now, he didn't
31 have to wear it, which we did for everybody who got on board. So he fitted it up and

1 said, "Do you mind if I keep it on?" I said, "No, that's fine. But it's not going to be
2 comfortable." So we took off and he said, "Do you have a latrine?" I said, "Yes, it's
3 back there behind the door." The doors were open and had straps across them. There
4 was a latrine for just men to use. I mean just a hole. He went back there and he stayed
5 and he stayed. I didn't see him come back. So I walked back there to see what he was
6 doing and he wasn't there. He'd jumped out. I looked down and his parachute was
7 descending to the ground. I ran up and told the pilot, "Hey turn back, this guy's has
8 jumped out." He didn't believe me. He thought I was joking. But when he saw him, we
9 circled him until he landed. The guy landed and waved at us and walked off toward a
10 road. So we called it on back to Saigon what had happened. They sent some helicopters
11 over and later got him. I think they brought him out of the country the second time in
12 cuffs. Anyway that flight, they dropped me off in Saigon, that was Hadlestat. They went
13 back over to Thailand and then two days later he crashed and burned.

14 RV: Oh, you're kidding!

15 JH: Yes, at NKP (Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AFB (Thailand)). His whole crew
16 was killed over there.

17 RV: So the third time this has happened for you?

18 JH: Yes.

19 RV: How did you feel this third time?

20 JH: Well, since I wasn't supposed to be on this one, while they were over there, I
21 didn't mind that. The pilot then was someone I didn't know very well. It wasn't that
22 much. But it's interesting that just this past year, someone in Washington called me and
23 said that they discovered that everybody on that crew, except the flight engineer is on the
24 Vietnam Wall. Asked me if I knew anything about whether the flight engineer was on
25 that flight or not. I told them absolutely yes, 100%. They wouldn't take off without him.
26 They investigated and found out that after they'd crashed he lived for three days before
27 he died. When he died he was in the hospital at the Philippines and they weren't even
28 sure since he came from Thailand that he was ever in Vietnam and he wasn't added to the
29 Wall. We got his name put on there. They're putting it on in May of this year.

30 RV: Wow! That's great. Did you know this guy at all?

31 JH: Yes, I knew him, and he was a very good engineer. But we weren't close.

1 RV: What happened to the plane?

2 JH: It was...over there at NKP they had a big bamboo pole. They had a pair of
3 panties on top of it.

4 RV: This is on the runway?

5 JH: No it was over beside the runway. After you took off you could turn right
6 and the people who would fly over there would turn and fly over it and blast it with the
7 air coming out of the back from trying to knock the panties off of the panty pole. It was a
8 fairly well known thing to those people. He decided he was going to get those panties off
9 the panty pole. He'd opened up his back cargo ramp and rigged a chain around a loop
10 and then flew real low level and real slow and banged the pole with the chain. I think he
11 missed the first time. Went around and made the second trip and he stalled out or
12 something happened. Engine shut down or something and he crashed into a couple
13 houses. That's not well broadcast of course, but that's what happened.

14 RV: I mean he's dead, but how did the Air Force deal with that?

15 JH: They sent someone over to investigate it. Just said that he crashed. The
16 official Air Force report, which the guy who was investigating in Washington sent me,
17 mentions that. Although they say it wasn't panties. They called it a red flag or
18 something on top of a bamboo pole, but they did give the particulars. It was not
19 something that's secret.

20 RV: Right. I'm interested. You said there was a latrine there in the back of the
21 plane.

22 JH: Well, it was just a urinal is what it was.

23 RV: Was it a hole that let out to the open air?

24 JH: Yes, a hole that let out underneath the airplane.

25 RV: How long would your missions last actually from take off to landing
26 usually? I know it depended on how far you had to fly. On average?

27 JH: The cargo runs over there were an all day affair. You'd take off one base and
28 land at another base. They had them planned so it would take you most of the day,
29 counting the ground time at each base. One base to the other was probably I'm guessing
30 half hour or so. It wasn't far at all. Then you'd have to stay on the ground while they
31 were offloading and then on loading the other stuff. Then you'd go to another base. It

1 was many bases and all day long. For every 25 of those missions that you flew, take off
2 to landing, if you flew 25 you'd get an air medal. Well, I got 19.

3 RV: From Mule Train?

4 JH: Yes, when we were spraying they didn't count it. They wouldn't get any
5 medals at all. It was still thought to be assisting those people and not doing anything on
6 our own. Which is really shame. We did all that stuff and we didn't get anything for it.

7 RV: It is. Has yourself or anybody tried to rectify that situation?

8 JH: I don't think so. Mainly because after my early Ranch Hand missions, they
9 did start giving air medals and different medals. So it was only those first two that I was
10 on, that didn't get anything.

11 RV: The Farmgate Missions?

12 JH: Yes.

13 RV: What were some of the more interesting things you carried during Operation
14 Mule Train?

15 JH: For Mule Train the most things we carried was the food around to all of the
16 different bases for the Army. Pallets of it. We'd also carry the ammunition. Every now
17 and then we'd carry a dead body back.

18 RV: How did you feel about that?

19 JH: Those body bags?

20 RV: Yes, sir.

21 JH: It was a sad thing to see a body bag. Of course it was all zipped up, you
22 didn't know who was in it, but you know there was a dead person there. It was
23 something you didn't want to even think about.

24 RV: How did you deal with your experiences with death and the war?

25 JH: My experiences with what?

26 RV: With death and the body bags?

27 JH: You know young people have no idea that they could possibly die. So we
28 didn't even consider it. That happened to them, but it couldn't happen to me type
29 atmosphere. It didn't bother us at all.

1 RV: Ok, sir I want to ask you a couple of other questions about Mule Train. Tell
2 me about dropping pigs and chickens. Live pigs and chickens without parachutes out of
3 the plane.

4 JH: Why waste a parachute on something that you're going to just kill? We
5 didn't do that often. I do remember doing it a time or two. Sometimes we'd drop the
6 chickens in baskets that would just break apart when they'd hit the ground. Sometimes
7 the chickens would get out while you were in the airplane. We'd have to chase them
8 around the back, and they'd run out the back.

9 RV: Really?

10 JH: They'd fly for a while and then go on down. It was all so funny. The pigs, to
11 keep them from running around the airplane, they were in wicker baskets. We would just
12 throw the whole basket out if we were at low level. There are a couple times I think we
13 had little parachutes put on them. I think it was just to slow them down so they wouldn't
14 spatter when they hit the ground. But they would all be killed. It was just to get food to
15 the people down there. I don't know if it was for the Vietnamese Army or for the people
16 who lived in the hamlets, we did that.

17 RV: Would you actually see the animals hit the ground?

18 JH: I did a couple times. After that it wasn't interesting anymore.

19 RV: Tell me during this time your over there February '60 through July '63 for
20 Mule Train, things in Saigon are really taking a turn for the worst as far as political
21 upheaval. What things did you see happening?

22 JH: During that time, they put a bomb in front of Hung Dao Hotel in Saigon. It
23 was where some of the American service men stayed. Three Americans were killed then.
24 During this TDY also, this Buddhist monk, his name was Quang Duc I think, was fed up
25 with the way the Catholics of Diem's régime were treating the Buddhists and self-
26 immolated himself. Which is set himself on fire in downtown Saigon right in front of I
27 think in front of the Catholic Church. That went into every newspaper I think around the
28 world. I think that was at the start of people turning more against Diem. I think the
29 reason the Buddhists were so mad at him was that they'd had a demonstration in Hue
30 because they weren't allowed to fly their flags at all above their buildings or anything.
31 While they were having a demonstration, Diem's police just shot and killed a bunch of

1 them. It just wasn't fair to them. Diem was only getting people around him who were
2 Catholic. I think he also had, not only was it that he was Catholic and they were
3 Buddhists, it was also the Buddhists and the Communists seemed to go together more
4 than the Buddhists and the Catholics. He was afraid of having close friends who were
5 Buddhists, because he thought they'd turn against him is my opinion of it. Anyway that
6 monk burned himself up and things became more hectic downtown. You could tell the
7 population were nervous.

8 RV: How did you feel, were you more nervous, were you more careful?

9 JH: I thought it was interesting. I couldn't completely understand the whole
10 thing of why they were hating him and Ngo Diem Nhu and Madame Nhu so much. In
11 fact, there was a restaurant on the Saigon harbor called Mekong that was blown up. Not
12 the restaurant blown up, but a bunch of Americans and Vietnamese were killed when
13 they set off two bombs there. I was eating there one day, a friend and I, and a bunch of
14 military people came on and went all the way around, looking over the sides of the ship
15 and stayed there with guns. I was wondering what in the world was going on. Madame
16 Nhu came in and sat down at a table about three seats above me with a bunch of people
17 and ate. She was a very nervous person who didn't trust even walking around. It was
18 kind of like Bush does now when he's visiting someone. You've got to have that guard
19 around you. I was thinking, "Boy, to have all that guard, she must really not be liked."
20 You could tell the people who were sitting around there, didn't much care to even look at
21 her.

22 RV: What was your impression of her, just looking at her?

23 JH: I didn't like her at all. She was a good-looking woman, real strict. I'm not
24 sure; my guess is she had a lot to do with running Diem's government. I know her
25 husband Ngo Dien Nhu did.

26 RV: She certainly had a hand in a lot of what did happen.

27 JH: Yes. I think way later when Diem got killed; I think she was touring in
28 America. I know she wasn't in Vietnam.

29 RV: Anything else during Operation Mule Train that you feel like you need to
30 cover?

31 JH: No, that Mule Train one was pretty good. I left there in July of '63.

1 RV: Went back to Pope again?

2 JH: Yes, I went back to Pope. When I got there, I was called into the
3 Commander's office. That was my third trip over there. He said, "You've been going
4 over here to Vietnam, and we really need you back to train people who are going over to
5 Vietnam. You know more than anybody else, you've got the experience. So, we're not
6 letting you go back to Vietnam anymore. You're going to stay here and train people."

7 RV: What rank were you at this time?

8 JH: I was still a Lieutenant. Yeah, I was still a Lieutenant. That was in July. I
9 went up to Langley and did a couple weeks of sea survival training. Then went and
10 started training the people there at Pope who were going to go over to Vietnam. That was
11 in July. That November, three or four months later, I got a call from Langley saying,
12 "Hey, you ready to go back to Vietnam with the Ranch Hand?" I said, "Well I can't
13 because they're not going to let me go." They said, "Do you want to go?" I said, "Yes,
14 that was exciting. This thing is boring." They said, "Ok." A couple days later the
15 Commander called me into the office said, "Hey, you've really got some good friends." I
16 said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "I got this message from Air Force
17 headquarters that said put you on orders to go to Ranch Hand Vietnam. You're leaving
18 in a week from now." He said, "I don't know who you've got that let's you do this, but
19 you've got some good friends. You ought to keep them." I don't know how they got me
20 to do that. I went back over there again.

