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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Dr. James Evans  
Conducted by Laura M. Calkins, Ph.D.  
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Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin

**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       Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech  
2 University continuing my oral history interview with Dr. Jim Evans. Today's date is the  
3 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2004. I'm in the Interview Room in the Special Collections Building on the  
4 campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock. Jim is speaking to me by phone from Dallas. Hi, Jim.

5       James Evans: Hello, how are you?

6       LC: Very good. Jim, I just want to ask you a few questions that call upon your  
7 perspectives as a Veteran and as one who is looking back on his own military service.  
8 The first of these is a big picture question. It concerns the United States commitment to  
9 South Vietnam in the first place. Was that commitment well conceived?

10       JE: My feeling is that U.S. did not consider the French experience in Vietnam.  
11 French had been there or had influence maybe 150 years. What was their experience?  
12 The other thing is after Dien Bien Phu, you know, what were the North Vietnamese  
13 forces. How strong were they? Where were they? How much was the South involved?  
14 After Dien Bien Phu it looked like the South was already very well compromised, then  
15 what's the point? You don't really have government to work with or an infrastructure to  
16 work with.

17       LC: Did it seem to you that either at the time of your service or as you had given  
18 thought to it subsequently that the South Vietnamese government who was our ally and in

1 support of whom the United States made that commitment was not strong enough to  
2 sustain the competition from the North?

3 JE: It just seems like the South was very fragmented. Diem was basically a  
4 mandarin. He didn't really have much [people skills]. He was from, I guess, what he  
5 thought was the ruling class, and didn't have a lot of skills in terms of getting people  
6 involved. His family, how do you pronounce Ngo?

7 LC: Ngo.

8 JE: Ngo. It's like there is corruption. He was not a very strong leader and  
9 particularly with the family as it was. Maybe immediately after 1954 he was probably,  
10 may have been ok but fairly later he really was not that much of a leader. Part of all this  
11 is from later reading but my feeling is with history is like you get a little look at a region.  
12 What was the history of the Vietnamese in relationship to the Chinese or other  
13 neighboring countries? What does history tell us about unity or disunity?

14 LC: Jim, what sort of impressions have you been able to form, if any, and I know  
15 this would be based on your reading rather than of course any kind of first hand  
16 diplomatic experience but you know what impressions have you formed about the  
17 Chinese role in the conflict? Should the United States have made a different assignment  
18 of that role than it did?

19 JE: I think that the theory was China would intervene so I think that caused the  
20 U.S. government to hold back and not be more aggressive in dealing with the North.  
21 More than likely it also reflected what happened in Korea. So that's sort of a feel  
22 that...you know it was just sort of a lack of appropriate military aggressiveness to deal  
23 with the situation. There were too many limitations.

24 LC: That had operational significance for American forces obviously.

25 JE: Right. It just seemed like there was too much interference.

26 LC: Do you think that the United States would have paid attention to the French  
27 experience a little more closely if say relations between the United States and France had  
28 been better in the early '60s or the mid '60s if De Gaulle could have communicated more  
29 directly with say the American Administration. Do you think that might have led to some  
30 changes or not really?

1           JE: It might have. It just seemed like the relationship with the French has always  
2 been sort of prickly. It's love, hate; you know De Gaulle was very, very good probably,  
3 from what I have read. I really don't know.

4           LC: It's definitely one of those kind of unknown factors. I myself kind of go back  
5 and forth about it as well. I suppose that the fact that the United States does not have a  
6 great relationship with France was not helpful anyway one can say that. Jim, can you  
7 make any general observations about the relationship between enlisted men and officers?  
8 Things that maybe you saw on the ground, some of which we have touch on and other  
9 things maybe that just arise from you just having been there. Was the relationship on the  
10 ground in the American military in Vietnam while you there a healthy one? Was it  
11 something that needed to be overhauled? Was it problematic case by case?

