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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Conducted by Richard B. Verrone, Ph.D.
April 19; May 10, 31; September 6; October 27; November 28, 29; December 14,
16, 2005; March 14, 2006
Transcribed by Mindy Moser**

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 Dr. Richard Verrone. I am conducting an oral history
2 interview with Mr. Joseph J. Welsh for the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project. I am
3 in Lubbock, Texas. Today is April 19, 2005. It is approximately 1:15pm, Central
4 Standard Time and I am in the Archive interview room on the campus of Texas Tech
5 University and Mr. Welsh is in Castroville, Texas. Joey, why don't we start with
6 biographical information on yourself? Can you tell me when you were born, where you
7 were born, and a little bit about your childhood?

8 Joseph Welsh: Okay. I was born in South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on
9 December 18, 1947. I basically only stayed there about six or seven years and then we
10 made the great escape across the bridge to South Jersey when they started building the
11 suburbs out there. My father worked for a Gulf Oil Corporation for forty-two years,
12 which was right over there in Philadelphia. He took time out to go to—he was in the
13 Second World War for three years and contracted TB (Tuberculosis) which was—
14 fortunately he survived that but he did spend a couple of years over fighting in the islands
15 in the Navy. Then I grew up in a place called Somerdale, New Jersey, which is probably
16 about—oh, I guess twenty miles from the bridge. And basically everybody was from
17 Philadelphia anyway.

18 RV: Tell me about your dad. He was in the Navy in World War II. Did he talk to
19 you about what he did?

20 JW: That was the thing. We didn't talk too much about it. I guess when I was a
21 kid the only thing I can recall is that he was a Seabee (Construction Battalions) and then

1 the landing craft. He would drive the landing crafts for the Marines, okay? And he had
2 been in Guadalcanal and places like that and he would tell me about some of his training
3 but I never really pursued it and my mother and father divorced when I was fourteen.
4 Then when I came back the first time, okay, and everybody was all excited and they said,
5 "Where are you going?" I said, "Back to Vietnam," and they weren't very excited. I
6 remember myself and my brother-in-law who helped raise me because I was with him
7 most of the time and my father—we had a few drinks and now he wanted to know about
8 me and I wasn't ready to talk about it. I just didn't feel ready to talk about it all at so we
9 almost got in a little scuffle there and I said, "You know, when you told me, Dad, you
10 had been back for years and years." I said, "Just give me some time and all that." But he
11 was in some wild stuff. The Marines, they were going on one island and the Marines hit
12 one side and the paratroopers were supposed to land on the other side and catch the
13 Japanese in the middle. Well they weren't real good at putting out paratroopers in them
14 days and they winded up landing in the middle.

15 RV: Oh boy.

16 JW: And when he got there, I'll never forget this story because he told me again
17 when I was going in because I was going into paratroopers. When they got there they
18 were in the water fighting hand-to-hand when they went in to pick them up. But he had
19 seen a lot of action and probably more so than most Naval guys because he was on the
20 boats taking them in and all. And then he did two or three years and then went right back
21 to work with Gulf and he stayed with them.

22 RV: Tell me about your mother.

23 JW: My mother—well, I was the baby of the family so I was real close with my
24 mother, just like the rest of us. Seemed like everybody—I grew up with mostly Italians,
25 okay, so especially the youngest son is the spoiled one, you know, so we basically got
26 away with murder. (Laughs) Well, not murder.

27 RV: Yes, I understand. How many brothers and sisters, Joey?

28 JW: Well, my father had a brief marriage sometime before all this went down
29 with my mother. So I had a stepsister and then I had an older sister and then I was the
30 youngest.

31 RV: Okay, so there were three of you?

1 JW: Right. Well, we were real close with my stepsister. They lived up in Bucks
2 County up in Pennsylvania and me and my sister were about six years apart. But we
3 became, as basically she helped raise me after I'd say before they even got divorced we
4 were pretty wild kids. Well, we don't consider it compared to now, but we had our little
5 gang system and as you grew older you went farther away from the town. So it was
6 like—the odd thing about it was when I moved to New Jersey I had never even seen a
7 lawn, okay, and then I'm living right in the last row of houses and I had a mile and a half
8 or two mile track of woods, which I had never seen. I think that's where I started my
9 military training because we actually did. We had underground forts. We stole all this
10 stuff off the contractors that were building the houses still and of course we were younger
11 then. That was our first development and then we got into the gangs. The older guys
12 would hang out there and drink and stuff like that and then they moved up into the cars.
13 First you move up into the bus system and you would see—you'd go down to other
14 towns, to record hops and stuff like that. We're talking the early sixties and mid-fifties
15 and then we'd get in fights. Of course we were going there for the girls and it worked
16 both ways. They would come to our place, too, you know? I remember five or six of us
17 went up to Camden, New Jersey. I don't know if you've heard of Camden but we went
18 up to Camden, New Jersey one afternoon and went into a movie theater and we walk in
19 the bathroom and before we knew it there was about fifteen or twenty guys on us, beating
20 the hell out of us. And the only way out was to catch the next bus so we were pretty fast.
21 So we sort of got beaten out of that town and when we got back the older group laughed
22 and said, "Oh, I guess you're not ready for Camden yet, huh?" To them that was—but I
23 played sports with all of us everyday because we had a field in between my house and
24 this other house.

25 RV: This is in Summerville?

26 JW: In Somerdale.

27 RV: Somerdale.

28 JW: Yeah, S-o-m-e-r-d-a-l-e. There's two of them. This is down in the Camden
29 County area, which is Gloucester and Belmar and Somerdale and Staffers. It's basically
30 on the way to over to Walt Whitman Bridge and down that way.

31 RV: Now, did your dad re-marry?

1 JW: Right, yes. He remarried some woman from the town. My dad was very
2 charismatic, very well dressed, Frank Sinatra-type guy. Emceed all the—we used to have
3 block parties at the neighborhood where they'd have bands in there all the time and he
4 was emcee. He was very well dressed, in good shape, he was a boxer in the Navy, and
5 always had a brand-new car every couple of years and stuff like that. He came from a
6 pretty rough family. My actual name is Walsh, W-a-l-s-h. My grandfather was Paddy
7 Walsh, who had eleven children and the two youngest died. He had ten boys and one girl
8 and they both died of lockjaw or Tetanus. And my father was born and he was last born
9 and he was named after the child who had died but this is when they were all in
10 Philadelphia. And he owned some Haberdasheries and things like that. You know,
11 clothing stores and basically these were all fronts apparently, because he had his hands in
12 everything. When he'd come over he was a bare-knuckle fighter from Ireland and what
13 happened was when he died my two or three oldest uncles got together and had our name
14 changed to Welsh so that could sort of—I guess not only credit-wise but personal-wise, I
15 guess—

16 RV: So, to make it easier for you all?

17 JW: Yeah, because my grandfather was involved in a lot of things that was going
18 on in them days. My dad would tell me stories that they'd be walking down the street—
19 of course he dressed—I guess everybody dressed up in them days and three or four punks
20 came up them one day and he said, “I'll never forget it because in one hand he was
21 holding me and then he just reached in and pulled out a .38.” That's what my dad said,
22 something like that, “And said, ‘Get the hell out of here,’ and off they went,” and they
23 continued on their Sunday stroll again. And he was big enough—well, with a name like
24 Paddy, you know (laughs), yeah. So because of all the dealings he was involved in and
25 stuff like that they changed the name to Welsh. I didn't know many of my uncles. I
26 never met—my grandmother and grandfather were dead when I was born on my father's
27 side and my grandfather was alive for a few years on my mother's side, which I vaguely
28 remember. So I had no grandparents. I had a godmother, or what we called the
29 godmother. My godmother, who basically was the historian, you know, and I was her
30 favorite of course. “Not my Joey, not my Joey,” you know. It's just like—basically a
31 strong Irish family like that is just like an Italian family. When you're young the boys

1 can do no wrong, especially if you're the young one. So, growing up I started getting
2 into a lot of trouble and all so they wound up sending me up to Connecticut where my
3 bother-in-law was when I was about sixteen.

4 RV: What kind of trouble were you getting into?

5 JW: Anything that we could find. In them days, like I said, we would get—it was
6 mostly fights, mostly going out and going to these record hops on the weekends and
7 getting in fights and drinking. I probably started drinking around twelve, thirteen,
8 fourteen years old. Not much. (Laughs) You know, a pint of wine would knock two of
9 us out. I was just very rebellious and a class clown.