21 RV: This was November '63?

22 JH: This was November '63.

23 RV: Of course a very, very pivotal month in the war and here at home. Diem is
24 killed in early '63.

25 JH: Yes, he was killed on as a matter of fact; he was killed November the 2nd,
26 '63. It was two weeks before I left to go back over there. I was here when that
27 happened. In fact, I was here when Kennedy got assassinated. That was three weeks
28 then wasn't it?

29 RV: Yes, sir.

30 JH: I went over there right after that. The people over there explained the whole
31 Diem thing, death to me. I got the whole story on that. It was pretty interesting.

1 RV: What did they tell you?

2 JH: When they overthrew the palace, they went inside and they were going to get
3 to Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu and they weren't there. They were completely gone, which
4 was a surprise to them. Come to find out that they had tunnel that went from the palace
5 over to that French country club I went to. Over there, I noticed back in the woods there,
6 there was a fenced in area, when I'd go over there to play bridge and ping pong. They
7 had a tunnel from the palace, that came out over on the grounds of that French country
8 club that Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu had escaped through. They had gone on over to
9 Cholon and spent the night with a friend and then went to the Catholic Church the next
10 day. While they were at Catholic Church they called. Big Minh was running the Army
11 that was defeating him there. They called Big Minh and said, "Hey, if you'll let us go out
12 of the country and give us safe passage, we'll turn ourselves in." Big Minh said, "Fine,
13 where are you? We'll do that." They said, "We're at the Catholic Church in Cholon."
14 They sent an APC (Armored Personnel Carrier), a military vehicle over there and picked
15 them up in handcuffs. On the way back, just shot both of them in the head, which was
16 kind of startling. They should have just let them go. I understand they were afraid that
17 they would still cause problems and they didn't want any more problems. They were
18 killed in handcuffs in the back of that truck on the way back to where they thought they
19 were going to be sent out of the country. The General Minh, who was called Big Minh,
20 he was real tall for a Vietnamese took over I think for a little while. Then other people
21 took over after him.

22 RV: Tell me before we talk a little bit more about when you got back into Saigon,
23 tell me briefly about Kennedy's death. You heard that when you were at Pope?

24 JH: I was at Pope, Kennedy died, it was shocking thing. I was at the Officer's
25 Club. I was up there and so I left the Officer's Club. Rather than go to the squadron I
26 just went on home and watched the rest of it on TV for Walter Cronkite talking about it.
27 It really was a shock to me. You always remember where you were when that happened.
28 I was up there playing a pinball machine at the Officer's Club.

29 RV: Did you call your parents?

30 JH: I don't remember. I'm sure I did.

1 RV: How much were you able to go see them when you would come back into
2 North Carolina?

3 JH: Probably at least every other weekend, I'd drive up. I still had some friends
4 up there, we'd pal around with and I played golf with.

5 RV: Were you still playing ping-pong when you came back to North Carolina?

6 JH: Yes, I was. It was slowing down a lot.

7 RV: When you went back to Saigon, for Ranch Hand, were you based out of
8 Saigon?

9 JH: Yes, I was based out of Saigon.

10 RV: Tell me what the mood of the city was like when you arrived in late
11 November?

12 JH: In late November, it was right after Diem was killed. The people seemed like
13 they were excited, but they didn't know what the future held. They were not certain of
14 whether to be happy or sad. As far as the Communist influence, there was no other
15 Communist influence. It was just, "Who's going to run the country type stuff?"

16 RV: Where did you stay? Did you go back to this former apartment?

17 JH: At that time, yes I stayed at that same apartment building that time, yes.

18 RV: Do you remember how much you paid for that?

19 JH: No idea. It's funny. I guess when things are so cheap, you don't worry
20 about it.

21 RV: Right. So tell me about Ranch Hand. Was it pretty much the same as
22 Farmgate? Were your missions expanded or were they longer, more numerous?

23 JH: No, actually at Farmgate you know it just started with that Jungle Jim thing.
24 They changed our name to Ranch Hand while we were in the Philippines, before we ever
25 got to Vietnam. Essentially we were all Ranch Hand then. The Ranch Hands were a
26 special outfit. We wore Green Berets like the Army Special Forces do, but they were
27 Vietnamese green berets like the Vietnamese troops wore. They were folded down on
28 the opposite side from the Special Forces. Then on the front of them we wore a
29 Vietnamese rank with a patch on the side, the Ranch Hand patch. By the way, Al Kidd
30 and myself designed the Ranch Hand patch.

31 RV: Did you really?

1 JH: The hats were really nice, we enjoyed wearing those. Later on Nguyen Kao
2 Ky, who was the head of the Vietnamese Air Force and wore a beautiful purple scarf,
3 allowed us to wear purple scarves. The Special Forces and the other military were really
4 upset with what we wore, but we had special permission to wear them. We enjoyed that.

5 RV: Tell me about these missions when you went back in November '63.

6 JH: Ok, we were getting shot all the time. I just hated to go on them because
7 they had learned to shoot us before. They would sometimes shoot at us, but I was always
8 in the lead airplane. They wouldn't lead the airplanes. You know you've got to lead
9 them in order to hit them. When they'd shoot at us, they'd usually hit the second
10 airplane, which it was fine with me, I was in the first one. But they learned how to lead
11 on me. We were getting shot up pretty bad every time. So they decided to try some
12 spraying at night to see if that wouldn't help. Flying 150 feet above the trees at night is
13 kind of a thing you don't want to do very often. One of our C-123s would go out ahead
14 of us and higher and drop these big flares so we could see the jungle and see where we
15 were going. We tried it and we found out the flares just silhouetted us. So it was easier
16 for them to see us to shoot us. So we tried it the next night without the flares to see if we
17 could go on with just the moon.

18 RV: Yes, sir.

19 JH: It didn't work either. Plus we were thinking that if we had an emergency
20 there was nowhere we could go. We couldn't see. So after those two flights, they gave
21 up on trying to spray it at night. We did all of our spraying first light. As soon as you
22 could see good enough that I could map read to get on the target, we were gone.

23 RV: You'd get up early in the morning to do your spray mission?

24 JH: I'd leave my house sometimes at 4:00 in the morning. In fact, in order to get
25 there, I would have my maid; tell her I wanted a taxi at my house at 4:00 in the morning.
26 Usually the taxi would come up in front of my apartment there and he would stay in there
27 and sleep in it, so he'd be there in the morning and I could take a taxi to the base.

28 RV: How far away from the base did you live?

29 JH: Probably 10 or 15 minute drive.

30 RV: Were you spraying more in the Delta or did you start expanding northward?

1 JH: No, they really went north after I left, after this one. While I was there, it
2 was mainly Delta. With the exception of one Quy Nhon flight, I think it was all Delta.
3 You know that Ranch Hand sprayed to kill crops, the rice crops. Luckily for me I guess,
4 that only started, and that's where they really got into a bunch of firefights. That only
5 started right after I left the last time from Ranch Hand. So I wasn't into that.

6 RV: Describe your missions. Were you still using the same formation?

7 JH: Yes, it was a formation of two sometimes three airplanes, flying at 150 feet
8 with no wind. We usually were lower than that. Sometimes I've seen us pull up because
9 of tall trees. So I know you know you're right up above the ground. We're flying at
10 about 130 knots. Spraying and then turning around and coming back across it unless it
11 was a place that got shot up pretty good. We'd go back the next day or some other time
12 to try to spray it the second time.

13 RV: I've heard rumors, or of other Ranch Hands folks who were involved in that,
14 say that there was really poor intelligence as far as where some of the hot zones were that
15 you didn't want to go. Also that a lot of times, people knew where you guys would be
16 spraying in the next day or so. Did you find that to be true?

17 JH: Yes, as far as intelligence on the enemy, we had absolutely from the briefings
18 and everything no idea where they were, really. As far as them knowing that we were
19 coming it got to the point where we thought that they were ganged up there because they
20 knew we were going to be there that day, you know?

21 RV: Yes.

22 JH: Because otherwise how in the world could they all be shooting at us at once,
23 every time? It got to the point where we didn't know what to do. So, they started
24 keeping the spray flight missions secret so that nobody would know it, except our
25 Commander, who sent it down until we took off. When we took off we'd always fly
26 straight east until we got into the ocean, go all the way around to the bottom, and come in
27 from the bottom so that they wouldn't have any idea where we going or where we were
28 coming from.

29 RV: Wow!

30 JH: We would do all this and we'd still get shot up. It's amazing.

1 RV: How do you think they knew that, just speculating? Was it a leak
2 somewhere?

3 JH: I think there was a leak somewhere. It could have easily been such as
4 someone watching me. I had to be on the flight. Anytime I'd take a taxi at 4:00 in the
5 morning to the base, they'd figure, "Hey, he's going to spray." You know that's the easy
6 thing to do. Then you just radio some other people, "Hey, they're spraying today." Of
7 course they didn't have any idea I'm thinking of where we were going to spray unless
8 they had some higher up Vietnamese who told them. We quit telling the Vietnamese and
9 we still got shot up.

10 RV: How many spray missions would go out a day?

11 JH: One.

12 RV: So it was just your mission, just your fight?

13 JH: Yes. I was the lead, and if I was sick, there was no mission.

14 RV: How often did that happen?

15 JH: Didn't.

16 RV: Tell me about your briefings, what were they like?

17 JH: As far as the briefings down at the Army 2nd ADVON or something,
18 completely useless. A waste of time. I know nothing from them, I learned nothing from
19 them.

20 RV: What would they try to tell you?

21 JH: I think they would try to tell us where the enemy was, but they had no idea.
22 It made no difference, so what? It was prior to the time they had .50 calibers really that
23 would tear into an airplane so bad. Ours were just small holes.

24 RV: Tell me about any outstanding incidents that stand out in your mind from
25 this tour.

26 JH: From this one, none other than when my pilot Hadlestadt crashed over there
27 in the Thailand. Nothing interesting happened on this one.

28 RV: How long were you there during this tour?

29 JH: I was there; this was the Mule Train tour. Oh, no this was the fourth tour. I
30 was there until April of '64. That other one was the Mule Train tour. April of '64 was

1 when I came back. That October was when they did the first crop destruction mission. I
2 wasn't into those.

3 RV: Were you still flying 123s?

4 JH: When I came back from this fourth tour they had 130s at Pope. C-130s. The
5 123s were gone. They had a quandary; they didn't know what to do with me because I
6 had never been in a C-130. So they put me into the wing there and had me fly only C-47s
7 base flight. My job was running the Air Force people who came in and flew to the drop
8 zones who weren't people. I was in the combat air delivery branch there.

9 RV: At Pope?

10 JH: At Pope.

11 RV: How long did you stay in this position?

12 JH: I was assigned there; I came back in April and was in the C-47s. They sent
13 me about a year later to PCS to Nha Trang, Vietnam in the C-47s. I volunteered.

14 RV: Did you start training up in the 130s?

15 JH: No, by then I'd never been in a 130. Since I was in base flight, only to get
16 my flying time, base flight had one C-47 at Pope. I flew in that. I would just fly every
17 month to get my flying pay. Other than that I had no idea. I had never been in a C-130.