12           JE: The experience I had in Quang Tri, you know, looking back it was very, very,  
13 scary in terms of the number of fraggings that occurred within one battalion. This seven  
14 month [tour] that we heard about either several of there were in Quang Tri. There was a,  
15 let's see, a West Point, going to be company commander graduate, you know, a captain  
16 and he was...he just didn't really care about. He was just going to issue orders and tell  
17 them what to do. I remember at Thanksgiving his men were out on the bunker line at  
18 Quang Tri. Colonel Miller said, 'What have you done about the Thanksgiving dinner?'  
19 'Well they are having C-rations.' Colonel Miller says, 'You will get them a hot  
20 Thanksgiving meal out on the bunker line now.' He did.

21           LC: Right, but only because he had been ordered too.

22           JE: Only because he had been ordered to. He was injured later. The story was a  
23 claymore mine had been set up by his hooch and got him and a lieutenant, may have been  
24 Hodgkin's, I'm not real sure. They were not killed but they were severely injured. One of  
25 the medics, there was another incident where one of the NCOs and one of the line  
26 companies you know was assaulted by enlisted men out in the field and got decked. This  
27 is a guy that I had seen earlier who was complaining about a bad back. After it got hit he  
28 fell and fractured a vertebra. Then one of my medics got hit when he was in the company  
29 commander's office for D company in Quang Tri. Somebody just lobbed in a grenade  
30 apparently. The company commander was not there.

31           LC: Right, and this medic happened to be in there.

1           JE: He was pulling charge of quarters and he was in there. You have a  
2 photograph, actually several photographs of him and the neck of his guitar that survived.  
3 He was just badly wounded. He was medevaced out of the country and he survived.

4           LC: And you would hear, in addition to these incidents, Jim I gather you heard of  
5 others in other companies, other locations where stuff is going on.

6           JE: Well there is not that much communication between the like various battalions  
7 so I wasn't hearing about it. But the other thing I was dealing with was I was getting  
8 threats that if you don't profile me so I don't have to go out in the field something may  
9 happen to you.

10          LC: And you took these seriously. I mean this was not...

11          JE: Well, with everything else that was going on I had it regarded as very serious.

12          LC: I know this is a difficult area Jim, but were any of the times when you had  
13 something like that presented to you, did you feel that there was any animus against you  
14 personally or was this just, you needed to fulfill this requirement or need for the person  
15 who was issuing the threat? Was it about you personally because you are the doctor and  
16 you had the power to get them off the line?

17          JE: Well that's right I had the power to write a profile. So I could say they weren't  
18 fit for field duty.

19          LC: In general was there kind of a culture or an environment that was setting up  
20 these confrontations between the enlisted men and, say, a position like yourself? You're  
21 an officer, you're a doctor, you have some authority and some powers but was there  
22 something...what was going on such that an enlisted men would feel you know, I don't  
23 know if no compunction is the right way to put it, but would feel enabled to go ahead and  
24 present you with a threat?

25          JE: Well, the war was still theoretically winding down. We had no evident  
26 mission or function. I was going to the briefings in the evenings for 1<sup>st</sup> of the 77<sup>th</sup>  
27 Armored Battalion and it's like I don't remember them ever saying a mission about what  
28 they were doing. It just seemed like they were meandering around the DMZ for no  
29 particular purpose. I think the men felt this lack of purpose, this lack of mission, and they  
30 didn't want to get killed or maimed given the circumstances.

31          LC: Like apparently for nothing, that kind of feeling?

1           JE: Exactly.

2           LC: Do you think it would have made a difference in attitude? I mean this is  
3 what's implied by what you've said, that a difference in attitude might have arisen if  
4 there seemed to be clear objectives and if those objectives were pursued and everyone  
5 was sort of walking in the same direction towards the same goal.