10 RV: Tell me about school. What were you like in school?

11 JW: Well, in school, in grammar school—I can't remember when I was very
12 young but I started off in an all-boys Catholic school in south Philadelphia and then when
13 I crossed the bridge it was a melting pot and I went to a public school and that's when
14 *The Untouchables* were on. And we were all into the gangster stuff. Of course we were
15 the gangsters. We weren't Elliott in that.

16 RV: Of course. (Laughs)

17 JW: Yeah. I was just very rebellious. I passed all my grades, my academics, but I
18 was always playing hooky and stuff like that.

19 RV: Have you ever explored why you think you were so rebellious as a kid?

20 JW: No. You know—well, my mother let me get away with a lot and that's the
21 way it was with most of us. All she had to do to stop it was say, "I'll tell your dad," and
22 it was, "Whoa, okay, let's talk it over, Ma." But I don't know. It was just—and the next
23 night I would be playing my heart out. For like eleven years I played baseball. I played
24 football in high school. We were all athletic and it's just this streak that we all had. I
25 don't know if it was coming from the city or what and God knows what would have
26 happened if I had stayed in the city because there's so much more involvement up there.

27 RV: What do you remember about Philadelphia?

28 JW: When I was living there I was very young. I was only seven. I just
29 remember the row houses, one house right next to each other, real small rows. And like I
30 said, some action here and there going down that I can vaguely remember but I wasn't
31 there really long enough for it to sink in. A lot of times I'd be put in the house. (Laughs)

1 RV: Were you a Phillies fan or following baseball or football there?

2 JW: No, I was never really—for a few years I was a Flyers fan when they were
3 winning and stuff like that but that was years and years later and I was basically where I
4 was hanging out and the people I was hanging out with and they fought. Broad-street
5 bullies and they won three years in a row so I sort of got a little hockey fever then but as
6 far as playing-wise, I played since I was like eight or nine years old. I remember I played
7 a couple years, and about my second year in Little League I was pitching, and you're still
8 playing amongst your peers and your friends, you know, they're just on a different team
9 and I hit a kid in the ear and he went down pretty bad and I felt pretty bad and they took
10 me up to Philly and my cousin was on a farm team for Philadelphia. They sent me down
11 with him—Joseph was his name—big, big, hulk of a man, and he said, “Why the hell do
12 you want to be a pitcher?” I said, “Well, you’re a pitcher.” He said, “No, no, you want
13 to be the catcher. The catcher runs the whole team.” He just talked to me about it and
14 that, “Hey, these things are gonna happen, and all.” And I wasn’t that big, you know, and
15 so from that day on I just got behind that plate and I never left.

16 RV: Were you a good ball player?

17 JW: Pardon me?

18 RV: Were you a good ball player?

19 JW: Yeah, I was an excellent ball player. I got MVP (Most Valuable Player) two
20 or three years in a row. Seems that anything that I did, whether it was good or bad
21 (laughs); I had to do it the best. I had a very, very, very bad temper and I had to adjust
22 because when I played freshman football I was just a hundred and six pounds.

23 RV: In high school?

24 JW: Yeah, a hundred and six pounds and I played every single game, both offense
25 and defense. And I had guys try and run over me that were two hundred and twenty
26 pounds. Where we grew up it was in your heart. I was thin, a skinny kid, but then what
27 happened was when my mother and father got divorced and then my brother-in-law came
28 into the picture. He was one of the toughest guys in the tri-county area and he was a tall,
29 skinny guy. And there was times that I had guys chase me home and one thing or another
30 but I had to go back out there and then between him and my cousin they’d started
31 working with me. It was just a matter of—the way I see it now—like when I did it with

1 my son—that sooner or later he'll get tired of it and he'll stand up. And that's what
2 happened. I mean, even your friends will mess around with you and smack you and then
3 one day you pop them and you realize you popped them and you pop them again and pop
4 them again and then when I went up to—I was fifteen when I went up to Connecticut and
5 I spent a year up there and that's where I started my martial arts training.

6 RV: Joey, let me ask you a couple of questions. You said you had a bad temper
7 as a kid. It sounded like you had some role models for that. You were raised in a tough
8 way, running around with this crowd and kind of having to defend yourself. Do you want
9 to talk about any of that and how that developed? Did you feel like you had to defend
10 yourself a lot out on the street or did this come from your dad or Paddy?

11 JW: Well, no. Like I said, my dad was a real good disciplinarian in the way that
12 he was strict. You sat down, you ate, you ate it all, and left, but I got away with a lot
13 more because of my mother covering for me.

14 RV: And you knew you could, I guess, after it happened.

15 JW: Yeah, I know that now. But all she had to do was say, "I will tell your
16 father." And this went for me and the other guys who were Italian guys who lived on my
17 street. We ceased to exist. "Hey, it's okay, we're done, Mom. We won't do this, we
18 don't do that." The temper, I don't know when it came from. My brother-in-law had a
19 bad one. He used to snap out, too, but mine had just—like I said, this guy used to—he
20 was my best friend, really, but he always used to be pushing me around, pushing me
21 around, and then one day just pushed me off my bike and when I got up and we stood up,
22 I just whacked the shit out of him. He's bleeding all over, so he started going home and
23 he said, "I'm coming back. I'll meet you at your house." So I went home and I was all
24 freaked out and psyched up. And he'd come up and he said, "What the hell did you hit
25 me for?" I said, "Well, you've been punching on me for years, man!" He said, "Yeah,
26 but I ain't ever beat you up." I said, "Well, you can't beat me up and remember that!"
27 And that was it, you know? And then I realized it and from my brother-in-law telling me
28 the same thing, that it's better to go down fighting than running. You can't run and he
29 helped me a lot. Then when I moved up to Connecticut and I started taking Judo—

30 RV: Why did you start that?

1 JW: I started that because when I got up there they used to call me The Gangster.
2 I was the only guy—now; this is southeast Connecticut, New Milford.

3 RV: Why did they call you that?

4 JW: I was the only guy in their place that wore black socks. They were all Future
5 Farmers of America and I dressed with a nice shirt and pants and black socks and quarter
6 wing tips and all Philly stuff. In Jersey that's the way we dressed. And I got tested a
7 couple of times and I did all right and then finally they sort of kind of said, "Hey man,
8 we're taking this Judo thing. Why don't you come over there?" So I started taking Judo
9 and it was the old Judo where you're in a gym floor and they don't use any mats. And
10 then that sort of expanded my relationships with a lot of people because we lived up in a
11 trail and it was kind of mountainous. I really didn't have any problems up there with
12 anybody at all. And I was attractive to the girls because I was kind of like—not the
13 Fonzie, but I was just so different. You know, I don't speak very well anyway because
14 from where I come from we speak fast and unless you really study, we speak our own
15 language. And I can recall my English teacher in sophomore year up there saying—let
16 me see, how did he put it? And he spoke like five languages and all and I was reading a
17 passage and I said something, "And there was three *ad-ults*," and he said, "Mr. Welsh,
18 it's *a-dult*." And I said, "Mr. So-and-so, it's *ad-ult*. I'm from Philly, that's the way I
19 speak," and that's just the way I was. I went right back at him like, "No, I cannot
20 change." This went on a couple times but he never sent me down to the principal or
21 nothing like that. I just told him, "Hey, where I come from it's *ad-ult*, it's *or-ange*, it's
22 *radd-iator*, that's just it." And that's how I spoke to him.

23 RV: Joey, how old was your brother-in-law?

24 JW: He was—I don't know, I guess he was seven or eight years older than me. I
25 was like fifteen and he was probably about twenty-four and he grew up on the streets
26 right next to Camden, which is worse than south Philly. I didn't know at the time but he
27 was known for being a big-time street fighter. I didn't know any of this at the time
28 because they had just started going out and then after time went on I got to move around
29 a little bit with him and I seen some of the guys he was hanging out with. And little did I
30 know that—I stayed with him for about a year and made it through my freshman course
31 and then they moved up there and I got put on probation for drinking.

1 RV: By the high school?

2 JW: No, by the cops. Well, the reason they caught us is one guy was on crutches.
3 They knew us. They knew us all and my dad was a politician. He got into politics and
4 his position was in the transportation sort of thing. Just town politics but he hired and
5 fired the cops. And so basically we were getting away with—we weren't doing anything
6 that bad all. Raising hell is what we were doing.