18 RV: How different was the 47 from the 123?

19 JH: 47 from the 123 they didn't even have a place that the navigator could look
20 out the window. They had a navigator seat there, but all he had was a compass and an
21 oxygen thing that would blink every time you put on your oxygen mask. You could sit
22 there and look at those two gauges if you wanted to. Or you could stand up there behind
23 the pilot and co-pilot and map read, which was what we all did. It was not made for
24 navigators.

25 RV: Sounds like it. So you were there for about a year in North Carolina at Pope,
26 before you went back?

27 JH: Yes, from 7 April '64. I started training to go back on 23rd of August, '65.

28 RV: What were you training for exactly?

29 JH: I trained at the 1st Air Commando Wing in Forbes, Kansas. We trained with
30 these C-47s. We called them Gooney Birds. We trained with these Gooney Birds that

1 were going to fire Gatling guns over there called Spooky or Puff the Magic Dragon or
2 something like that. I don't know if you've interviewed any of those people.

3 RV: Yes, I've heard of Puff many times.

4 JH: I trained with them. It was really something interesting. The pilot would just
5 turn that thing over and shoot that Gatling gun. It would just look like a hose of red
6 because of the tracers that were coming out. It was interesting. I know that they said if
7 you were on the ground and they shot you with one of those, before you could hit the
8 ground dead, you'd have 100 more bullets in you. Which means there was a lot of bullets
9 coming out of there. While we were training in Kansas, up there in the fields, they said,
10 "Here, I'll show you how much this'll come in." The pilot leaned over and shot into a
11 pond and the water boiled up. Just flew up in the air, all the water. It was something! I
12 was impressed with that. So they sent me over to PCS and I got there in November of
13 '65 to Nha Trang, Vietnam. Rather than keep me in the C-47 that had the Gatling guns,
14 they sent all the navigators I think except one, up to Nha Trang for leaflets and loud
15 speakers. That's what we did.

16 RV: First of all tell me about the base at Nha Trang and the differences of being
17 there and what your housing was like and your food and the general things like that.

18 JH: Nha Trang had some beautiful places. It's right up there on the beach of
19 course. We rented a French villa, one block from the beach. There was one, two I think
20 six of us navigators, all navigators. We rented a villa; I don't know again what we paid
21 for it. It was a big fenced in area, a luxury place really.

22 RV: Did you each have your own bedroom?

23 JH: There was two of us to a bedroom; three bedrooms, two of us each in a
24 bedroom. We went down and bought some cheap beds with mosquito netting around
25 them and put it in there. We didn't have air-conditioning or any of that stuff.

26 RV: Did you have some of the local Vietnamese come in and cook and clean for
27 you?

28 JH: Well, we didn't have a Vietnamese cook at this one. We had someone who'd
29 come by and clean up. The owners of the place lived in the servant quarters behind us,
30 but we didn't get them to come in and clean up. So as a general rule, we didn't have
31 anyone to clean up. We didn't care.

1 RV: For recreation would you guys go to the beach?

2 JH: Yes, we'd go swimming a lot. While I was there, another navigator and
3 myself went over to Thailand and bought a couple of Honda motorcycles. That was a lot
4 of fun riding around there on Honda motorcycles. We did that a lot.

5 RV: Did you feel relatively safe in Nha Trang?

6 JH: Yes.

7 RV: What was the city like to you?

8 JH: The city of Na Trang was way, way, way smaller than Saigon. But they had several
9 nice restaurants and several nice bars. We'd hit those every day. It's amazing how much
10 beer I drank down there. The Vietnamese beer called 33, Ba Muoi Ba was what
11 everybody did, so we did it.

12

13 RV: Would the drinking affect your flights the next day because you had to get
14 up so early?

15 JH: No, I don't think it ever did. I guess you ever know. But no I would never
16 wake up so drunk that I'd have hangovers or anything.

17 RV: What about the alcohol use, was it becoming more and more prevalent or
18 was it about the same?

19 JH: I think it was the same. Everybody in Vietnam, that was the way they killed
20 the time. It wasn't the whiskey it was the beer. Today I drink maybe a couple beers a
21 year. Over there it was three or four beers a day.

22 RV: What about drug use, did you see any of that during your tours?

23 JH: Well, while I was at Ranch Hand and Mule Train, there was never ever a
24 mention or ever did I see any drug use or hear about it. I think while I was with the C-
25 47s I had heard that lot of the Army people were getting high on drugs. I'm going to tell
26 you this story, it's a true story. I was a young Captain there; I had never ever even
27 smoked marijuana in my life. I went outside of my house there to the cyclo driver. I
28 heard that you could get drugs from them. Bought two marijuana cigarettes. I think they
29 cost .50 cents each. I smoked one that night after I drank some beer and went to sleep. It
30 didn't do anything. I smoked the other one the second night. I noticed that it had made
31 me feel like I had been drinking the beers except that my stomach was still empty. A

1 much better feeling. In my life, I've never had another one. If they were legal, I'd
2 probably go back to it. But I did have those two, and it was the first cyclo driver I'd
3 come up to. There must be some people over there who were familiar with that stuff.

4 RV: How about the other guys in your house, were they trying?

5 JH: No, none, none. In fact, I was smoking while one of them was sitting there
6 talking to me that night while I was sitting on my bed. They never ever mentioned
7 anything. They didn't even want a puff or anything. We didn't talk about it. You know
8 I was an officer. I don't know what the enlisted people did. So, I've had two marijuana
9 cigarettes. Other than that it was just straight to beer.

10 RV: Tell me the culture differences between Saigon and Nha Trang in the
11 civilian population. Things were very unstable in Saigon, politically, for a while there
12 while you were there, and then you're in Nha Trang. Was it very, very different? Could
13 you tell amongst the civilian population a big difference?

14 JH: As far as the people, the difference was it seemed like they were more
15 country, rather than city. Just like you would find Raleigh rather than New York or
16 something. There was no difference in their attitudes at all. They were friendly too.

17 RV: You said you did drive your motorcycles around town and you were able I
18 guess to go shopping and do things like that. Were they friendly?

19 JH: Yes, everybody was friendly. It wasn't a big place where you could do a lot
20 of shopping. I bet you they didn't have 10 bars in the whole city. The restaurants, there
21 were maybe three or four restaurants that you would go to. Other than that you cooked at
22 your own place. We didn't do a lot of cooking at our own place, but we ate an awful lot
23 of those C-rations. We'd bring them home from the base and that's what we'd eat.

24 RV: Which ones did you like best?

25 JH: I had my favorites then, but that's along time ago and I don't remember.

26 RV: Now this is November 1965, and getting to 1966, what did you know about
27 what the United States was trying to do in Vietnam?

28 JH: I did know that they were advancing so much with building places for the
29 Army and the different military units that it had got ten times as more people. It seemed
30 like every year it was 10 times more people than there was the year before.

31 RV: Meaning Americans?

1 JH: Yes, Americans. I think somewhere around that time, they opened up Cam
2 Ranh Bay. That was right beside Nha Trang. So we were close to that.

3 RV: What did you think about American policy in Vietnam at the time?

4 JH: Right now I can tell you, but back then I could care less. It didn't affect me
5 at all.

6 RV: Did you know why the United States was in Vietnam at that time?

7 JH: Yes, it was to help them keep the Communists out and it was that simple.
8 The Domino Theory, that's all you hear everyday.

9 RV: Did you buy into the Domino Theory at that time?

10 JH: I did at that time, I don't now.

11 RV: Tell me about your spray missions there when you went back. Your tour
12 here was going to be for a year, is that correct?

13 JH: No, this wasn't spray missions.

14 RV: Excuse me, that's right.

15 JH: This was the C-47s. We dropped leaflets and we had loud speakers.

16 RV: Tell me about doing that.

17 JH: As far as the leaflets, about that time, the B-52s would fly out of Guam on a
18 mission called Arc Light and just completely change a jungle into a bunch of holes by
19 dropping from way high altitude a bunch of bombs. We had the job of being right beside
20 them, flying close to that area while they were doing it. As soon as they would finish
21 we'd go over the area and drop surrender leaflets. Saying, "Hey, you can give yourself
22 up and you won't get this stuff," to them. We had those missions with the B-52s that we
23 did really often.

24 RV: Tell me about the destruction the B-52 could level.

25 JH: Tell you about what?

26 RV: Tell me about the B-52 destruction and watching that up close, first hand.

27 JH: It was exciting seeing those holes appear on the ground. I remember one
28 particular mission on Arc Light. We'd get the message down on when they were going
29 to be on target and where they were going to be. We had to be there a little bit after that.
30 We were dropping surrender leaflets and I looked down at the ground and the holes were
31 exploding. I said, "My, what's going on?" I looked up and the B-52s were dropping

1 straight down to us. Someone had messed up the times and we were there the same time
2 they were. That wasn't very exciting. We didn't get hit with anything.

3 RV: Could you see the B-52 above you at 30, 000 feet or so?

4 JH: Yes, but they were way, way up high.

5 RV: What did the leaflets say, did you read them?

6 JH: The leaflets were all different kinds. The one that we're most famous for is
7 the surrender leaflets or Chieu Hoi leaflets. Which were interesting in that they all had
8 serial numbers on them. When we would drop those, we would mark down the serial
9 numbers, which was a group of them from such and such to such and such, and where we
10 had dropped them. The Viet Cong would usually find those and put them in their pocket
11 incase they got captured. They could say, "Hey I was turning myself in or something."
12 Or for some other interesting reason. Or when they got killed and they got searched
13 they'd have them. We were using that, when we'd find one of those people we were
14 using that to find out where they had picked it up, so they could figure out where they
15 were moving from to. It really helped us out there too.

16 RV: Right. What other kind of leaflets besides the Chieu Hoi and surrender?

17 JH: I once collected a bunch of them and I gave them away. I tried to collect one of each
18 kind. We had leaflets that say, "Hey, turn in your gun and we'll give you \$1,000." Some
19 of them said, "Give yourself up and we'll give you," I don't know, "\$5,000." I heard that
20 there were some people down there that made a living turning themselves in every now
21 and then.

22 RV: How effective do you think those leaflets drops were in your opinion?

23 JH: I think they were very effective. The writings up were at that point from
24 when we started until during that time, it increased something like 35 times as many
25 people turned themselves in as they did before. The other part of it, we had loudspeakers
26 on there too that we did.

27 RV: How would that work?

28 JH: We would always have an escort because they would shoot at us all the time.
29 In fact the C-47s were the most shot at airplanes in the Vietnam War, with the exception
30 of Ranch Hand. So I went from one shot at to another shot at. But we would carry an
31 escort. Sometimes fighter planes with Napalm, but a lot of times we'd carry those C-47s

1 beside us, who had the Gatling guns. We'd fly over an area. First off, they'd capture
2 some Viet Cong person and get him to tell the name of all the people who's with him and
3 where they're stationed and where they are right now. Then they would take and record
4 all these messages. We'd go up there and we'd circle and we'd have a Vietnamese guy
5 get on the loudspeaker and say, "Ok people we know you're there." Then he'd name a
6 few of them. He'd say, "Give yourself up. If you don't we're going to kill you. If you
7 ever shoot at this airplane, you're going to regret it." If they'd shoot at it, we'd back off
8 and then the Gatling gun would come in there and just wipe them off. Then we'd go
9 back over and say, "See that, don't do that." Call them by name and tell them to
10 surrender and all that. I'm sure that was pretty effective.