6           JE: Well I think if there had been clear objectives and that you have a military  
7 objective and you wouldn't have to deal with all the political minutiae like you can't fire  
8 here, you can't fire there. You can't pursue into the DMZ. You know all these things you  
9 cannot do that ignore sort of the military reality. I certainly don't have any experience  
10 about that but just in terms maneuvering, it didn't make sense. I was reading, like in  
11 *Blue's Bastards*, they went out to Mutter Ridge and NVA had them zeroed in. So why  
12 would you keep on going out to the place to draw fire when you know the sources for  
13 artillery?

14           LC: That kind of purposelessness or whatever seemed to also not just be that but  
15 also in some way handed an advantage to the enemy because when you couldn't shoot in  
16 a certain place that let them walk through there with impunity and follow them beyond  
17 the DMZ, then that allowed them to retreat there and recoup or regroup or whatever it  
18 was they needed to do.

19           JE: Right. I think the interesting thing, you know, you want to fight with one arm  
20 or both arms tied behind our back. When a convoy's in the Laotian panhandle on the Ho  
21 Chi Minh Trail, well you can't fire on them. They are neutral.

22           LC: Yeah, like what? Again, just in your observation or impressions that you  
23 formed, were people in command positions, officers, equally as concerned about being  
24 hamstrung operationally as enlisted men obviously had to be?

25           JE: I don't think they let on.

26           LC: Is that right?

27           JE: The thing is I was not around the people in the battalions that much, in terms  
28 of the executive officer or the battalion commander who, you know here he was sort of  
29 going on moment to moment. All I was hearing was like at the evening briefings.

30           LC: Would you hear anything that was outside that official sort of line of  
31 narrative from the briefing room?

1 JE: No.

2 LC: Not really?

3 JE: One reason I ended up leaving Quang Tri was first of all I could do it. After  
4 we came back from the DMZ in January of 1970 we weren't doing anything. There were  
5 no rumors, nothing was happening. So I left about the 5<sup>th</sup> of June and within a week or  
6 two the brigades or at least part of it moved out towards Khe Sanh. I had the feeling that,  
7 you know, part of it was like we're sitting still. There were no rumors. It was eerily quiet.  
8 There were no rumors. Suddenly there was this order, move out towards Khe Sanh. I  
9 guess June or July.

10 LC: Jim, what did you think that order was going to bring down on the unit?

11 JE: Well Khe Sanh was a very scary place that people remember from '68.

12 LC: Absolutely, yes.

13 JE: I remember the concrete signpost, QL9, for Khe Sanh. I can't believe...you  
14 know here it is. It's not that far away. What happened, they went out and basically not  
15 anything happened. But I guess what didn't make sense was when I was in Hong Kong  
16 late April, early May of 1970 because of the Cambodian invasion. There was nothing  
17 comparable up north until probably late June of July.

18 LC: By up north you mean cross border into Laos.

19 JE: Right, the Quang Tri province. I guess for me it's like if you're looking at a  
20 supply line why do you go for the terminus rather than the neck of it? Go closer to the  
21 beginning.

22 LC: Did you give that much thought at the time? Jim, or it something that your  
23 attention has been more focused on as the years have gone by, thinking about it, reading  
24 about it.

25 JE: I think it's been since then because first I think I was not exactly that aware of  
26 where I was. There was no introduction or where I was going, why I was going to Quang  
27 Tri.

28 LC: No contextual sort of setting.

29 JE: Right there is no setting. There was no...but like with physicians there was  
30 no...they just said we need someone at Quang Tri. They need two battalion surgeons and

1 no particular consideration for background. The view was if you are a physician you can  
2 practice anywhere.

3 LC: Just sort of plug you in to whatever hole there was that needed to be filled.

4 JE: Right. I guess what bothered me was that I was very quickly on helicopter  
5 flights out over the jungle. Realized that if we crash I'm cooked. I have no idea what to  
6 do. Doctor Buesseler said, 'Well it didn't bother me. I had jungle survival training.'  
7 Maybe you did but the rest of us didn't.