7 RV: Now, your dad stayed in touch with you when you were up there in
8 Connecticut?

9 JW: Well, what happened was—of course, when he left and there was probably a
10 couple of cops that had it out for me because they called it Joey Walsh's Gang.

11 RV: Oh really?

12 JW: Oh yeah. They called it Joey Walsh's Gang.

13 RV: So you were at the top of the heap.

14 JW: Yeah, yeah.

15 RV: Did you like that?

16 JW: Well, no, I really wasn't. We were all the same; it was just that I was the
17 ringleader because in their mind, I guess because of my dad that's why they thought I
18 was getting away with a lot. And basically what happened was they knew who the
19 different groups were throughout the town and it wasn't hard to find out who was on
20 crutches. And so what happened was we were fighting amongst each other, which was
21 very common, and the cops came and we all ran. Now, of course, the guy on crutches got
22 caught. This is now—remember now; I had just spent about six years in the woods. I
23 snuck over to the cop shop and climbed up the back of the cop station and watched them
24 as they interrogated the kids. They had one in one room and one in the other. That's
25 what kind of head I was in. I didn't go home, you see?

26 RV: I see what you're saying, yeah. You're doing a little recon.

27 JW: Yeah, yeah, I was into that, you know, as much as I could get away with.
28 And then I went home and then of course they came and got me and I said, "No, I don't
29 know what you're talking about." I knew that they had us because of the guy on crutches
30 and then the guy that I had beaten up before and they had both of them. And along with
31 that they can just take out the list and just go right down the list. So they gave us three

1 month's probation. We were only like fourteen, thirteen, fourteen. You know, had to be
2 in at nine o'clock, had to go to church every Sunday, get the priest to sign your note, then
3 go down to the chief of police and show it to him at all.

4 RV: Were you Catholic?

5 JW: No, when I crossed the border, I was in an all-Catholic school. My dad said,
6 "Your mom and I don't pursue any religious beliefs in the way of going to church. You
7 know that." And he said, "And I'm not going to push it on you." He said, "You was in
8 Catholic school and now you're in public school and you go where you want to go." So I
9 used to go to church with my buddies. I'd go to Catholic Church, I'd go to Presbyterian,
10 wherever. So I was baptized Catholic but that was it.

11 RV: Did you feel like you have a personal need to do that or did you just want to
12 just hang out with your buds?

13 JW: Well, I wanted to see, you know, and there's a certain type of—when you're
14 young there's a—I guess it's a respect but it's also a fear of what's going on here. But
15 being from—especially when you go to an all-boys Catholic school your first year. Like
16 now, I feel very confident in the church, any church, okay, because I've come to peace
17 with myself and I understand what I feel but I do not attend church. But that's how I did
18 it. I would go with them. Now, I had to go to church for three months, and I did go to
19 Catholic. And it got to be pretty cool because I think that helped us because we got to
20 meet with the priest. God, we got to meet with the priest. The first couple times it was a
21 little—but he was cool, you know? After a while you realize it's a man dressed up. And
22 he would say, "How are you guys? Are you guys being good?" And all that kind of
23 stuff. "Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra," you know. So it was on an informal basis and he wasn't some
24 untouchable figure.

25 RV: Right. He was kind of talking to you.

26 JW: He was a human being and he sat down there and he basically had our well-
27 being within him and that's what he wanted.

28 RV: That's very cool.

29 JW: Yeah, and so it was cool, we did it for three months, but I didn't continue.
30 However, on occasion I would go to midnight mass with them on Easter and all. It kind
31 of relaxed me in the religious field where I didn't feel that I needed to go there and I

1 found out later in Vietnam that I was right. I didn't need to go there. I had my own god
2 with me and my concept of God then was that if there's a God that is everywhere then
3 God has to be energy. That was sort of my coming to terms. If they say there is such a
4 thing, that there's this thing or spirit then the only thing that's everywhere and everything
5 contains it is energy, this form of energy.

6 RV: That's a very literal translation, basically. "If God is possible of being
7 everywhere then he has to be this. This is what makes sense to me."

8 JW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And whether there's a heaven and hell, who knows? I just
9 know they're burning me because I ain't going in that cold ground. (Laughs)

10 RV: (Laughs) Okay. Well tell me about when you finished your freshman year
11 up in Connecticut?

12 JW: No, I finished—well, here's what happened. Little did I know that all this
13 took place but I knew that my mother and father got divorced and then my father
14 married—I won't even use the word stepmother, but that's what she was. Now she was
15 teaching in Gloucester, which was right next to Belmar where my brother-in-law grew up
16 and Gloucester was right next to Camden. And they were living in a one-bedroom
17 apartment. Well, I was expecting to be—when they picked me up, which was in June—
18 see, because my brother-in-law and sister had to leave early so I stayed with my friend up
19 there in Connecticut to finish my last couple of months. When they picked me up they
20 took me to their one-bedroom apartment and they had her three kids in there who were
21 very small and there was some kind of wrongdoing in the way of she had them for
22 visitation rights and wouldn't give them back. And she had all this planned anyway.
23 And of course I was, you know, what do they call it? A juvenile delinquent. But I started
24 going to school there. Now that was a tough school but my brother-in-law, having the
25 reputation that he had, knew all the guys whose nephews and younger brothers and
26 cousins and all went there. So my ticket in was a lot easier than most, okay, because I
27 remember going to school the first day. I made it down to the corner—and I could walk
28 right around behind the apartments. And I can remember to this day, as soon as I came
29 up to the corner there was a few girls there, really pretty girls. "Oh, hello, who are you?
30 Who are you? Gee, I'm going to like this." And then when I got into the hallways, there
31 were some pretty stout dudes and I said, "Well, here we go." And the guy comes up to

1 me and he says, "Are you Joey Welsh?" I said, "That's right." I was getting ready to
2 drop my books and scrap and he put his hand out and he says, "Well, I'm Frank Furrs,
3 Johnny Furrs'..." "Oh yeah, okay." "You're Dusty Gillis' brother-in-law." I'm like,
4 "Yeah." He says, "Yeah, we knew Dusty, man. He's a bad ass. Come on over here and
5 meet..." So then one thing led to another and I was in. I mean, I was in. I had missed
6 football because of the tryouts being before school started and I got there late and a
7 couple of them played inner city and they said, "You play ball?" I said, "Hell, yeah."
8 They said, "Well, come on out, we're inner city." Boy, talk about inner city. (Laughs)
9 So we played the surrounding area, which was parts of Camden and other places. We
10 played Blackwood and all these little towns and we'd get up there on a bus and they'd
11 drive us to a field on a weekend and we'd play, get on the bus for halftime and hangout
12 and then come home.

13 RV: What was your position, Joey?

14 JW: I was usually a wide receiver and then, believe it or not I'd be a linebacker
15 but I was like the roving linebacker because I was fast.

16 RV: And you would take heads off?

17 JW: No, no, what I would do is I would just find out where they were going and
18 just somehow—I remember the first time the coach noticed me was when one of our top
19 runners tried to run through me. And he ran through me and over me but he never went
20 any further because I was wrapped around his arms and legs. This was when I was a
21 freshman. He said, "Who the hell is that under there?" And Dominic Gump said,
22 "Welsh, of course." And he said, "Damn." Because this guy was a black guy. We had a
23 lot of blacks when I was a freshman. And that's just the way, you know, once again,
24 being brought up playing field football, I mean...

25 RV: Tell me about the mixture of races there. Were there any difficulties, any
26 problems? This is the...

27 JW: No, in fact it was kind of weird because where we lived we were a growing
28 community. My sister had to be shipped or bussed several communities down so she
29 went to a rah-rah school we called Haddon Heights, which was up near Haddonfield and
30 all that upper middle class. By the time I got around going to high school they had built a
31 high school for our three little towns, which was Somerdale, Stratford, and Magnolia.