11 RV: Was this flying over villages mainly?

12 JH: No this was over places where the Viet Cong were coming in from the Ho
13 Chi Minh Trail as our general rule. It was over the troops, not the villages. As a matter
14 of fact, we had what was called a No Doze Mission. We'd go up somewhere around 9:00
15 or 10:00 at night over where the troops, we knew where the Viet Cong troops were
16 massed, and fly over their area all night with screams and funeral music, just to keep
17 them awake.

18 RV: Really, screams?

19 JH: Screaming, babies, people and in the background funeral music. If they ever
20 shot at us we'd blast them again and then go back over it. We'd stay there all night for
21 maybe I don't know how long you can fly. Maybe eight hours with that music.

22 RV: Now, how loud was it to you guys inside the plane?

23 JH: It was pretty loud. We had earplugs we had to use. Of course we had our
24 headphones over the top of the earplugs.

25 RV: But you could still hear it?

26 JH: Oh, yes but it was Vietnamese I had no idea what they were saying.

27 RV: But a scream, is a scream is a scream right?

28 JH: Yes. We did that at 3,000 feet, which kept a lot of the rifles from hitting us.
29 Back during that time, the Viet Cong also had those .50 calibers which were the first
30 things really that could reach an airplane good and tear into it. We had this standing
31 policy that if we got shot with a .50 caliber we left the area. It wasn't that important.

1 RV: So as soon as?

2 JH: You could look down at the ground and see them shooting at you with
3 machine guns and tracers. When they're coming your way it looks like they're going so
4 slow with the tracers because they're coming straight at you. They would usually not
5 reach you. Every now and then there'd be a big white flare go "Phoom!" And go right
6 on by you real quick. You say, "Uh-oh that's one of those," and you'd get out of that
7 area.

8 RV: How many were on the crew in the C-47?

9 JH: C-47: pilot and co-pilot and me and the engineer.

10 RV: Did you mainly fly just one plane or did you have a couple planes in
11 formation with you?

12 JH: I think up there at Nha Trang we had four C-47s but we'd fly one plane at a
13 time. The rest of the squadron were U-10s which did the same thing, single two seats but
14 a single pilot airplane that did the same thing.

15 RV: I'm curious did the funeral music and screaming ever bother you guys that
16 much?

17 JH: No, we didn't pay attention to it.

18 RV: Would you sleep all day to prepare for these kind of missions?

19 JH: Yes. But we didn't do those every night. We only did that occasionally.

20 RV: How about the briefings this time around, were they any better than what
21 you described before?

22 JH: I'm going to tell you what's the truth. I have no idea. I don't even remember
23 the briefings this time around. But in my whole career in Vietnam I don't ever remember
24 a briefing that was important to me. It was just some wasted time. I just don't think we
25 knew that much about where the enemy was, you know?

26 RV: Talk about the enemy a little bit, how can you describe it?

27 JH: I don't know, I never saw one.

28 RV: What about their tactics?

29 JH: I think the big secret with the enemy winning out in the end was they got the
30 people for them. I think way back Mao Tse Tung said in one of his little red books there
31 that, "If you're a fish you've got to have the water with you or you're going to die. If

1 you're having a revolt you've got to have the people with you or you're not going to
2 make it either." Something like that. That's the truth. They knew that over there. Those
3 Viet Cong turned the countryside in their favor. That's the whole secret.

4 RV: How could the United States have done it differently? How could the
5 United States overcome that if that was the situation on the ground?

6 JH: They's always saying, "Well if we'd have bombed them here and done it
7 earlier and done all this." I don't think ever you could have turned their hearts and
8 minds. For one thing, we weren't Vietnamese. In '69 when Ho Chi Minh died?

9 RV: Yes.

10 JH: I was downtown Saigon, that's still in the middle of the war. I noticed all the
11 Vietnamese people around there wearing these little black labels. I asked them I said,
12 "What's that?" They said, "This is in honor of Ho Chi Minh." I'm talking about the
13 people in Saigon, everybody. Right in front of the military troops, they were worshipping
14 Ho Chi Minh. No one wore anything when Diem died. They were always for Ho Chi
15 Minh I think. Because he wanted a country. Whether it was communist or not, he
16 wanted a country, not run by the French. Not run by the Americans, not run by the
17 Japanese.

18 RV: How was the morale of the men around you?

19 JH: It was pretty good. There wasn't that much that they could do. You know
20 sports wise and everything else. They got along real good together. I think they made
21 friendships that they still have reunions and love to get together.

22 RV: Were you able to ever make one of the MARS (Military Affiliate Radio
23 system) calls to call home?

24 JH: Yes, I did that one time. No, I did that while I was in Thailand. I didn't do
25 that when I was in Vietnam. I did that in Thailand one time just to see what it was like. I
26 called my mother and father and they were surprised.

27 RV: How long did your conversation last?

28 JH: Ten or fifteen minutes. I remember that was a real nice thing.

29 RV: How about other contact with home, were you writing letters now more
30 evenly?

1 JH: Yes, I was. I hate to get this public. I was also telling them to send me some
2 hundred-dollar bills in cash, because I could take that down and trade it in for piasters
3 and you really get a good bargain.

4 RV: Well, that makes sense. If you're out there supplying yourself and buying
5 things, you can do that.

6 JH: You know the black market; money was of so much higher value than the
7 other stuff.

8 RV: Did you even have any contact with troops from other countries, the
9 Australians, the New Zealanders?

10 JH: Yes, when I was down in Saigon, this is before I was with the C-47s. The
11 Australians they had this thing. They could out drink us, out scream us, party us, sports
12 anything they wanted. I noticed also that they had these nice hats that they wore, almost
13 like a cowboy brim that they wore. In fact, we had asked to be able to wear a hat like
14 that. I think then over CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific Command) was Admiral
15 Felt. He said, "Hey we've got these hats." You know those big old hats that they wore
16 down during Panama when they were building the canal? I don't know what they were
17 called. They're made out of plastic. He told us that we could wear those because they
18 were issued. Later on they gave us some hats like those Australians wore, but we
19 enjoyed those real good. The Australians, I'd land at their base sometime, they were
20 usually at a different base than what we were so they could be completely separate. They
21 were all real friendly. We got together. They could out drink us though.

22 RV: Was that true, they could out party you guys?

23 JH: Yes.

24 RV: Out play you and everything?

25 JH: In every way. I don't care what it was. They could do it better than we
26 could.

27 RV: Was there any resentment toward that?

28 JH: No, no. It was just, "Let's have a party type stuff." No, no, no.

29 RV: Did you ever have any experience with Medevac or the dust off units?

30 JH: No.

31 RV: Nothing at all?

1 JH: No, I'd carry dead people and wounded out sometimes.

2 RV: Right.

3 JH: In fact, I got a medal. I was sent up to a base close to Nha Trang while I was
4 in Mule Train to pick up an Army man who had tried to kill himself by cutting his throat.
5 He threatened suicide and they put him in this room by himself. In the window of the
6 room was a razor blade that he got a hold of. He just sliced himself all to pieces. We
7 were to bring him back down to a hospital in Saigon. It was the middle of the night, and
8 the base didn't have any lights. Wanted to know if we'd volunteer to land there if they'd
9 put a jeep in the front and the back with their lights on to tell us where the runway was. It
10 was a pretty dangerous mission. We went up there and brought him back. I think they
11 gave us the Commendation Medal for doing that. I remember we brought him back in a
12 stretcher and he was conscious. We were on the way back and he asked me if I had a
13 cigarette. I gave him a cigarette, lit it up and gave it to him. He took a big puff of that
14 cigarette and the smoke came out of his throat!

15 RV: Oh really?

16 JH: You think, "Ugh!" That's where he'd cut himself so bad.

17 RV: Wow! I bet that was a bit freaky. So how long were you in Nha Trang?

18 JH: Nha Trang I was there for a year. I was a PCS. I was there until—I departed
19 Nha Trang in December of '66. From there my orders were to go to Tachikawa, Japan.
20 All that was, was another Vietnam mission.

21 RV: Really?

22 JH: Yes.

23 RV: How so?

24 JH: The mission for the Tachikawa C-130s was to fly 15 days in Vietnam, come
25 back and stay about a week, and then go 15 days to Vietnam and back about a week for
26 the whole three years I was there.

27 RV: Ok, so you were rotating out?

28 JH: Yes. In and out for 15 day trips. It was interesting because they sent me to
29 Tachikawa, thinking that since I came from Pope, I was a C-130 guy. But I'd never been
30 in one. Tachikawa had C-130s. I hadn't been to a C-130 school, but they trained me. I
31 just flew with someone until I learned how to do it. I don't know of anybody else who's

1 ever flown C-130s most of their life and has never been to a C-130 school, but I hadn't
2 even been to one. I went to Tachikawa. That was in December, when was that?
3 December of '66.

4 RV: How was it learning in the C-130? Was it difficult for you?

5 JH: C-130s are really nice. The navigator seat is nice. They've got a nice radar.
6 I hadn't even used radar before. All the instruments a navigator needs.

7 RV: You were in 130s the rest of your time?

8 JH: Yes, that's it.

9 RV: Tell me about Japan, what was that like?

10 JH: Tachikawa, that's where it is. A met a nice Japanese woman and we got
11 married. She's in the other room.

12 RV: Really? Wow! That's wonderful.

13 JH: So you know that was nice place.

14 RV: Yes, sir absolutely! I guess you just answered the question. Were you able
15 to go off base and enjoy Japan culturally and socially and all that? How much different
16 was it compared to Vietnam, comparing the two?

17 JH: Comparing the two, Vietnam is crude. Japan is probably better than America
18 as far as being up to date. The people of Japan are so nice that they're weird. I mean you
19 have never run across, not just because I'm married to a Japanese. But those people,
20 they have learned how to treat people. They're so nice. Even if they didn't like
21 Americans because they were in the Second World War, they treat you like real nice.
22 Unless it was an old person, old man or something, they had no regrets from the Second
23 World War.

24 RV: Did you ever run into those people and the older folks had experienced?

25 JH: Yes and I'd try to change the subject and get them off of it. They want to
26 talk about being in the Second World War and fighting against us. It was not something.
27 It's like abortion, don't talk about it.

28 RV: Can you talk about how you met your wife?

29 JH: Yes. I was at the Officer's Club. A good friend, bachelor friend of mine was
30 dating a Japanese girl at the Officer's Club. The girl had her girlfriend with her. We sat
31 there and she didn't speak a word of English and I didn't speak any Japanese. Other

1 than, "Hi, how you doing?" She smiled and that was my future wife. I found out that she
2 had been taught that if she talks to Americans, the only word in English that she needs to
3 know is, "No." It was probably pretty good training. Kept me after her I guess. I went
4 and took some formal Japanese courses over there through the University of Maryland.
5 We dated for two years, and I got to where I just decided I couldn't even do, while I was
6 even flying in Vietnam I would write her letters in Japanese. I was getting that good at
7 the language. I got to where I'd just said, "Hey, this is it. I've got to live with her or else
8 I can't live." We married in July of '68. After we dated two years. For the wedding I
9 brought my mother over.