8 LC: By virtue of what did he have that training whereas you did not, do you  
9 know?

10 JE: I really don't know.

11 LC: When did you guys discuss this? When you were here with us? It would have  
12 been in March I think of 2004. Was he surprised at your reaction, which was that you had  
13 not had that training?

14 JE: No.

15 LC: Is that right.

16 JE: The feeling I have is, to me this is sort of the unawareness or lack of  
17 awareness that I experienced when I was in the Army. I can remember when we were at  
18 Ft. Sam Houston, a full bird colonel gave a talk one night, you know let us know what it  
19 was like in Vietnam. When he landed somebody met him at the airport. They drove him  
20 in the jeep, picked up his luggage, and he had no concept of what a captain would  
21 experience. We had really no introduction of what was going to happen. We just got  
22 dumped.

23 LC: Jim, let me ask you about another area that in some way picks up on what  
24 you just said. That is the longer-term implications of U.S. military involvement in  
25 Southeast Asia. Either on a sort of national policy level or on a personal level, what has  
26 been the fall out from the experience of the United States troops being sent to Vietnam?

27 JE: I think a tremendous amount of mistrust from people who served and just I  
28 think it made people very cynical. More than likely that was very reasonable. You know  
29 the government cannot be trusted.

1           LC: Jim, from your perspective because the government didn't handle that  
2 situation well or because it simply didn't convey to you what you were involved in and  
3 why or a little of both maybe.

4           JE: A lot of it was the lack of explanation. As I said the view was if you are a  
5 physician you can practice anywhere. There really wasn't a good orientation to what it's  
6 like to be with a battalion before suddenly you are with battalion in a combat zone.

7           LC: And you're a physician who's had no training for handling combat  
8 environment, right? Is that fair?

9           JE: Right. When I was at Parkland we had a lot of trauma patients but I was not  
10 really in charge of management or triage. The experience I had was, once I got into the  
11 situation; ok I can do it. I worked in the emergency room at 91<sup>st</sup> Evac. We would have  
12 mass casualties. You would just triage patients like the term. Who does what, when,  
13 where, and who can be saved and who cannot be. When that happened you just sort of  
14 went on automatic.

15           LC: I think we talked a little bit before about the kinds of injuries that you saw in  
16 that situation with the 91<sup>st</sup> Evac at Chu Lai. I mean these were different injuries then you  
17 would see or did see at Parkland in terms of car accidents and that sort of thing. These  
18 were different injuries.

19           JE: They were different in that severity injuries were typically far worst.

20           LC: And actually just to clarify Jim, you were doing triage at Chu Lai as well?

21           JE: Correct. Actually when I was with 1<sup>st</sup> of 77<sup>th</sup> Armored Battalion we were not  
22 getting casualties because they were casualties that were out in the field that Medevac or  
23 dust off helicopters picked them up and took them in probably 18<sup>th</sup> Surgical Hospital. So  
24 I saw very few direct casualties except for a few when I was at Charlie 2 when they got  
25 rockets. Generally the rockets, you know, they weren't aimed well. Everything on the  
26 base was fairly sprawling so the probability that it hit anything was pretty low. Every  
27 now and then somebody would get hit. Those casualties were minor.

28           LC: Right, relative to...

29           JE: Yeah, just like small shrapnel.

30           LC: Jim, while we're on this. Did you have to...was there ever a time,  
31 particularly I would think at Chu Lai, where you had to, in triage, make a decision that a

1 certain patient was not going to make it and you had to devote your sources in some kind  
2 of crisis situation to those that probably would?

3 JE: Yes. If someone was clearly dying you might see whatever could be done for  
4 comfort but the priority was the men that you could do something for in terms of  
5 stabilization and stopping blood loss. So what we did there was assess the patients,  
6 stabilize, got the appropriate surgical care, whether it was orthopedic or neurosurgery, did  
7 the paperwork, got the patient to x-ray. X-ray is appropriate area and like typing cross  
8 match for blood.