1 Somerdale was, I guess you could say, the street kids. Athletic, but street kids. The
2 Stratford was the—they were the more academic. Athletic and academic but not as
3 street. And then Magnolia had a lot of blacks, okay, which we never really interacted
4 until we got into high school. And then when we went the first year they went in high
5 school, of course they only went up to juniors. They let the seniors graduate from where
6 they were. Well, I come in the first year as a freshman, rather than four years and that
7 was the second year and I think we went to state finals in football because you mixed
8 them three together, your blacks, your white street, and then your white athletic jocks. I
9 mean, we definitely, definitely had a hell of an athletic program. And I used to go out
10 and hang out with the black guys. I used to go down to the house and eat dinner with
11 them. It's just the way it was because it was small. Now we would fight a white guy as
12 fast as we would fight a black guy in school. However, when you came to our school or
13 we went to another school, it was school against school. We didn't care what you was.
14 And we did fight a lot. I mean, basketball games—even if we won. (Laughs) It was
15 always a fight. Constantly.

16 RV: It sounds like sports played a really big role in your childhood.

17 JW: Yeah. I was always playing baseball and then what happened was when I
18 was in Connecticut they didn't have a football team so I went out and I did the Judo all
19 winter and I hurt my arm and they couldn't figure out what was wrong with it. And I
20 went out for baseball and after a couple weeks I was a sophomore. I was being looked at
21 for the Varsity position. Because on my knee I could hit second base in a heartbeat. But
22 there was something wrong on my arm and from constantly using it I was favoring it. So
23 I missed making Varsity and I played JV. In fact, I had to sit out for a while and they
24 never—I don't know, now I think it was tendonitis but they couldn't tell me what it was
25 because they couldn't straighten out—what happened was a guy threw me and instead of
26 letting me go he was driving me into the mat. He held onto it and I think it tore some
27 tendons and the throwing—at first I was dazzling everybody and then it just hurt too bad.
28 I just couldn't straighten it all out and all that kind of stuff. I remember going to the
29 doctors but nothing ever materialized. It finally just went away on its own. But I played
30 ball up there and like I said, by the time I got back to Gloucester they had started football
31 so I played inner city football which was great because basically we went up against

1 Fairview which was undefeated. All blacks and we went to their town, their little field
2 and he said, "Let's kick some ass." I don't know if anybody ever scored or anything
3 because all we did, every time we hiked the ball we just started fighting and knocking
4 them over. Well, at halftime you'd go into the busses. Well, they got in the buss and
5 they left.

6 RV: Oh really?

7 JW: They forfeited.

8 RV: Geez.

9 JW: This is was like unknown. They had never lost on their own home field. I
10 mean, I knew there was a lot of arguing going on between the adults and coaches and all
11 but we didn't give a shit. We just really didn't give a shit. We were going to win one
12 way or another and we hadn't lost and I don't think they had lost and so we just
13 intimidated them. That was our coaches' thing: intimidate. "Don't be intimidated. You
14 go there and be intimidated and they think you're scared of them or anything like that."
15 So as soon as they'd hike it somebody would knee somebody or somebody would kick
16 somebody. I mean, these guys had never been treated like that. Everybody was like—
17 yeah it got around that we were pretty damn good at something because they chased them
18 off their own field. The coach came back in and he kind of had a smirk on his face and
19 we said, "What's going on?" He said, "They forfeited." "Yeah!" I don't even think we
20 scored. I don't know if anybody scored. So that was a big bonding of the crowd that I
21 hung with and we were constantly out there looking for girls and getting in trouble.
22 There was a lot of fighting. I mean, you had to fight.

23 RV: It sounds like it.

24 JW: Yeah, you had to fight. Unless it was your best friend you might want to try
25 to talk him out of it, especially if you were drinking or something but besides that, you
26 know, that's the way it was. And I had to rely on speed and stealth and that's where I
27 picked it up, in the martial arts, that these guys could run right over me. They could pick
28 me up and slit me all over but if I did this and I did that—and I had this small guy
29 stalking. He was in the military and he picked that up on my right away. "Now, who
30 ever told you to do that?" I said, "It made sense to me." He said, "Well, come over
31 here," and he talked to me. He said, "You know what you did?" I said, "What?" He

1 said, "Well, when he went to throw you, you threw your body and reversed it and you
2 became in front of him and so he was already going that way and so it's called a reverse
3 flip and you're not supposed to be able to do that." I said, "But it works." Because of the
4 speed, that's what I relied on. And then also if I was outnumbered I could run fast.

5 (Laughs)

6 RV: (Laughs) Joey, tell me why, when you mentioned your mother-in-law, you
7 said, your kind of so-called mother-in-law, your dad's new—

8 JW: Yeah, I'll cut right to the chase there. She was a teacher in the elementary
9 school in Gloucester and she—my father and her bought a house in Barrington. And
10 Barrington was—if you lived there you had to go to the rah-rah school where my sister
11 originated and I would have got killed if I went there, being from where I was from,
12 okay? And we moved out there and she used to drop me off in the morning. It was no
13 problem for her because she went right by the high school to get to the elementary and
14 she picked me up in the afternoon. Well then, I guess about six months into school or
15 whatever, my dad said, "Look, somebody called and said that you're living here and
16 we're going to have to pay tuition if you stay here," and I knew that was bullshit. She
17 was tired of taking me, she didn't want to be tied down, she wanted me—you know, she
18 was just tired of it. And I loved it. I mean, I was going to school every day, I was
19 passing, I was in the beginning of my junior year and I said, "Well, I'm not going to
20 Haddon Heights." I said, "Dad, they'll kill me over there after being in Sterling." That's
21 where I was my first year in Connecticut and then coming out of Gloucester. I said, "I
22 won't go to Haddon Heights. No way."

23 RV: What did your dad say?

24 JW: Well, there wasn't much he could say because when I said, "No," I meant no.
25 I said, "I'm going to try to move back in with my mother." So I moved back in with my
26 mother and then—

27 RV: Where was she?

28 JW: She was still at the original house from where I grew up, okay, and my
29 brother-in-law and sister were living there at the time, too. And see, even though I was
30 running with a pretty bad crowd, I went to school and I was playing sports and I was
31 passing and everything. But then when I got back to Somerdale I went back with the old

1 crowd that I had grown up with and you know, it wasn't maybe three months and I was
2 getting in trouble again and then we got in this big fight after a basketball game and they
3 caught some of us and I got suspended for a couple weeks and so then my mother went
4 away on vacation. I remember that and so I stole her car and I went to Connecticut where
5 I used to live and I did a two-week route all over and winded up back at Gloucester and
6 just called up and told my dad—knowing my mother would never sign—I said, “I ain’t
7 coming back unless you let me quit school.” I said, “I ain’t going to stay in this school
8 because I’m a marked man.” He said, “Okay.” Well, my brother-in-law caught me
9 because I went down to pick up my paycheck and my brother-in-law caught me and he
10 whacked the shit out of me a little bit. “Get in the goddamn car. You’re driving your
11 mother crazy,” and all of that. But my mother wasn’t there to put up a fight so they let
12 me quit school. So I quit in March or April of my junior year and I was passing. I just
13 quit and then this whole time I never talked to my stepmother. She was all her kids this,
14 her kids that, her kids this, her kids that. Really pulled my father, who was very close to
15 me and his daughters, really pulled him away. And I’m going to finish this to get it over
16 with because years later after I had come and gone, staying all over and things like that,
17 after I got out of the service and everything like that, I’d stay with him once in a while.
18 Obviously I was jumping around because I was semi-quasi married. Then he got
19 diagnosed with cancered liver. Well, before that we got real close. Before that we got
20 real close because I wasn’t working and I would drive him around everywhere. My
21 stepsister’s husband was a cop in Philadelphia who got wounded in a bust and he became
22 a detective and he worked up at Bucks County DA (District Attorney) office. So he
23 hooked us up with a lawyer. My dad was pretty good. He was well off. He had invested
24 in the stocks and all that stuff from the Gulf Oil Corporation since it began, he had a
25 beautiful house that he had re-done, he had an outdoor heated pool, he had—you know,
26 he just invested his money very wisely. And all he would tell me is, “When I go, you get
27 my car.” That’s all I cared about. I didn’t care about no money. But anyway, then he
28 started bringing over insurance policies to my sister, saying that, “In case anything
29 happens I want you to sign and get this.” And my sister said, “We ain’t signing shit. If
30 you want it, you sign it over to us.” So finally we’d been having these meetings with the
31 divorce lawyer and talking about a divorce and the lawyer was saying, “Hey, with what