10 RV: Did you really?

11 JH: Yes. Had the wedding in downtown Tokyo at the Embassy. We left a year
12 later to the States.

13 RV: Tell me about your trips over to Vietnam, these 15-day spans. Where would
14 you stay first of all?

15 JH: When we would go to Vietnam for the 15-day trips we would stay at Cam
16 Ranh Bay and fly missions out of the area. It was just the same as the 123s except a lot
17 more of them and carrying a lot more cargo. We'd have to land at a little longer airfield
18 than the 123s would.

19 RV: So you flew in and out of Cam Ranh?

20 JH: Yes, in and out of Cam Ranh to everywhere.

21 RV: These were specifically spray missions is that correct?

22 JH: No, no, no this is cargo.

23 RV: This is totally cargo?

24 JH: Totally cargo. After I left that Ranch Hand before I got into C-47s and I left
25 Ranch Hand. That was the last spray mission.

26 RV: Was this similar to Mule Train or were you more busy?

27 JH: Yes, it was similar to Mule Train, just a larger airplane.

28 RV: Tell me what you would haul around the country.

29 JH: Supplies for all of the Army bases. Always carried food, carried the mail and
30 carry the equipment and the bullets and ammunition and stuff they needed. We

1 sometimes carried jeeps and stuff. I don't think we could carry tanks, we couldn't get
2 those in there; all the stuff that they would need in order to keep building up their bases.

3 RV: Did you get shot at a lot?

4 JH: Not as much as we did on the others because we're flying higher, and landing
5 at larger bases and so they were well protected. You know they still had the 130s that
6 went into places like Khe Sanh for that. I'm lucky that I wasn't one of those.

7 RV: Did you ever find any really hot zones?

8 JH: We still got shot at and I still got holes in our airplane, but they slowed down
9 a lot. There's nothing that I can remember that was really exciting about that stuff other
10 than just hauling cargo.

11 RV: You had mentioned earlier when I asked you about had you been wounded,
12 you said no but one of your pilots had been.

13 JH: Yes that's while I was with the leaflets and loudspeakers. It wasn't my pilot.
14 It was my roommate navigator, Jerry Duffy. He's dead now, but he didn't get killed over
15 there. He was a navigator in my room and he was flying the C-47s. I told you we didn't
16 have a navigator seat. We stood up behind the pilot and co-pilot. A bullet came through
17 the cockpit and went through the co-pilots armrest. The co-pilot didn't have his arm on it
18 at the time. From the armrest went straight into the stomach of my roommate Jerry
19 Duffy. He lost a spleen and a bunch of stuff, and immediately got out of the Air Force
20 and went back to New York. He still got around. He opened a ski resort I heard. But
21 he's since died. He got wounded. Other than all those other people that got killed, that
22 was the only wound we had.

23 RV: Any memorable experiences on the 130 during these three years you're in
24 Japan and flying over? Was it as routine as it sounds or did it vary from time to time?

25 JH: I don't think I can remember anything exciting happened on those. They
26 were pretty routine.

27 RV: You did this in Japan from December '66 until when?

28 JH: I was at Tachikawa and I left there December 2, 1969. It was about three
29 weeks after Ho Chi Minh had died.

30 RV: When he did die, you said you saw the people in Saigon.

31 JH: Who had the black patches on, other than that there was nothing.

1 RV: How did the Americans react?

2 JH: I don't even remember that they even cared.

3 RV: In Japan did you live on base or were you able to get housing off base with

4 your wife?

5 JH: I lived on base. I lived at the BOQ (Bachelor's Officer Quarters) until I got

6 married. Then they moved me into a real nice on base house there. I enjoyed that.

7 While I was over there I made Major.

8 RV: Let me ask you some questions about life at the base, just kind of in general

9 looking back at your Vietnam career. Did you ever run into any race issues?

10 JH: I ran into a race issue before I ever got, while I was in Aviation Cadets. I

11 don't even know if it's worth mentioning, but it was in San Antonio.

12 RV: What happened?

13 JH: I was an upper-class Lieutenant, kind of a boss of an underclass who had just

14 come in. They had one black guy. Looking back, back at that time that's the only black

15 guy I can remember seeing there. He was really intelligent and really nice. We went

16 downtown. I was upper-class and he was underclass. Went downtown San Antonio to

17 go to a movie one Saturday. We went up to the movie and I bought a ticket and he was

18 behind me. He gave them the money and they said, "I'm sorry you can't come in here."

19 He said, "Why?" She said, "We don't allow colored people." So I went to the window

20 and I said, "Can I get my money back for my ticket?" She said, "Certainly." I said, "I've

21 got some friends inside can I go in for a minute?" She said, "Certainly." So I went into

22 the movie, it hadn't started yet and went up to the balcony and yelled down an

23 announcement that anybody from Aviation Cadets, this is off limits and to leave. Fifteen

24 or twenty people walked out and got their money back. We put it off limits. I don't

25 know whatever happened. That was in 1960, San Antonio.

26 RV: Why did you feel so strongly about that?

27 JH: Well he was my friend. I'm going to tell you throughout my life, I've never

28 had anything about the race. It didn't make any difference to me.

29 RV: Was that the way you were raised?

30 JH: That was the way I was raised. I really thank my father. It was just another

31 person. I'm sure that he brought that into my mind. It was something I didn't even think

1 about. When I married my Japanese girlfriend, North Carolina only the year before that
2 didn't allow mixed marriages. I couldn't have married her in North Carolina.

3 RV: Wow!

4 JH: So, things change.

5 RV: Yes, sir.

6 JH: As far as Vietnam, I didn't see any race stuff there.

7 RV: How about any tension between those who were drafted and those who had
8 enlisted and were officers?

9 JH: The rule was and it was really strictly enforced, you didn't get together. You
10 didn't party together; you didn't do anything together that you weren't allowed to.

11 RV: Was that ever broken?

12 JH: Yes, some people fell in love and married enlisted girls. Later, I don't know
13 of any of it during that time. The Sergeants and officers would get together for a pig
14 picking or a barbeque or something sometimes, but as a general rule you didn't pal
15 around together. You just didn't do it and I didn't. I stayed only with the officers. The
16 others were friendly and nice. They stayed with their people and we stayed with ours. I
17 guess it was more that than it was the race. You just didn't do it. You know they had
18 their own clubs. They weren't allowed into an Officer's Club and we didn't go into the
19 Enlisted Club.

20 RV: Tell me about the relationship you had with your men in your unit?

21 JH: The ones that you lived with in your house, they ended up being almost like
22 brothers. The others were just real friendly. The pilots and et cetera were just real
23 friendly people that you got along real good with. Even if you didn't care for them, you
24 didn't show it.

25 RV: Do you remember particularly a more humorous event that comes to mind
26 about your time in Vietnam?

27 JH: There's many, many, many humorous things. I remember in Saigon when I
28 was living at that apartment, a Special Forces guy gave me a great, big Viet Cong flag
29 which I really was proud of. I brought it home and gave it to my brother. I don't know
30 where it is now. The star in the middle of it was coming loose from the thread. I gave it
31 to my maid outside and told her to sew that back together. She was sewing it up when

1 the police happened by and arrested her and took her off to jail. Figuring that she's got
2 the Viet Cong flag, she's Viet Cong. I had to go out there and get her back and explain to
3 them what was going on. That was kind of humorous. While we were in C-47s in Nha
4 Trang, I don't know why, they got this thing, "They've got to send us some food and
5 they've got to send us some letters." They had this big thing in the States, "Support your
6 service men overseas." There were all kind of letters from girls that you'd want to
7 answer just to say in schools. People would send you cookies and all that stuff.

8 RV: Just complete strangers?

9 JH: Yes, complete strangers just trying to say, "Ok I support you." Different
10 companies would send stuff over for your unit. My roommate's father worked at the
11 Schlitz Brewery in the States somewhere. Said, "Hey, I'm sending you a gift over." One
12 day we got a call from the base at Nha Trang said, "You've got some stuff out here
13 you've got to come pick up." We went out there in a pick up truck. He had sent us so
14 many pallets of beer that it took us three trips out there with a pick up truck to bring it
15 back to our house. It wouldn't fit in there, and we put it on the front porch. It was just
16 for us. You can imagine for a while. We knew that we couldn't finish all that beer, but
17 we kept enough of it for our trip. Took the rest of it downtown and sold it to the bar
18 owners. Got a lot of money for that. That was kind of humorous.

19 RV: That is funny. Anything else that comes to mind?

20 JH: No, there's a million things. You just can't think of them.

21 RV: Was there a particular brave action that you remember that stands out in
22 your mind?

23 JH: Brave action?

24 RV: Yes, sir.

25 JH: As far as I'm concerned I wasn't brave, no.

26 RV: What about those around you? Was there an incident that you remember?

27 JH: No. There wasn't anything. I remember I tried to get a Purple Heart. When
28 I was at Pleiku one night they mortared the airfield and they were trying to hit our
29 airplane. They told us to get away from it, to move. So we started running away from
30 the airfield. I ran into a barbed wire fence and cut my arm pretty bad. Went over and

1 told them that was combat and they ought to give me a Purple Heart, but they didn't do it.
2 That wasn't brave. I was just running away from the airplane.

3 RV: How often did those mortar attacks or rocket attacks happen at these bases?

4 JH: The bases we were at, it seldom happened. When we'd visit some of those
5 bases it would happen. We'd want to stay there as small a time as possible and get out of
6 there. The ones we stayed at over night, they were really safe.

7 RV: What do you think about the immediate leadership that you had in Vietnam?
8 Those ranked just above you who were kind of directing your operations?

9 JH: As a general rule they were great people. There were a couple, just like
10 you'll always have who were lousy, just assume not name them.

11 RV: Sure.

12 JH: Overall leadership was real good.

13 RV: What about the overall leadership for the war in general as far as Military
14 Commanders, Westmoreland and Abrams?

15 JH: Now everybody knows about those and their shortfalls. And I do too. Some
16 of them I really can't stand. I will tell you the truth while I was over there; they were
17 invisible. They meant nothing to me. They didn't affect anything that we were doing
18 that I can remember.

19 RV: How about some of the Air Force leaders?

20 JH: Same with that. The higher up you got the more invisible they became. Our
21 Squadron Commander who was over everything as a general rule was a very nice person.
22 It's very hard to find any, that were just really, really outstanding. But they did their job.
23 They put the emphasis where it ought to be, which was whatever their bosses told them to
24 do.

25 RV: Did you ever come across a time when American morale was either going
26 down or very, very high?

27 JH: No. If I'd have been a foot soldier it would've been a different thing. From
28 what we did, you're like truck driver. You could care less what's going on.

29 RV: How much contact did you have with the indigenous forces, the Vietnamese
30 Air Force or ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)?