9 LC: Jim, do you think that the nation has sort of in some historical sense or  
10 retrospective sense kind of come to grips with the Vietnam experience at all? Do you  
11 think it's still something that is kind of out there, if you want, haunting America at this  
12 point?

13 JE: I think its haunting America in view of the current Presidential contest.

14 LC: I'm guessing there that the reference you make is to the press attention given  
15 to both candidates national service during the Vietnam era?

16 JE: Yes, exactly.

17 LC: What about the parallels that have been drawn again largely in the press  
18 between the American commitment to rebuilding Iraq after the downfall of Saddam  
19 Hussein and the commitment to trying to prop up South Vietnam? Do those parallels  
20 strike you as reasonable and ones that should be explored or is it just completely  
21 fallacious and not a good line of argument?

22 JE: I guess my feeling is both for South Vietnam and for Iraq that we didn't  
23 belong there to begin with in view of the history of the area and for Iraq for there was no  
24 strong evidence for involvement with Al Qaeda. What's the history of Iraq? You know  
25 social history, religious history, and cohesiveness. I think those were some very similar  
26 questions.

27 LC: Let me turn Jim to a question that as a physician and as a veteran of the  
28 Vietnam era you may have some particular insights or observations to offer. That has to  
29 do with whether the United States has extended what you would see as an appropriate  
30 level of care to Vietnam era veterans. I'm talking here specifically about the Veteran's  
31 Administration. I mean, what's your view of the VA?

1           JE: I guess the feeling I have is I don't think we've ever taken good care of  
2 veterans. It's like ok you serve and then it's over and go away, if you're injured or  
3 whatever. I think the experience I had sort of indirectly with knowing about the VA here  
4 in Dallas is that the staffing comes from medical school. I think that creates a very  
5 different circumstance than other VA hospitals that are sort of like out in the boonies. I  
6 mean there is one, I don't know if it's still open in Bonham that in terms of staffing it's  
7 like in the middle of nowhere. It got put there because Sam Rayburn who was from  
8 Bonham I think it's a place that the medical care is not very good.

9           LC: Is that a matter of funding or institutional commitment or political will? Do  
10 you have any observations about those kinds of issues as to what is at the root of these  
11 kinds of problems?

12           JE: I think funding. I think its awareness. Personally like this...make the veterans  
13 go away. Warehouse them but we don't want to see evidence that, you know, getting an  
14 amputation or whatever it is. We don't wish to be reminded.

15           LC: Is that something that you've come across in your own sort of journey as a  
16 Vietnam Veteran?

17           JE: Well part of the experience is like don't talk about your experience. Just make  
18 it go away. Unless you are talking to someone else who has been there. That's part of it, I  
19 think; we'll just get over it.

20           LC: Just kind of disappear it in someway.

21           JE: Yeah. Let us rewrite history and make it go away.

22           LC: Jim, what would it take to change that? I mean not just veterans of the  
23 Vietnam era or earlier conflicts but also to go forward. The Iraq conflict at this point has  
24 deployment of getting on toward a 140,000 active service personnel that are there in any  
25 one time. When those people come back is the situation going to be any different or does  
26 it depend on the outcome of the war?

27           JE: I think it's going to be dependent on the outcome of the war. I don't see that  
28 there is going to be any particular difference.

29           LC: Ok. I mean over the years the VA, like the rest of American medical  
30 community has had to, you know, make some changes and accept the fact that veterans

1 had some illnesses that perhaps certainly hadn't been anticipated and were thought to be  
2 socially unsavory in some way. I'm thinking about PTSD and AIDS.

3 JE: What's the first one?

4 LC: PTSD. The recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and of course the  
5 AIDS crisis in this country in the '80s and '90s and continuing on into the present. I  
6 wonder from your vantage as a physician you saw anything in the VA's response to these  
7 problems. Agent Orange is another that was commendable. Was there anything there that  
8 was good policy?