1 you've got right now, she going to get half of it but at least you're going to get some." I
2 said to him, "Why do you stay?" He said, "Well, you know, I'm content and she takes
3 good care of the house and all that." Well, then he gets sick and I was working. I was
4 coming out of my rebellious—well, that's another story about when I came back from
5 Vietnam, but this was the '72, '73, but I got into the EMT Paramedic Program because I
6 couldn't hold a job and that just grabbed me. That's what I needed. Ring the siren, I'll
7 go. So I became pretty obsessed with that and I got really involved in it and I was
8 working in the ER (Emergency Room) and I was working in Camden as a paramedic
9 volunteer and volunteering at the local level. Our doctor, who I grew up with, our
10 hometown doctor, was the EMS Coordinator and all and so at the time my father started
11 getting jaundiced and stuff they put him in. The doc—I was on call and he called me
12 over and I said, "What's the deal?" He said, "Well, you know, I'm not supposed to tell
13 you anything but I know your dad has already requested you to come up there. He's got
14 cancer of the liver." I said, "How much time?" He said, "I'd give him four months." So
15 it's just that fast. And I said, "Okay." So I go up and my dad tells me that, "I don't want
16 you to tell anybody. I want to go home because I know you know what's going on." I
17 said, "Yeah, whatever you want, Dad." So I took him home and of course once—it just
18 hit so fast. This was October, November, December, January, February. It was about
19 November because he died on Valentine's Day. It wasn't within a month—he was
20 morphed out. He had so much morphine in him and all and then my wife at that time,
21 we'd go over and visit and stuff like that.

22 RV: Joey, how hard was this for you?

23 JW: Well, being in the business and seeing it so much and then seeing death so
24 much, it was hard for me in one way of losing him but I knew what he was going through
25 because of being in the business and that the sooner the better because of his condition,
26 the suffering that he was going through, just from studying and working around it and all.
27 But I was so glad that we had come to terms and we were really, really close. You know
28 what I mean?

29 RV: Yes.

30 JW: So I felt settled in my mind that one little incident that we had when I got
31 back from Vietnam, that was long past. We were very close and what he wanted, that

1 was he wanted. He wanted to stay with her, fine. And after all these meetings he winded
2 up staying with her. So then one night I went over and I said, "I want to stay tonight." I
3 wanted to just feel. And she said, "No, you'll keep him awake." I wouldn't keep him
4 awake. He didn't know what was going on. He was so morphined up and could hardly
5 move. And my wife was there and she came back and she said—Dot was her name—a
6 "Dot thinks it would be better if you leave or he won't get rest." I said, "I'm telling you,
7 Judy, I've got to stay." She said, "Well, we're close, she'll call if anything happens."
8 We left about eleven. At three o'clock I get a call and she's in convulsions. I said, "Call
9 the paramedics," and I beat them there and I jumped in the truck with him and basically
10 there was nothing they could do or he wanted done so we took him to the hospital where I
11 worked out of and by then it was around dawn and there was everybody coming up. The
12 family came from Philly, from all over, that could get there. What was weird was—and
13 he looked terrible. Of course they hadn't seen him. I had been seeing him so it was—
14 what was funny was there was so many people in and out that be family but his real
15 family at that time, being in the way of children was myself and my sister and my
16 stepsister and her daughter. And I laid down next to him and I said, "Dad, you've got to
17 let it go. You've just got to let it go. It's okay." And he let it go.

18 RV: Right there.

19 JW: Right there, right then. Ten o'clock and it was only us. And every five
20 minutes somebody else was in. But I said, "We're all here for you," and I said who was
21 here and all and I just said, "Let it go. Just let go." And he stopped breathing. And I
22 started crying and all. I was laying down with him but what got me was she wasn't there,
23 the bitch. Nobody was there. It was just his children and his godchild. And that's when
24 it hit me pretty hard. But I was okay. I handled everything and we were okay. Well, my
25 stepsister, she was a wheeler-dealer. We had a nice ceremony, he was cremated and stuff
26 like that and I got up and said some things and everything went nice and then we went
27 over to the house and she gave Jeanie this and gave me this and gave me that. Well,
28 when we came back to the house, to the family, the godmother was sitting there, my aunt,
29 my aunt May. And she said, "What did you get, Joey?" And I showed her and she said,
30 "Where is his diamond rings?" I said, "I don't know, Aunt May." And boy, she went
31 off. "That bitch, that goddamn bitch! I'm telling you, she's ripping him off! It's

1 tradition in this family that all the jewelry and clothes that fit or anything must be passed
2 from father to son.” She gave me his turquoise—it was real Indian turquoise and all that.
3 Well, she seen that and that’s when my stepsister said, “This bitch. Something is going
4 on.” And of course we couldn’t do anything until the thirtieth day when it because
5 public. My stepsister was there and she said—we got out of a meeting, we went to a
6 family meeting and seven days—we don’t know what was on it before that—seven days
7 prior to him dying, which is around seven February, we had around a six or eight inch
8 blizzard. He supposedly got up out of the bed, got in the car, drove about twenty miles,
9 and he went up these stairs and went into this lawyer’s office and changed his entire will
10 to read that everything will go to his wife and if she doesn’t survive, everything will go to
11 her children. Not a word was mentioned about his kids. So she ripped him off on his
12 deathbed. What happened was, the way we figured it out was she might have been
13 running around with the lawyer but the lawyer came to the house and brought his
14 secretary. Because remember, my brother-in-law was a detective and we had the lawyer
15 right behind him. And, “Here, sign this, sign that.” And I said, “Man, he’s too
16 morphined out. He could not make sense of anything five, six, seven days before that
17 and you all know it.” The lawyer said, “You’re right, Joey, you’re absolutely right. Now
18 you want to go to court?” And I said, “You’re damn right I want to take her ass to court.”
19 I said, “Look. I don’t care nothing about the diamond rings.” I wanted the car, you
20 know? I said, “But it’s the principle that she ripped my father off his deathbed and if I
21 get a hold of her I’ll kill her.” Well, that’s all they had to hear. “Okay, let’s hold it up
22 now, hold it up.” So come to find out was, all they could do was have her freeze her
23 assets. And he was worth well over a quarter million. And she couldn’t sell anything.
24 She still had everything, she could use everything and she could wait us out. The lawyer
25 finally came down and said, “Joey, you don’t have the money. You’d have to bring all
26 them doctors in and them doctors, some of them are going to say, ‘Well, it’s possible,’
27 and that’s all they have to do is say it’s possible that he did leave. She’s going to lie.
28 She’s going to lie and stick with her lie because she’s a lying bitch and the lawyer is
29 damn sure going to lie. He ain’t going to change stories.” So there was just nothing we
30 could do. I said, “There’s something we could do,” and I left the house and I took a ride
31 and I cooled down because what are you going to do to a woman, you know? From that

1 time on, it was a couple weeks later my brother-in-law seen her—now he sort of took it in
2 stride like, “Screw her, it ain’t nothing to do with him.” He said, “Oh, how you doing?”
3 and she said, “Oh, fine.” She said, “Oh, by the way, Mark,” her son, “he brought me a
4 pistol.” She made sure he knew that. Like a pistol was going to stop me. “Yeah, I have
5 a pistol know and he showed me and took me out to shoot it and all so I feel a lot safer
6 now and all.” But he came home and told me that right away. I said, “I’ll take that pistol
7 and shove it up her son’s ass and blow his goddamn...” But I was quite bitter at that.
8 Not because of the money and that’s the God’s honest truth. I didn’t want a penny. I
9 wanted the car. That’s what my dad said he would give me, was a Chrysler Cordova at
10 that time. But we couldn’t fight it. We froze it for a while and then after a while we just
11 had to let it go. So she was the step bitch and what goes around comes around. She died
12 several years later and...

13 RV: Well I expected that there was a story behind that when you said that about
14 her earlier.

15 JW: Yeah, she made me get out of school because she was tired of taking me back
16 and forth. That was the bottom line, okay, which I blame on her. She put me back in
17 with my old street gang and that just sent me to shit. Then she rips my dad off on his
18 deathbed and at that time my dad and I were as close as we ever were. For the past year
19 before that we were so close and I knew what she was doing and we knew that she—
20 that’s why we got my brother-in-law and another lawyer in there because she was
21 shrewd, very, very shrewd. She was educated and stuff like that and my father kind of
22 got off on that since he had only went to eighth grade. But he was very, very smart
23 investment-wise and everything like that. But you know I’d spit on her grave in a
24 heartbeat because you just don’t do that. It had nothing to do with the diamond rings or
25 the money. If anything, the car, but my dad—it made my dad look, to anyone, an
26 outsider, that he didn’t even care about us but we knew that it was not him.