1 JH: Vietnamese Air Force, other than when I was in Ranch Hand and they had to
2 fly with us, and being over there close to Nguyen Cao Ky. We had a couple of them that
3 were friends of ours. We'd meet at bars, and I would use them to translate what some of
4 those girls were saying to each other. We'd go around drinking together. They were
5 nice, but other than that, as a general rule, we didn't have anything to do with them.

6 RV: Of the three planes that you flew in, the 123, the 47 and the 130, which was
7 your favorite?

8 JH: You're right those were the ones I flew. I think it has to be the 130, C-130
9 because it had so much for the navigator to use. I was most used to the C-123, but the C-
10 130 was great.

11 RV: Which one was the worst of the three?

12 JH: Of course the C-47. It was good during the Second World War, but we're
13 past that now.

14 RV: Sir, we left off December 1969, you go back home with your wife. Did you
15 go to Pope Air Force Base again?

16 JH: Yes, I went back to Pope. I was assigned to the 778th Airlift Squadron,
17 whose name was changed later to the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron. So, I stayed in the
18 40th. In fact, I stayed there, other than going back overseas, that's where I stayed until I
19 retired.

20 RV: What did you do when you got back in 1969?

21 JH: '69 when I got back, I just was at Pope flying C-130s and doing the normal
22 mission of running the Army around everywhere they wanted to go and practice
23 dropping, air dropping.

24 RV: Were you doing any training for people who were going to Vietnam?

25 JH: Yes. I didn't have any idea whether they were going to Vietnam or not,
26 because we just trained them. We could care less where they were going. A lot of them
27 went to Vietnam, but we didn't train them just for Vietnam at that time. Prior to that they
28 had good training. They knew they were going to Vietnam. These were just training and
29 how to fly the C-130s.

30 RV: How long were you doing this?

1 JH: I did that from when I got back in '69. I did that until 1975. But during that
2 time from '69 to '75, I occasionally went over TDY to Thailand and we'd fly
3 occasionally over to Saigon and back. Our main mission was to do high altitude airdrops
4 over Cambodia. We were supporting those people at that time. We did that, flew real
5 high airdrops because they were scared at that time they had shoulder-mounted missiles.
6 They didn't want us to get shot down by one of those.

7 RV: Right. Do you remember the altitude?

8 JH: No, I do remember it was very high. When we would go to land somewhere
9 at Phnom Penh, Cambodia and we'd have to go down lower, we'd have the loadmaster
10 standing in the door with a flare gun. If a heat-seeking missile came at us our defense
11 was to shoot a flare gun out and hopefully it would chase the flare.

12 RV: Wow! That's a big chance to take. (Laughs)

13 JH: Yes. One flare got shot, and he claimed that something was coming up. I
14 don't know if it was true or not.

15 RV: So you were based out of Thailand when you would fly these missions?

16 JH: Yes, out of U Taphao, Thailand, which is down on the Gulf Coast.

17 RV: What kind of things were you taking in and dropping?

18 JH: We were dropping ammunition and supplies, high altitude airdrops on
19 parachutes. What we would do is we'd have our coordinates that we'd have to go to.
20 We'd go over there and we'd have to contact them on the radio. They'd have to give us a
21 secret code because the enemy was also on the radio. If they gave us the proper secret
22 code we would drop the stuff to them.

23 RV: Were these to South Vietnamese troops?

24 JH: I tell you I'm thinking back. I don't even know who we were dropping to.
25 Somebody was fighting down there. We were supporting them.

26 RV: The Americans were in there for a period of time and the South Vietnamese
27 were in there for a period of time so I imagine you were probably surprised.

28 JH: I mean I've got too any countries to worry about. I don't know what's going
29 in Cambodia. I know Pol Pot was over there killing all those people.

30 RV: When you said secret code words, can you give an example of what you
31 mean?

1 JH: Before the mission we'd pick up a book of Dead Days Codes or something.
2 It was something like Alpha Bravo Charlie. If we'd say ok, "Alpha, Charlie, Charlie."
3 They'd have to give a response of "Alpha, Bravo, Charlie," or whatever the appropriate
4 response it to what we said to them, according to a code book that they also had. If they
5 didn't, they didn't get the equipment. I know at least one time we got permission to drop
6 and the people told us "Hey we've moved, we're across the river now." It just sounded
7 kind of funny. So we went to a different code and asked them and they couldn't respond
8 to it so we didn't drop to them. I know that the enemy were trying to get that stuff. The
9 codes were important.

10 RV: Was that the only incident that you had?

11 JH: Yes, that's the only problem we had at that one time. It was so high altitude
12 we weren't really involved in it. We had no idea what was down there at the bottom.

13 RV: Was it your standard crew again on the 130?

14 JH: Yes, just the standard crew.

15 RV: How many missions do you think you flew during this time period?

16 JH: Maybe every other day for a couple months.

17 RV: Ok. Would you go for the six-month stay?

18 JH: No, it was usually a two month stay then at the most. I don't remember
19 exactly. We'd go over at different times. Right now it was TDY from Pope, just maybe
20 a squadron. We'd go over there.

21 RV: How did you get selected? Was it simply your squadron was selected?

22 JH: Our squadron, our squadron went.

23 RV: Any outstanding memories from this time? Any incidents that popped into
24 your mind?

25 JH: No. Not for when I was TDY from there at Pope.

26 RV: Let me ask you a couple questions about the early 1970s. The United States
27 left Vietnam officially in the early part of 1973. How did you feel about the plan that the
28 United States had to Vietnamize the war? To turn over the war to the Vietnamese. Do
29 you think that was a good idea or feasible or what?

1 JH: No. Even at that time. I'm giving you my thoughts then. To me, it was "Ok
2 we've lost. Get out of there." There was no way possible that the Vietnamese could take
3 that over.

4 RV: Really?

5 JH: Yes.

6 RV: Why do you think so?

7 JH: They didn't have anything without the American troops. There was no way.
8 In my opinion there was no way. It was just saying, "Ok we lost, but if we're not in there
9 we won't be the ones to get overrun."

10 RV: Do you feel differently today?

11 JH: No, that's the exactly the way I feel about it. We gave it up at that time.

12 RV: Do you think the United States achieved the "peace with honor" that Nixon
13 and Kissinger said?

14 JH: No.

15 RV: Why not?

16 JH: If you back all the way up to "Should we have been there?" Of course we
17 shouldn't have been there. Then even half way through the war, let's say in the '60s, if
18 you had any intelligence at all, you knew that no matter who you supported whether it
19 was a good President or Diem, there was no way that we were going to win because we
20 didn't have the people behind us. The people really didn't want another country taking
21 over like America did. They wanted a united country, and Ho Chi Minh had offered that
22 to them way back. They had secretly, I think, wanted that. There's no way, no matter
23 what that we could have won, in my opinion. Some people said, "That's just my
24 opinion."

25 RV: Do you remember how you felt when the United States had completely
26 withdrawn from Southeast Asia or from Vietnam I should say?

27 JH: I just knew that was the end of it and I was just wondering how long it would
28 take before the Viet Cong took over. That was '73 wasn't it? It took two years, that was
29 a pretty long time in my opinion. I thought it'd be months. As a matter of fact, we'll get
30 into it, but I was there on the last day. In '75 when they evacuated Saigon.

1 RV: Let's talk about that. You said you did go into Saigon a number of times
2 you would land in there.

3 JH: Yes.

4 RV: What had changed that you noticed?

5 JH: The openness of the military walking around downtown and what wasn't
6 there. If you even went downtown it was in an armored vehicle. I think the Viet Cong
7 were driving by on these motorcycles and throwing grenades into cars and stuff. It was
8 guarded against that. It was just more tight and secure, and nobody trusted anybody.
9 That was my opinion of it.

10 RV: You felt more nervous?

11 JH: Yes, and it felt more strange than friendly.

12 RV: Were there less Americans on the street that you noticed?

13 JH: There were not lots of Americans. There were up until then. There weren't.
14 There was many, many more Americans that were in Vietnam then but they just weren't
15 running around downtown Saigon.

16 RV: When you flew in during this time from 1970 to '73 when the Americans
17 were still there, I guess into '75, how long would you stay? Would you stay out of Tan
18 Son Nhut, would you go into the city and stay?

19 JH: When I'd go into Saigon I'd stay there at Saigon in some barracks over night.
20 I never stayed more than over night when I go back into Saigon.

21 RV: Were you just simply dropping off cargo, refueling and then coming back
22 out?

23 JH: Yes, yes.

24 RV: How long would it take you to fly from Thailand into Saigon?

25 JH: We'd have to fly across Cambodia. I would say, I don't know, but I guess a
26 couple of hours.

27 RV: Were you shot at much?

28 JH: No, never. We'd come over high altitude and then lower ourselves into
29 Saigon. We weren't shot at, at all there.

30 RV: Why don't you tell me about being there in April 1975?

1 JH: Let's catch up to where I got. That was while I was at Pope. Then in
2 January of 1975, I was given PCS orders to go to Kadena, Okinawa to fly C-130s. So the
3 last part of January I was in Kadena of '75. From Kadena they sent us over to Thailand
4 and we were helping to move all of the equipment and people out of Saigon. We would
5 just go daily, daily, daily. In and out, in and out, in and out. The last night when the Viet
6 Cong came and took over, you also had to carry Army people or a couple of guards in the
7 back of our plane with guns to keep people from running onto the airplane. I was just
8 wondering if they were going to shoot and kill somebody because they were trying to get
9 on the airplane. You never know. We'd carry out sometimes 100 people sitting on the
10 floor of our airplane, without any seats or anything. Just sitting on pallets on the floor.
11 We'd bring in nothing other than the *Stars and Stripes*. Just used the empty aircraft to
12 take out everything that was in the PX (Post Exchange) and everything that was in the
13 radio stations and all that other stuff and the people. So, we'd do it over and over and
14 over. The last day that Saigon was being overrun, which was in, what was that?

15 RV: April, end of April 1975.

16 JH: 1975. April 30th when it fell.

17 RV: Yes, sir.

18 JH: Our route then was to come in straight off of the south of Vietnam; high
19 altitude. We were so many airplanes that we didn't even have to see where we were
20 going. Just look and follow the one ahead of you type thing. Really high, get straight,
21 stay high until you got over the field, and circle down over the field and landed at Tan
22 Son Nhut in Saigon. Just to keep those people from shooting you. Get a load and take
23 off, that's what we'd do all the time. They even got one C-130. They had to push it off
24 the side of the runway so we could still land. We would do it and do it and do it. I was
25 coming in and we were circling to land when we got the word from I don't know where.
26 I doubt it was on down in Saigon, "Everybody off. This is the last one has landed. No
27 more." We went on back to Thailand without landing because the last one had landed
28 right ahead of us. In fact, I think I got a Commendation Medal for doing all of that stuff
29 too.

30 RV: Really?

31 JH: Yes.

1 RV: Did you lose any 130s while you were doing this?

2 JH: There was one of them there on the runway that had been shot or something
3 happened. I think he got shot. They had to push it off to the side. You could see it every
4 time you landed. Didn't hurt the crew. I think the crew went on the next airplane and
5 took off.