9 JE: You know example of Agent Orange that it took outside pressure for them to  
10 begin to acknowledge that there was a possibility that I think the initial view was ok the  
11 veterans are just making all this up rather than taking a look. The neurological problems  
12 that developed after Desert Storm, again the same situation that the VA and the  
13 government is like you weren't exposed to anything. You are making it up. It's not real.  
14 You weren't exposed to this. You weren't exposed to that.

15 LC: You just want some more benefits or something.

16 JE: Yeah, exactly.

17 LC: There is an implicate accusation that somehow veterans were trying to  
18 freeloader or I don't know what. Something not good was implied there.

19 JE: Well it's like, it's called Secondary Gain. That whatever the Veteran is  
20 seeking is only because they don't want to work. They want the benefits. They are  
21 making it all up.

22 LC: Is that a part of the invalidation? Is that an element of what we've been kind  
23 of talking about, which is you just make it go away type of thing?

24 JE: I think it's like just make it go away. It's not real. You are making it up.  
25 Whatever you are experiencing in your body is not real.

26 LC: Do you feel the same thing has operated in the government's management of  
27 the MIA issue? Or is there something different happening there?

28 JE: I think, I guess one concern that I've gotten more into lately is that our policy  
29 as we were withdrawing from Vietnam was driven by POWs and MIAs. The driving  
30 force should have been military.

31 LC: Was that a miscalculation that was driven by politics?

1           JE: I think it was driven by politics. I read William Westmoreland's  
2 autobiography and he said, 'You don't get concessions from the enemy by being nice.  
3 That if I don't bomb you, you will do this.' In terms of military history, if you want a  
4 military result or you want a political result then you have to apply military pressure and  
5 continue. Rather than saying, well I won't bomb you.

6           LC: Right withholding.

7           JE: I'm withholding rather than...

8           LC: But at any time I could if you don't do what I want you to, which allows  
9 them to not do it.

10          JE: Exactly. So like he was, ok, we hold that long enough the U.S. won't do  
11 anything. A lot of this is retrospective. It's very difficult. I certainly had no perspective  
12 when I was in the military.

13          LC: I think just from having spoken with you and we've exchanged a number of  
14 letters and so forth. There were things that absolutely you were thinking about that were  
15 before you. If we could just talk about some of those for a moment, I think this would be  
16 interesting. For example, Jim, I think it's fairly clear and will be clear to people who  
17 study materials that you've deposited here that you're an accomplished artist. I wonder  
18 what role artistic expression was playing for you, even before you went to Vietnam? I  
19 know some of the works that you were planning to place here at the Vietnam Archive are  
20 from a period in 1969 before you went to Vietnam and some are from afterwards. Can  
21 you express something about what role your own artistic work was playing for you  
22 during that time period?

23          JE: When I looked at what I did right before I went in the Army I realized, you  
24 know, now sort of the emotional depth of what was there. I was not aware at the time.  
25 One of the pieces I will be giving is Plaster of Paris and on the back it says 'Youth.' It's  
26 dated September 1969. There is just like mementos of youth because I knew that once I  
27 went in the Army my life would be forever changed. There is another one, as I clasp my  
28 hands with the peace sign. There is another with a fist. I realized sort of the emotional  
29 intensity of what was being expressed in my art at the time that I didn't necessarily  
30 realize. I was also doing a number of paintings by Jackson Pollock. You know it's chaos,  
31 painting and swirling colors, which I did before Vietnam and I did in Vietnam.

1           LC: What were you letting out with that Jim? As you think back on it now, what  
2        were you saying with that, even if it was only saying it to yourself?

3           JE: I think it was just chaos. In some ways the paintings they are just sort of  
4        dripping on the canvas. It is just swirling and in some ways no real purpose. I guess part  
5        of the feeling I had at the time was like anybody can drip paint on canvas, but you know,  
6        sort of purposelessness, meaninglessness.