27 RV: Right, of course.

28 JW: We never ever held it against him and that’s why we knew it was a scam.

29 RV: Yeah. Joey, why don’t we take a break?

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 2 of 10
May 10, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history
2 interview with Mr. Joseph Welsh. Today is May 10, 2005. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on
3 the campus of Texas Tech University and Joey; you're in Castroville, Texas again. Let's
4 pick up where we left off. You had basically talked about your family. You had gotten
5 to the point where you had dropped out of high school and I was wondering if you could
6 kind of tell me how you felt after that and where you saw yourself going and I think you
7 had a pretty clear direction.

8 Joseph Welsh: Well, it was kind of a foolish move. It was just that I had been
9 moved around in three years to four high schools. If I would have just stayed where I
10 was, I was very happy and I was passing. I quit in March of my junior year. Anyway,
11 the following year I turned eighteen and at that time I knew the draft was going to be
12 coming up so I started researching the Marines and Army and all that. And ever since
13 Kennedy I had just always been stuck on that Green Beret ever since that first one I seen.
14 So I enlisted in the Army with a guarantee to go to Airborne School for three years in
15 February 25th, 1966.

16 RV: Tell me why the Army?

17 JW: Because of that Green Beret.

18 RV: That was it. That was the deciding factor.

19 JW: Yeah, yeah. I had never seen one before and when he was assassinated, I
20 was home from school that day I remember and I turned on the TV and it was twelve or
21 twelve-thirty and they had just announced it. As much of a street punk as I was, that
22 really got to me because...I don't know. Everybody liked Kennedy. He was just that
23 kind of guy and then when they had the funeral and I seen them Green Berets and then of
24 course he was the one who went down there and that's why it's named after him. He
25 gave that Beret through a Presidential order so there is no one, no one who can change
26 that. Like, the Black Beret was taken from the Rangers. In fact, that's where my final
27 job was, at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.

28 RV: Right.

1 JW: So then I get into basic training and we're almost completed and I guess it's
2 probably more drafted than enlisted and they said, "Okay, anybody who wants to
3 volunteer for Jump School, raise your hand." So I'm going like, "Oh." So that's how
4 bad they needed them so if you past the PT (Physical Test) test then you went to Jump
5 School. Of course I didn't know that but it didn't bother me. I knew I was guaranteed.
6 Little did I know that these two-year guys—they were smart, too, because that's an extra
7 three or four weeks here and then a thirty-day leave and then they get to Vietnam. They
8 might have around maybe eighteen or nineteen months. Well, when you was in Vietnam
9 and it got down to enlisted or drafted, if you was—say you had seven months left, they'd
10 let you extend for a cushy job. I shouldn't say cushy but usually a safe job because with
11 thirty days left they don't want you in anything anyway. But a lot of the drafted guys
12 would spend eleven or ten or eleven or twelve months on line and then they'd extend for
13 a month or two and once you had a hundred and seventy-nine days or less, they'd let you
14 leave Vietnam and go right to the States and get out of the Army. ETS—Estimated Time
15 of Separation. Except for me. (Laughs) Mine was an entirely different situation. When
16 I graduated Jump School I requested Vietnam with the 101st and they gave me the 82nd.
17 Well, that all happened in one day and then the next day that's when you finished
18 jumping. The next day—there was only about a hundred and fifty-five—they said,
19 "You've all been levied." I said, "What the hell's a levy?" They said, "You're all
20 leaving for Europe tomorrow and no leave." So they needed paratroopers. So
21 fortunately, I feel now, because if I would have went to Vietnam then I wouldn't have
22 known what I knew when I finally did go. So I winded up the next day on a plane to
23 Germany along with the whole entire class. It saved a lot of people's lives and I stayed
24 over there and I was with the 509th Airborne Infantry Mechanized, which was trained and
25 trained and trained and trained and I had to be there ninety days before I could request.
26 And I did. I requested to leave to go to Vietnam but that seven or eight months that I
27 spent there I learned so much and became so much more acquainted with the military. In
28 fact, when I signed out—two days before I was getting ready to sign out the 1st Sergeant
29 called me in. I'd only been in eleven months and he said, "Welsh, I don't really have to
30 do this but since you've got to wear greens, put this on there." And he threw me
31 Corporal stripes. I made E4 in eleven months. I mean, that's how much I soldiered, you

1 know. It was a very, very strict training. And the training was great because you had
2 Korea and Vietnam veterans training so I got really—even though it was cold weather it
3 had no bearing on it. You know the idea of just getting more familiar and being in the
4 Army, I felt a lot more comfortable when I went to Vietnam.

5 RV: Sure. Hey, Joey, let's go back and talk about your basic training.

6 JW: Oh, basic training it was brutal.

7 RV: You're at Fort Dix, right?

8 JW: Yeah. Yeah, I got stuck—well, that's one thing about enlisting. When you
9 get Airborne you sort of get tossed into the ringer for anything else. But I went through
10 the basic training and it was February 25th when I went there. And it was—we had the
11 rottenest guy you could ever want. Very abusive, very hard. I was athletic so the PT—I
12 sucked it up. I loved it. And basically that's what I really needed. I needed somebody to
13 grab me by the back of the neck and give me some direction.

14 RV: When you say brutal what are you talking about? Give me an example.

15 JW: Well, I was pretty good at running so they put me in the rear. In other words,
16 here's what they'd do. We had to march. Anything less than five miles you had to march
17 to, otherwise you had to take trucks to be there on time. So we would rotate platoons,
18 one, two, three, four. Then the next day, two, three, four, one, etc, etc. But we always
19 started last and were expected to wind up first. And what he would do was, the rest of
20 the company would move out and he'd say, "Low-crawl position, move!" And you'd
21 have your pack on and your M-14 and he'd walk backwards until somebody could touch
22 his boot and then we'd get up and start double-timing to catch up with the back of the
23 company. Well, we were pretty dumb at first. We'd all go in a straight line. Well, then
24 we started talking to each other. "Okay, let's do it in sweeps. You guys surround this
25 guy quick and touch his boot or we're going to be crawling all the way across the field."
26 Then we'd get up and get in formation. I was what they called a rear road guard with the
27 vest and all. I would run up ahead and stop traffic and then have to catch up and nobody
28 better fall out behind me or I'd pay. So as soon as we—and we were close to the woods.
29 As soon as we hit the woods, which was all sand, then he would just take off and I don't
30 even know how the other drillers put up with it but we would take a column of twos on
31 each side and we would go and get past them. I mean, this would all take a couple miles

1 but we would have to be in front, all right? And I've had guy fall back and I'd just be
2 pushing with my rifle, pushing, pushing, pushing. I remember one day I was pushing and
3 pushing this guy and I'm trying to convince him, "Come on, man, come on. You can't
4 fall out." And he just said, "Welsh, move out," and the guy sort of fell off on a side trail
5 and I seen him grab the gun, his weapon and just start beating him with the butt of the
6 weapon, kicking him in the butt and stuff. Well, I'll tell you what, when we got off of
7 Fort Dix, I'll never forget this. We got off and they had the painted yellow—you see this
8 in the movies and you don't think it happens. They had the painted yellow feet that you
9 stood in for checking out and you are in a reception station so you're still in civilian
10 clothes and all. And they'll walk along and they'll pick the biggest guy out and they hit
11 this guy dead square in the chest, man, and he liked to fold down and fall down and said,
12 "When I said, 'Attention,' that means don't move." Well, I'll tell you what, boy, you
13 froze. You didn't move. And then they put this pile caps on, you know, the ones with
14 the ear flaps? And you had to pull them down and you to wear an overcoat to cover
15 yourselves up and they called you pussies because you still had long hair. And it wasn't
16 long hair but this is your reception station where you was going to take your test and get
17 your uniform. And until you got your uniform that's what you did. You ran around in
18 this overcoat with this pile cap pulled down around your head. Then you got your
19 uniform and then right around that time they assigned you to your unit and then when you
20 got your unit they'd stop and everybody would all grab their bags and then you'd double
21 time up with your bag. It was double time everywhere and we would be on the third
22 floor and of course when they blew the whistle we had to be the first in formation or we'd
23 do it again.