6 RV: Go ahead.

7 JH: That was that. An interesting thing happened. That night is the one they
8 waved us off. The next morning, I went out to the U Taphao Airfield there and it was
9 completely full. Airplanes on the grass everywhere. They had all departed from Vietnam
10 with anybody that knew how to fly, and anybody that was their, family or anything in it.
11 They had every kind of airplane there was. Helicopters, even C-123s I think landed
12 there. From people getting out of Vietnam and an interesting part about it is I stood there
13 and watched them. When this great old big crane looking helicopters that the Army uses,
14 they came over and started picking up these helicopters and taking them out into the Gulf
15 of Siam. I figured they were taking them out to a carrier somewhere. Before they got out
16 of sight, they would drop them into the ocean. Come back and get another one and drop
17 it. They'd come and get the airplanes and take them out there and drop them. They were
18 just dumping those into the ocean. The reason was the Viet Cong said, "Hey that Air
19 Force belongs to us now, give them back." We said, "Ok give us a couple days," but they
20 didn't get anything back. They were dumped in the ocean.

21 RV: How did that make you feel watching all this?

22 JH: Nothing. I thought it was right cute.

23 RV: Could you actually see any of the North Vietnamese Army advancing on
24 Saigon those times you were flying in and out of that area?

25 JH: I would see a lot of ground fire at night. You'd see a lot of tracers, a lot of
26 ground fire around Saigon. You knew they were very, very close. After they actually got
27 in, I'm sure we knew nothing about it, because we weren't allowed in then.

28 RV: Do you remember how those around you felt during this time period?

29 JH: Those around me meaning whom?

30 RV: Just your crew and any of the other Americans?

1 JH: They thought we had to get all those people out. We had to get them out.
2 We were worried about being rushed by a bunch of people after we landed. So much so
3 that you wouldn't be able to take off. That was a big worry for us. A couple of times I
4 think that had happened; not at Saigon but at some of the other bases.

5 RV: What was your payload, do you remember?

6 JH: No, I just know every, what we were allowed to carry we filled it up. Either
7 with equipment that was being evacuated or Vietnamese who were being evacuated.

8 RV: Of course that wasn't your job as a navigator. That was the loadmaster.

9 JH: No that wasn't mine at all. It was to get there and get out.

10 RV: Any other things stand out in your mind about this time period?

11 JH: No.

12 RV: How did you feel about the fall of South Vietnam? I know you said it was
13 almost inevitable.

14 JH: I thought it was a shame. I wondered if that was going to be the end of
15 Americans even being able to visit that place because they would just be shut off and be
16 Communist. Even way later I visited Saigon when I was TDY to Thailand. They were
17 going from Thailand to the Cambodia for the Embassy run. Cambodia, then to Saigon,
18 then to Hanoi. Then reverse it and they let me out in Saigon, and I stayed there until they
19 came back from Hanoi and went back over to Thailand. After the war I wanted to see.
20 The people were still friendly then, but there wasn't any Americans.

21 RV: How long were you stationed at Kadena?

22 JH: Kadena, I was at Kadena for only a couple months. Then they moved us up
23 to Yokota, Japan. Since the war was over, the whole squadron moved up to Japan,
24 Yokota.

25 RV: How long did you stay there?

26 JH: Three years.

27 RV: Did your wife go with you?

28 JH: Yes. She loved Japan again.

29 RV: This takes us to 1978.

30 JH: Really? You're right. I left June 1978 and came back to the 40th Squadron at
31 Pope.

1 RV: How long were you there at Pope again?
2 JH: Until April of '81 and I quit the Air Force.
3 RV: Why did you decide in 1981 to get out?
4 JH: Every year I thought I was going to get out and just never did. I said, "Ok,
5 I'm getting close to retirement." When I get 20 years I'm going to get out. So when I got
6 20 years I was going to get out. They told me that if I stay one more year and a half I
7 could get credit for 22 years and my retired pay would be a lot higher. So I did that. A
8 year and a half after my 20 years, I just quit.
9 RV: What rank were you?
10 JH: I was a Major.
11 RV: When you went back to Pope that last time, what were you doing? Were
12 you still flying 130s?
13 JH: Right. When I came back to Pope that last time, they made me the Chief
14 Navigator for the squadron. I ran all the navigators in the squadron.
15 RV: Let me ask you some question, some general questions about the Vietnam
16 War.
17 JH: Ok.
18 RV: First of all, when you would go and come back so often, so many times, did
19 you ever have any problems transitioning back to the United States?
20 JH: In what way?
21 RV: Just going from a war zone back to a peaceful zone, back to a war zone,
22 back to the United States?
23 JH: No, it wasn't any problem at all.
24 RV: How about when you got out of the Air Force in general was it a difficult
25 transition for you to civilian life?
26 JH: The big loss was my friends. Not the military life. Just dumping a bunch of
27 friends. Like leaving college or something. Staying around Pope, since I'm still there,
28 I've still got a lot of those friends around.
29 RV: That's good. Did you discuss your Vietnam experience with anyone else
30 when you came back to the United States besides your buddies and I guess your parents?
31 JH: No.

1 RV: Did anyone ask you about it, civilians?

2 JH: No. No one ever welcomed me back or said dip. Nothing.

3 RV: Why do you think that is?

4 JH: I don't think it was a very popular war. If it had been the Second World
5 War, we would have been heroes.

6 RV: What did you think of the anti-war movement inside the United States?

7 JH: Well, it didn't bother me. There's always people who are going to be on one
8 side or the other. It didn't affect me at all. Since it didn't affect me, it didn't bother me.
9 I really didn't have any problem with it at all except I thought it was an awful big shame
10 when those people at Kent State got shot. I don't care what it was. It was no reason to
11 shoot them.

12 RV: Where were you when that happened?

13 JH: I don't even know when Kent State was. I was probably overseas. I was
14 probably over there.

15 RV: What did you think of U.S. policy then, after the war, 1975 you're back out
16 of that situation? What did you think about overall U.S. policy?

17 JH: It was a big mistake. Overall, even from the first, it should not have gone that
18 way. If you go way on back, Ngo Dinh Diem shouldn't even have been the President.
19 They cut off the elections they should have had in '56 when Ho Chi Minh would have
20 certainly won. The whole thing was something that we rigged. You could even go back
21 further and say well the French shouldn't be there and the Japanese shouldn't have been
22 there. Then after the Japanese the English came in and let the French back in. You can
23 go forever. In fact, you can go on back to how come we're in America? If you go down
24 to the truth, there's no good stories about any of those countries taking over any other
25 country. It just shouldn't happen. Way on back. The Chinese took over Vietnam.
26 Before that the Vietnamese took over the Champa. You can go back as far as you want
27 to. There's always somebody that's going to take over your country if they can. The
28 same thing happened in Laos and Cambodia. It's just one of those things. I don't think
29 we should have been there. I think the people of every country are proud of their
30 country. If some foreigner comes in for any reason. I don't care if they're real rich or

1 what, for any reason, you'll welcome what they give you, but you won't welcome them
2 staying. That's my opinion.

3 RV: Do you think the United States government learned any lessons from the
4 Vietnam War?

5 JH: Yes, I don't know if they're going to implement them. I think that they
6 learned if they're going to fight a war that they're going to try to win, they should start
7 out by putting everything in it to start with rather than dribbling stuff through. As far as
8 fighting that war, they shouldn't even have been there to start with.

9 RV: Is that something you feel in retrospect or did you have that feeling when
10 you were there?

11 JH: I had a little of that feeling when I was there. I never when I was there
12 thought that we could win the war. I remember between one of those tours, way back in
13 the '60s my aunt asked me what's going to happen over there. I said, "We're going to
14 lose and we're going to get out." A couple years later we did of course. But I never
15 thought we had a chance over there. Because I think I knew the people and the people
16 weren't for it. You've got to have that. You can't buy every single person.

17 RV: What could the United States have done differently, besides not going?

18 JH: Besides not going; I think they should have put the major emphasis on
19 pacifying the people. Getting the people proud of ever who's in government over there;
20 and figuring that the people who are in charge are going to protect them. Even when we
21 went to strategic hamlets and started taking them out of their old hamlets and putting
22 them in the new cities, they didn't like that. The whole programs we did, I think it was
23 political anyway. It didn't work. Lord, when they did all that stuff to the Buddhists, they
24 dumped on the Cao Dai, they dumped on the Hoa Hao and the other religious sects. You
25 can't do that. Not and succeed.

26 RV: Do you think it was even possible for the United States at that time to let
27 free election happen knowing that Ho Chi Minh would have won the elections?

28 JH: No, not during that time. They couldn't have. Because we were so scared of
29 that Domino Effect. We were so scared because the Communists were making such
30 advances. Mao had just taken over China. Everybody was trying to increase
31 Communism. We were so scared of it, that we were trying to block it wherever we could.

1 There was no way we could not be there with that kind of a policy. If I had believed that
2 way back then, I would have probably done the same thing that Kennedy and all of them
3 did and put the troops in there. I think they should have paid more attention to pleasing
4 the people.

5 RV: Why do you think the United States didn't pay attention to that?

6 JH: I don't know if it's because they listened to Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh
7 Diem or because they were listening to military leaders who were inept, unnamed or
8 what. I have no big reason why they didn't. They never have. I don't know why they'd
9 start now.

10 RV: What about the political leadership in the United States during the War,
11 what's your opinion of that?

12 JH: As far as the Presidents, I'm not sure that it was their decisions. I think it
13 was them listening to their bosses of the military who were in the Defense Department,
14 including McNamara, who made the decisions. They just said, "Ok I'll go along with
15 that," or "Ok, I won't go along with that." I don't think they came up with the ideas
16 themselves. Any President. I don't know. I may be wrong.

17 RV: Personally looking at your Vietnam experience, looking back today how do
18 you feel about your service in Vietnam?

19 JH: I never thought that there I was serving my country. I thought there I was
20 having fun and being excited. Those people who now say, "Well here I served my
21 country." I say, "Bull, you went over there because you got drafted. Don't give me that
22 shit." Excuse me. It was just something that being a bachelor I had no other thing to do.
23 It was either that or go try to learn to bowl or something.

24 RV: Go back to Elon for that last semester?

25 JH: Yes. (Laughs) Or maybe get me a doctor's degree at Texas Tech. Who
26 knows?

27 RV: That's right. What do you think was the most significant thing you learned
28 while during your many times in Vietnam?

29 JH: Probably a good question. I think I learned to listen to the other people, hear
30 their story and understand their story and get along with them, no matter whether they
31 were completely different from my opinions or not. Before that it was just me and

1 nobody else. Whatever I say or whatever I do is the only thing that's important. I
2 learned to listen to the other people, which is a good thing.

3 RV: Is that something that you think you were born with but never had the
4 chance to practice or was that something that being overseas taught you?