7           LC: And that was sort of what the experience of being commanded to be in the  
8        Army was doing to you, how it was making you feel.

9           JE: Right. There was no purpose.

10          LC: I don't know if it's the case that during those years you were writing. I know  
11        again from material that you are depositing with us that in these later years you have done  
12        some very good writing about the things that the Vietnam experience has called up in you  
13        or things that happened that call that experience out of you. I wonder if writing is  
14        something you have always thought of.

15          JE: Not that much. It was probably more lightweight, there has always been  
16        letters, but at one point I thought maybe I would like to write about my experience in  
17        Vietnam. I realized that I had some material to write, I didn't have that much. Basically  
18        what I had was a lot of photos. A photograph would in some ways, would speak better  
19        than some of my words

20          LC: Well I think they speak together actually quite forcefully. I'm not trying to  
21        put too fine a point on it but for example the incident in 1997 on Christmas Day, which  
22        you have told me about. Where a Vietnamese man driving in his car sideswiped your car  
23        and this was quite a compelling moment for you, not only in terms for what it brought up  
24        for you on the day that it happened and on the days afterwards but it's also something  
25        that you've written about in poetry. Can you say anything more about that incident?

26          JE: Well I think part of what it is...then I started having flash backs and  
27        realization ok, it's time to deal with this. I was getting involved with the men's  
28        workshops and was able to create rituals related to dealing and stealing. I was reading  
29        *Men and the Water of Life* by Michael Meade. It talks about rituals. Talked about the  
30        initiation of war and sort of how different people who have gone to war deal with it. I just  
31        sort of created a unique ritual. Putting three loafs of bread on the altar, which is a

1 nonspecific alter. When I was on like ritual journey I could use the loaves of bread  
2 symbolically to distract the lions that I had to deal with. For once I felt it, dealt with it,  
3 then I discovered the lions were toothless. A lot of what I feared was something I had  
4 created. Once I dealt with it and faced it then it took a lot of the power away. It was really  
5 an amazing time.

6 LC: If I'm following you, you found that you had power, somewhere to overcome  
7 and that generating a ritual or a practice was a way of expressing that. Is that fair?

8 JE: Yes and sort of first ritual like free as it was. I was being massaged and I told  
9 the two men who were giving me a massage, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to be  
10 going back to Vietnam to feel it and to let go. I will be yelling and screaming, I may be  
11 crying. Keep on with touch; basically don't let me fall off the table. This is what I'm  
12 doing so there may be a lot of noise but don't worry. This is something I'm doing of my  
13 own free will. There is a purpose of doing this. My feeling was that it pretty much  
14 worked. None of the absolute but it did make a huge difference.

15 LC: And let you go to a place where hurrying up and turning loose some of that  
16 stored up stuff, I don't know what to call it, could just go.

17 JE: Right. It's an ongoing process. It's like letting go of the photographs, letting  
18 go of the memorabilia. That's part of healing. Feeling like it has a place in history in  
19 terms of other people who contribute to give a very big few. It's also a personal way of  
20 letting go. It's like I'm so glad that I've done it. That that's... and my friends will say,  
21 'We're glad you did it.'

22 LC: You know I'm sure that it won't come as any surprise to you to know that  
23 this is one of the, really the most difficult things to do with a number of veterans, people  
24 we've spoken to. They will carry their Vietnam pictures around in there vest pocket and  
25 have them all the time. Not just when they come to the Vietnam Archive but they have  
26 them with them all the time and surrendering them in some way. It takes a big leap for  
27 some veterans to do that. It's a very difficult thing.

28 JE: What I've done for, I've been asked to create rituals with some individual  
29 men. Part of what I tell them and part of the ritual is if you're wanting healing, or  
30 whatever you're seeking, you have to be willing to give something up. Like the balance  
31 of the universe. If you are wishing to be healed from a wound, you have to yield [the

1 wound]. You have to give up your wound. One man was getting into middle adulthood.  
2 His intention was to think of himself as a mature man. I created a ritual where there was  
3 some symbolic references to being a child, to being a young man, and that he, like,  
4 creating a gate, you know probably a small one. 'You're too big to go through. You are a  
5 grown man. You'll have to knock it down. These are the stones.' 'I don't want to do  
6 that.' 'Well we cannot proceed unless you let it go. You have to knock it down. You have  
7 to let it go.'