24 RV: That's tough.

25 JW: And we'd do it again, and we'd do it again, and we'd do it again. And then
26 he would—you know, it helped me as a Drill Sergeant because I learned that you don't
27 have to—if you yell all the time it's not going to be effective when you do yell. You
28 know what I mean?

29 RV: Right, oh yeah.

30 JW: You know? But it was constant and it was driving guys crazy and guys
31 would be screaming at night and all and then they would put the pressure on you. "Okay,

1 you'd better get him right." So I know one night they came in and I was going to try to
2 stop them but there was about seven of them and this one guy kept falling out. You
3 know, they threw a blanket over him and beat the shit out of him. Blanket party. "You're
4 screwing us all up." I felt I could beat the shit out of any one of them but let's not
5 interfere with the system, you know? And if you didn't take a shower, that was a rough
6 one. If somebody felt that you wasn't taking a shower, they'd take scrubbing brushes to
7 you.

8 RV: Now why was that a big deal, to take a shower? Besides the stench.

9 JW: Well, yeah, it was for personal hygiene and guys like—we had eight-man
10 rooms. They were brand-new barracks and if a guy was a slob, I would tell him the same
11 thing. "Hey, man, you stink when you come home. When you get a chance to take a
12 shower, you want to take a shower. Personal hygiene, right?" And some guys wouldn't
13 and they would only last one or two days and then that night they would throw them in
14 there and they would take them big wooden scrubbing brushes and they'd scrub his ass
15 down and from then on he'd take a shower. Then once we would get to the rifle range or
16 any range we were doing, we'd get everything and then on the way back it would be the
17 same thing. We would wait and they would take off but it didn't take long. We learned
18 real quick, as soon as he said, "Low-crawl position. Move!" it was like a swarm of an
19 army of ants. He couldn't take three steps and somebody would touch his boot. And
20 then we'd be up and then we'd be on the run. And that went on and on and on. I know a
21 couple of guys left battling. I never seen them again but he really was competitive and he
22 hadn't been. I'm trying to remember. I don't believe—I've still got the book. I don't
23 believe any one of the Drill Sergeants had been to Vietnam. Maybe one. Of course—
24 because you get to know what to look for. It was hard, really, really hard. "Okay, the
25 barracks are unclean. Take all the furniture from the third floor," this was on a Sunday,
26 "outside and clean the barracks and then take it back up."

27 RV: Yeah, yeah, just constant stuff like that.

28 JW: And then now they've got you built up. And then we went to the hand-to-
29 hand bugle sticks and all and we were just mauling everybody, the other platoons and we
30 were just—boy, you get a chance to hit somebody, man, and that was it. And by this time
31 I had made Squad Leader.

1 RV: Let me stop you. Why were you guys so good at that? Was it just because—
2 JW: Because we had the chance to strike back at something, at somebody, and
3 you was just so pent up and we were—I was in tremendous shape. From the running and
4 everything like that I maxed the PT test every time and that's when we had to do the five
5 events and all that. And plus, I knew I had to take the test to get into Jump School. We
6 were just finishing up. We had about a week left and it was just final testing and they let
7 is—it wasn't even that, it was a few days. They let us have a couple beers a piece and
8 some pizza or something. That was it, that's all we had the whole time and of course the
9 guys who didn't drink, we snuck that off them. And the next day—now, when you leave
10 a formation—and they might have a pistol grip, a pistol belt with a poncho on the back in
11 case it rains, and a canteen of water. Or they might have a full pack. Whatever. You
12 always leave an equipment guard. Well, we were going to chow and I was the Squad
13 Leader and so I wasn't running. I was sort of—I was kind of hung over and I was just
14 acting like, "All right, keep moving, keep moving," and what I did was I stepped across
15 the left rear of one of the ponchos. I didn't touch it, right? Well, this guy, he's in the
16 same situation. He comes to full arms and starts screaming at me, "Rah-rah-rah-rah-rah!"
17 And I said, "Oh, fuck you, man." And I went up to him and then he went to rifle-butt me.
18 I was trying to tell him, "I didn't step in your damn shit." And I didn't know that there
19 was four Drill Sergeants in the window watching me but then he went to do—because we
20 had the bayonet training and I knew exactly what he wanted to do. He was trying to do a
21 cross-rifle butt stroke and I blocked it and I hit him and knocked him down and knocked
22 him out and by that time the guys are grabbing me into the dining room. I went into
23 chow and they said, "What the hell? Are you crazy, man?" I said, "Well, screw it, man,
24 I didn't do nothing wrong." And he said, "Yeah, I know, but you only got three days
25 left." Well, it wasn't five minutes and here comes Staff Sergeant Kast, K-a-s-t. That was
26 our Drill Sergeant and he came in there. "Welsh!" Real loud. "Yes, Drill Sergeant!"
27 "You get your ass out here!" And he's screaming and yelling at me and took me right
28 into that building, boy, and in that building they had five Drill Sergeants and put me in
29 the center and then they just started asking me every question, back and forth, left and
30 right. Oh god, I figured, "They're going to beat the shit out of me, I'm not going to
31 graduate, I'm going to get recycled," the whole thing. Then when I left, I walked around

1 the corner and the Drill Sergeant said, "What happened?" Because I was trying to tell
2 them what happened but they wouldn't give me the opportunity. They knew what
3 happened. They'd seen it. So I told him and he said, "Good, good, I'm glad you
4 knocked the shit out of him. You did good. Get out of here." So I'm like, "Jesus
5 Christ." But now he knows that I had passed the test. I did the ultimate test. In front of
6 everybody I took—he knew I was telling the honest to God truth, that I did not touch his
7 poncho, although I did cut into the corner of his formation. And him being a—he was a
8 few weeks behind us. He did was he was supposed to do, kind of pull arms. But
9 apparently I knocked his tooth out or something because that's what they were a little
10 concerned about. (Laughs) I'll tell you what, we had five days left, my punishment
11 was—and since my buddy was with me that pulled me off—we had to do the inverted
12 crawl, which is crawling on your hands and feet backwards for a hundred yards before we
13 ate every day. We had to crawl to chow to get our food.

14 RV: Wow, that's tough. Joey, what do you think you were the best at in basic?
15 How did you distinguish yourself?

16 JW: I don't know. It just—I liked it, I loved it. I just liked being off the street
17 and being—what would you say—hating authority, you know? I fought authority and so
18 I'd run. I guess that's just what I needed, you know? I just ate it up, you know? Kill,
19 kill, kill. That was me. Let's go. When we went to the Jump School test, our company,
20 we did all the events and when we took off running I was gone. I was gone. I mean, I
21 was just the rabbit to chase. I came through there like about—I don't know, I think it was
22 two miles in like—no; it was a mile in something like less than six minutes. And that
23 was in boots and all. I was just ready. I just wanted to do it and I didn't have—I had a
24 girlfriend. They gave you one day, I remember, and it wasn't no big thing so I wasn't
25 losing nothing family-wise. I just wanted to go to Jump School, which we did. As soon
26 as you leave there you get trucked over and shipped down to Jump School. Then you can
27 tell who's been through the hard basic training. (Laughs)

28 RV: Right, because they can stick it out.

29 JW: Oh boy, oh man. Because by the time I got there it was May and it was hot
30 and every hour you'd have to get into the push-up position and you do like roller coaster
31 to cool you down and they run you to death. But they weren't in a way abusive in that

1 way of saying, "You can't." They said, "You must." They sort of gave a better
2 psychological training. "You can do it, you've got to do it, you've got to do it if you
3 want to be Airborne," and all that. Well, I had made it through the first week and I
4 couldn't breathe.

5 RV: Now, this is at Jump School?

6 JW: Yes.

7 RV: Okay. Let's go back to Fort Dix for a moment. You said you made Squad
8 Leader. How do you do that in basic? What happened?