5 JH: I think being overseas taught me that. I was just too young before that.
6 When you're young, you don't know anything but yourself and what's going to happen
7 the next day. What's going to happen in the future means nothing to you. Whose
8 running the country or doing this or that, you could care less. All you want to know is if
9 you've got gas for your car the next day. And so, I grew up a lot. Because you know, it
10 was just age. It wasn't because I was over there as much.

11 RV: How do you think the war has most affected your life?

12 JH: Well, I don't know. I feel like I have matured so much from being over
13 there. I know so much about it. I met so many people who are my friends now that I
14 really value that whole experience.

15 RV: Is there anything that you would change about your experience if you could?

16 JH: Of course there's a lot of people I'd like to bring back who died. I can't
17 think of anything.

18 RV: Do you suffer any disabilities from your service?

19 JH: No. I've got people everywhere who say they've got this and that from me
20 spraying Agent Orange. I have no disabilities.

21 RV: Any Post Traumatic Stress Disorder stuff?

22 JH: No, nothing.

23 RV: So you've had no reaction, nothing at all from your Agent Orange exposure?

24 JH: Nothing. I have two intelligent kids who got no birth defects.

25 RV: What do you think about those who are claiming this, that there's absolutely
26 a connection?

27 JH: If right now I had cancer I'd blame it on Agent Orange. You've got to blame
28 it on something and what's around there. So those people who've come up with any
29 disease it's just like I'm not sure the Gulf War people had all those problems. If you
30 come up with a disease, you've got to look around for some source of it. Agent Orange
31 was such an easy way to do it. I personally don't believe that any of those diseases was

1 caused by Agent Orange. You know they still make those physical tests every five years
2 nowadays. I go out to California for and I just went out last year for the last one. All
3 they found out so far is we live longer than normal people.

4 RV: Are they surprised that there's nothing wrong with you guys in general?

5 JH: No. They never outlawed that defoliant. They still use it on farms. My
6 uncle is still using it now. I said, "That's 24D." He said, "How do you know that?" I
7 said, "That's what I sprayed." They still use it. There's nothing wrong with it. Such a
8 little bit that was dioxin that to have some Special Forces guy say they walked through it,
9 walked through a jungle once that had that in it, which was 1/1000 of an ounce per acre,
10 kind of makes you wonder. "Are you serious?" When we'd get it all over us and have to
11 wash it off. Then I'd say, "Hey, I was soaked in it everyday." They'd say, "Well the
12 difference is you could go home to a shower everyday. We couldn't." I said, "Ok."
13 Who knows? It may be true that they suffered from that. But if I come down with a
14 disease I'll probably blame it on Agent Orange, what else is there?

15 RV: Well there's old age and a number of things.

16 JH: When I get Alzheimer's I'm going to say, "Agent Orange did it." No I don't
17 think they've shown it to be a cause of any of those illnesses. I'm not going to tell any
18 Army person. I've got some friends now who are getting disability because they've got
19 diabetes and they say it came from Agent Orange. I look at them and they're great big fat
20 people. And you think, "Well, mmm-hmm ok."

21 RV: That in fact diabetes is the only thing I think that's been proven somehow to
22 be linked to it. A higher incident of diabetes I should say.

23 JH: I'm surprised you know that.

24 RV: Well, I do my research. What about the Vietnamese today? I know there
25 are orphanages in Vietnam who claim that and they have a lot of kids who were
26 deformed, birth defects things like that. They're claiming this is all from Agent Orange.
27 I assume you would say, "No way."

28 JH: I'm thinking, "No way." I'm thinking if it happened to them, it should have
29 happened to some of us who were in it everyday for a couple years. Why aren't we sick?
30 It could be some bodies are allergic to it and some aren't. If it were really something
31 dangerous, I think it's time to outlaw it so the farmers today don't use it. Personally I

1 don't think there's any problem with it. My co-pilot, Jack Spay, I think ya'll interviewed
2 him.

3 RV: Yes, sir.

4 JH: He even drank it.

5 RV: Why did he drink it?

6 JH: Just to show people that it wasn't dangerous.

7 RV: Was this while he was there?

8 JH: No, even now he'll say, "Hey come on down, I'll stick my finger in it and
9 lick it."

10 RV: Do you think the government has taken care of its Vietnam veterans?

11 JH: I think they're taking care of their whole veterans as much as they're required
12 to. I don't think there's any special love for whether it's Vietnam or anybody else. As
13 the budget gets tighter and tighter, I'm sure that taken care of will get smaller and smaller
14 too. I'm proud now that I'm almost 70; I've never in my life had to buy a prescription.
15 They're all free. That's pretty nice. The way those things cost nowadays.

16 RV: Have you ever wanted to go back to Vietnam?

17 JH: I love that place. I'd love to go back anytime and visit them and talk to them.
18 Just to see how they're taking it now. I'd love for the place to be non-Communist, but on
19 their own. They could make a good Democracy out of that thing and be something like
20 South Korea if they tried. I don't think it could ever be like Japan. I'd like to go back.
21 I'm sure I never will.

22 RV: Why do you say that?

23 JH: If I get a chance to go anywhere it's going to be Japan.

24 RV: How many times have you guys been able to go back to Japan, you and your
25 wife?

26 JH: Just once after that did I ever go back on a visit.

27 RV: What do you think about Vietnam today? You said there is economic
28 potential; you do think that the government will change?

29 JH: I think Communism can't last. In my opinion Communism is a Monarchy,
30 but they just don't call the guy a king. The reason he stays in power is because he's got
31 the military. As soon as the people get so bad off that they don't care whether they live

1 or die, they're going to get rid of that. The way they're living it'll be like Russia, it'll fall
2 apart. I think it's going to be a long time from now. Probably happen first in China.

3 RV: I was going to say what do you think the influence of China is over that
4 course of events?

5 JH: You know China did supply them until we came in, and probably after that
6 along with Russia and the North Vietnamese. As far as China taking over Vietnam they
7 had the chance to do that before and turned it down saying, "No way those people won't
8 follow us." I don't think they have any desire to take over Vietnam now. I just think that
9 Communism in those countries will eventually go away. I'm not sure Capitalism and
10 Democracy are the best way. It just happens to be the best one we've come up with so
11 far in my opinion.

12 RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States?

13 JH: Not lately. They used to have a couple of Vietnamese restaurants down here
14 and I'd go in just to see how my Vietnamese language was coming along. There's still a
15 lot of them living around here. I can see them now and then, but no contact that is
16 important.

17 RV: Do you think much about Vietnam these days?

18 JH: No. No I don't. Until you called I would have forgotten about it.

19 RV: Was that on purpose or is that just because that was part of your military
20 career?

21 JH: No, it was just I'm moving on. Right now there's too many other things to
22 think about. How about Iraq? I can think about that.

23 RV: That's right. What movies on Vietnam have you seen or do you try to avoid
24 them?

25 JH: You say movies?

26 RV: Yes, sir.

27 JH: I think I've seen all of them. Name one, I'll tell you what I thought about it.

28 RV: The first one that really made a big splash was the *Green Berets* with John
29 Wayne.

1 JH: Yes. I don't know quite what to say about that one. You know that song that
2 Barry Saddler came out with, *Green Berets*, while I was over there that was really a
3 popular song.

4 RV: Really?

5 JH: We heard it all the time. The John Wayne movie was ok, but it was just
6 entertaining. The movie that really got me was the one where, I don't remember other
7 than it was the guy in the back streets who was doing the Russian roulette with the pistol.

8 RV: Oh, the *Deer Hunter*?

9 JH: *Deer Hunter*, yes. That one kind of got to me. It really showed the dark side
10 of that place.

11 RV: Did that dark side exist?

12 JH: I don't think it was that dark. I'm sure there was a dark side.

13 RV: You mentioned that song, what other songs take you back to Vietnam or that
14 time period in your life?

15 JH: That's the only one that would come to mind.

16 RV: How about books on Vietnam, you seem to be very well read on Asian
17 history and what not.

18 JH: I've read all of them that were important, that were interesting. There was a
19 couple while I was over there that I read. *The Quiet American* with Graham Greene, and
20 while I was over there I read a book that wasn't about Vietnam but it was about Asia
21 called *The Ugly American*. I think it was a novel. I thought it was so true the way we
22 treat other countries. That kind of stuck with me. Then there's a couple interesting
23 books on Vietnam. I don't know the names of them now that I've read.

24 RV: Do you try to read on Vietnam in particular?

25 JH: Here, recently not. To get back to that original, I thought the first big book
26 that I read was Bernard Falls, *Street Without Joy*. I thought that was really good. Just the
27 history ones after that, that would really tell me what was going on in Washington during
28 all that time which we had no idea of. Those were always interesting books. Or some
29 General's tale of it, or some Vietnamese guys tale of it. Especially the Vietnamese.
30 Nguyen Cao Ky came out with a book I thought was good. It told the truth about all of
31 that stuff. You remember Nguyen Cao Ky?

1 RV: Yes, sir. I know what you're talking about. I was just trying not to interrupt
2 you.

3 JH: Ok, that's it.

4 RV: What would you tell young people today about the Vietnam War if you had
5 the chance to talk to them about it?

6 JH: Other than it was a war that we lost that we shouldn't have been in. Not
7 much to say. They want to learn about it, I could tell them about it history wise what
8 happened when this President got shot and when that one happened. Other than the
9 history, they can read it themselves. They probably wouldn't be interested anyway.
10 When I went over there I had never ever heard of a war or a battle called Dien Binh Phu.
11 Some of those battles are so big and so important for me to go all the way through school
12 without ever having heard of it. It's something.

13 RV: Do you think that's true today, that continues?

14 JH: I think it's even more true today. I think that they go on with the highlights
15 of things. So for one year you'll say, "Ok, what happened this year?" "Oh, Kennedy got
16 shot." "Ok, what happened the next year?" But they won't go into not only Kennedy get
17 shot, Diem got killed. They'll just go with the time line type stuff. That's about all a
18 student can remember anyway.

19 RV: Why do you think the attention span intellectually is so poor in the United
20 States then?

21 JH: I don't know. I think it's just running so fast. There's so much more that has
22 gone on. Unless you really say, "I'm going to concentrate on the rise and fall of the
23 Roman Empire or something." You really have no idea. Things go too quick for you to
24 learn it all. You've just got to get an overview of it. If there's something that you really
25 like you can study it by itself.

26 RV: Have you been to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C.?

27 JH: Yes, I have. I really loved that. I want to go back up there. You go up and
28 look at the Wall and see those people that you knew and all the other people leaving stuff
29 at the bottom of it. It was a really silent appreciative time. Yes, I'd like to do that again.
30 Of course I've got that one guys name. I'm going to go up there in May. I'd like to go
31 up there and see his name.

1 RV: Could you actually watch them carve it into the Wall?

2 JH: I don't know. I don't think they told me when in May they're going to put it
3 up. If they've got anybody to add, they say they add them every May.

4 RV: Well, Mr. Hodgkin is there anything else that you would like to add to our
5 conversation today?

6 JH: No. That should be about it.

7 RV: I've enjoyed talking with you. We'll end the interview now with Mr. John
8 Hodgkin. Thank you sir.

9 JH: You're quite welcome.