8           LC: Jim, how if I can ask, do other guys come to ask you to help them in this  
9 way? Do you have retreats or are there groups, are these friends that you have known a  
10 while?

11           JE: Most of these were you know group situations where there would be  
12 organized activities and there would also be an opportunity for men to have specific  
13 rituals and to appoint a ritual master.

14           LC: Ok to seek out someone particularly.

15           JE: To seek out. This is what I want. This is why when I was ritual master and  
16 asked questions about the purpose of the ritual and then creates the ritual.

17           LC: On this, sort of extremely personal basis, you know very idiosyncratic in the  
18 best sense of that word. This is part of the journey that you've been on as well to manage  
19 what's come up for you since 1997.

20           JE: Yes.

21           LC: Jim, if I can just sort of widen the discussion a little bit. I want to ask a  
22 question, I don't know whether it's anything you've given thought to or not. This has to  
23 do with contemporary relationship between the United States and Vietnam. I'm sure that  
24 you are aware that diplomatic relations have been established between the two countries  
25 and going on ten years now. I just wonder if you think that's a good thing?

26           JE: The feeling that I had when I was in Lubbock, it felt very good. That there is a  
27 path and then you move beyond the path. I just felt good, I mean when you give a  
28 description about scholarships for students who are in Southeast Asia. It felt very good. I  
29 think PBS maybe a week or so ago had a show about raising a U boat that was sunk off of  
30 the Danish coast. The British crewmen on the airplane that sank it and the crew of the U  
31 boat who survived got together when this is raised and coming to a place of friendship

1 and that's the path that's over. One of the British crewman said we were not trying to kill  
2 the men. We were trying to kill the U boats. So what I was hearing when I was Lubbock  
3 was like this is about healing and the war is over, let us move on as well as practical.

4 LC: And recognizing that not everyone moves in the same direction at the same  
5 time but still trying to find points of reconciliation.

6 JE: Exactly.

7 LC: Yeah I agree. Jim, would you ever, have you ever given consideration to  
8 going to Vietnam again?

9 JE: I mean sort of in the back of my mind, but I guess my feeling was that the  
10 ritual I created was what I needed. And actually I've had a lot of concern about service  
11 people who go to Vietnam seeking healing when I don't think healing happens in a  
12 geographical occasion. I think healing happens within us.

13 LC: By saying that you have concerns about them, and I'm just offering this, is it  
14 that the possibility is that they may go over there and be disappointed or that they may go  
15 over there and go through and have spurred some, you know, potentially climactic kind  
16 of episode?

17 JE: I think they could have a climactic episode and not have cared. It's similar to  
18 Vietnam veterans who are working through their experience and who have never been to  
19 the Wall. In terms of like being in a group, whatever is forwarded is necessarily  
20 [necessary for support] and that they go within that support system.

21 LC: So that there is a safety net in a way.

22 JE: So there is a safety net but also that a lot of healing has already occurred. So  
23 when for example you see the Vietnam Wall, you see the brothers and sisters we lost  
24 there that you have prepared yourself emotionally, doesn't mean that you're not going to  
25 feel something but you are prepared to be with it.

26 LC: Jim, on that point I wonder if there are any points that we haven't covered  
27 that you would like to add?

28 JE: Actually I think that's pretty well covered this.

29 LC: Well I want to thank you for participating in the Oral History Project. At this  
30 point we will conclude.

1           JE: Ok, that sounds good. I have certainly appreciated the opportunity and your  
2 kind attention.

3           LC: Thank you. Thank you very much Jim.