9 JW: Well, they way I did it as a Drill Sergeant, as I was going through, checking
10 the guys' rosters and getting their names and all, I'd look for someone who I felt was
11 slender, athletic, I might ask him about high school, "Did you play any football? Did you
12 do this?" I looked for someone who graduated high school and was athletic. That's what
13 I would go for. I wouldn't go for the biggest guy or anything like that. Because in the
14 Rangers, believe it or not, the average weight, the size and weight of a Ranger is like
15 5'10" and a hundred and sixty-five pounds, or a hundred and sixty pounds. They made—
16 not always, but the percentage was high school graduates that was athletic. I used the
17 formula MDA. If they're Motivated and they got Discipline and they're Aggressive. I
18 don't care how stupid—I should say that—how slow or how weak they are. "I can make
19 them stronger and I can make them smarter if they have that magic drug," I used to say,
20 MDA—Motivation, Discipline, and Aggressiveness. "If you stick with me and you listen
21 to me and I'll train you and I'll make you stronger and I'll make you smarter."

22 RV: You obviously had this yourself.

23 JW: Well, I don't know. (Laughs) I didn't think I had any discipline at all and so
24 I got off that damn truck. But I mean, them Drill Sergeants were in my face saying,
25 "Come on, hit me." But it was good training but I really felt that some of it wasn't
26 needed. Now, that didn't go on forever.

27 RV: The basic?

28 JW: Yeah, the touching his toes. Because once we got so good that could out-
29 march anybody, we would. So there was different ways that he used that and there
30 wasn't—oh, another thing. Like, I got in a fight—well, everybody got in fights. If we're
31 in a chow line, we're out in the woods, right, and two guys start fighting, the Drill

1 Sergeants will turn away and they'll let you fight it out, where in the new Army they
2 won't let you do that. Where, I believe in that.

3 RV: So that was—why was that good? Why did that help?

4 JW: Well, because if these guys are going to live together, it's just like being on a
5 high school football team. You're going to have arguments. Get it out of their system
6 and get on with it. When I was a Drill Sergeant, we started boxing every Sunday, myself
7 and another E5 who had some experience. We'd bring our platoon together and we'd put
8 twelve-ounce gloves on them and weight them up as best we could and just let them beat
9 the heck out of each other. So we get called down to the orderly room. "What the hell
10 are you doing?" I said, "What do you mean?" "You're having them fighting out there."
11 I said, "Jesus Christ, we're teaching freaking guys to kill and they can't have fights?
12 They've got to get off this steam and they've got to realize that you're teaching them
13 hand-to-hand combat. It's good for them. They blow off this steam and if they've got
14 something to do or they're pissed off at somebody; we let them beat the shit out of each
15 other and they get it out of their system and it doesn't interfere." I had two guys on
16 police call. One was a big black guy and one was a big, mountain white guy.

17 RV: What's police call?

18 JW: That's when you pick up the area. Now, the evening before, when they
19 turned in their weapons, these guys had been picking at each other for weeks when I was
20 at drill. They almost went at it in the weapons room so my partner tells me about it. I
21 said, "Yeah, I know, okay." So they were out on the highway, along the edge of the
22 highway doing police call and they started slamming each other. So the Drill Sergeant
23 goes down and breaks them up and he brings them down and my 1st Sergeant wants to
24 give them an article 15. I said, "Hell, no." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Tom,
25 they're here to kill. All they're doing is fighting. Jesus Christ, let me handle it." So I
26 moved them in. I said, "All right, you two guys are SO (Significant Other) buddies. You
27 will go every single place. When one roster number is called you will go with the other
28 one. You will live together, you will shower together. The only time you can be apart is
29 when one of you goes on sick call or church. Otherwise, one man moves, the other man
30 moves." And I did that for—it must have been for about eight weeks. They were what
31 we called SO buddies and when you go out to a committee group and they'll say, "Roster

1 number fifty-eight," and both these guys pull up, they'll go, "I didn't call for you." "I'm
2 his SO buddy." And I'll tell you what, they became the best of friends.

3 RV: That worked.

4 JW: It worked. And you know, I was going for a physical to go somewhere, years
5 later, and when I walked in, this Warrant Officer, the black guy, stood up at attention and
6 said, "Good afternoon, Sergeant Welsh." And I said, "Who are you?" And he said, "You
7 don't remember me? I was so-and-so." He was the black guy who was fighting the
8 white guy and now he was a W2 pilot and he still wouldn't stand at parade rest when I
9 stood up. When I walked in I was an E6 or E7. I'd say, "Whoa, whoa, take it easy,
10 Chief." I said, "How are you doing? Have you heard from him?" He said, "Yeah, we
11 keep in touch. He's out there somewhere in infantry now." And I said, "Well, what do
12 you do?" He said, "Well, I passed the flight test and I'm flying choppers." He was all, "I
13 really appreciate everything you've done and how are you doing?" I said, "I'm alright."
14 But God, I didn't realize these guys had to be 6'4 or 6'5. To me, that's what we had to
15 do. And what happened was—am I getting off track?

16 RV: Well, it's okay. This is exactly what we're going to talk about. Do you want
17 to say anything else about your basic at Fort Dix?

18 JW: I'm comparing. See, in our basic training—well, I'll lead right into this
19 because it will work out better. In our basic training, if you were out in the fields and you
20 guys starting fighting, the Drills would basically turn away. Now, they keep an eye to
21 watch how far you'd go, but they'd let you go at it and then they'd come over and yell
22 and scream and break it up. But they'd let you go out. They'd let you get it out of your
23 system. I mean, Christ, you're learning how to kill, kill, kill. And then when you went to
24 Jump School, every Friday night they had everyone. The first two weeks of Jump School
25 you're totally restricted. I went through the first week and what happened was, I woke up
26 Saturday and I could move. I couldn't breathe. I had upper respiratory infection due to
27 the heat and the water that you had to go through. I was like, "God, what's going to
28 happen?" But because I had passed all my performance evaluations and I was a hard
29 charger they told me that I would be on light duty for that week and then I would pick up.
30 So I was a week behind. But what happened was, a friend of mine who always got in all
31 the trouble with me—what happened was, he was from my same high school but we

1 didn't know about it until we went in the Army the same day. And we didn't even know
2 about it and we spent basic together but he got held up and so what happened was, he
3 winded up coming like me. I was a week ahead of him. He winded up coming in so he
4 would be starting the first week when I was sitting it out. So I said, "Come on with me."
5 He was a boxer. See, I was more into martial arts. If he messed with me I'd just start
6 kicking him and he'd leave me alone. But he was a puncher so I said, "Come on with
7 me." "Where are we going?" I said, "Come on, you're going to fight." "What do you
8 mean, I'm gonna fight?" I said, "You're going to fight. Every Friday night we've got a
9 fight." And they had a boxing ring outside. So I knew—I think it was from six to eight
10 that they practiced every night. So I went over and said, "Excuse me." What did we call
11 them—Sergeants? Because they weren't in the Airborne Committee at that time or
12 whatever anyway, and I said, "My buddy here can fight. He can box good." "Oh, he
13 can? How much does he weigh?" They said, "Get in here. Put your gloves on, Welsh."
14 I put his gloves on there and he said, "You're crazy." I said, "No just slam the shit out of
15 these guys. They can't fight, man. Just knock the shit out of them. Just tear into them.
16 He's going to be bigger than you but just tear into him. Just knock the shit out of him.
17 Just think like you always do." And that's what he did, man. He went in there and he
18 weighed about one-sixty and they put a guy about one-seventy-five or one-eighty that
19 came strolling out there and Jimmy just went in there and started slamming. He knocked
20 that sucker all over and he said, "All right, all right, okay. You're in." That was it. And
21 so every night they would train. You train all day, then you'd eat, then you'd go train
22 two hours of boxing and every Friday night every man that wasn't allowed to go
23 anywhere was at the fight. And so they encouraged that. It was competitive and I carried
24 that over with me to when I was a Drill Sergeant and we got yelled at but then the
25 Battalion XO (Commanding Officer) came in and he was a boxing fanatic and the black
26 guy that I was training with, he was three times European middleweight Army Champion
27 so he knew what he was doing. So this new Battalion XO said, "I want a boxing team."
28 But wait a minute now, we're in infantry training and we're living out there in the woods
29 for two or three weeks and he said, "I want a boxing team." So me and John got together
30 and said, "Okay, who can box? Raise your hand. All right, get on the truck." We took
31 them in there and just process of elimination. We found out real quick who could fight.

1 But they had—I knew how they felt and I knew and John knew that they would give
2 anything to punch the shit out of anybody. But we did not—I never touched a trainee. I
3 never had to. I mean, I might grab him and drag him along but you don't have—the guys
4 who were pricks and the guys who were always yelling, they didn't do nothing. They
5 couldn't do nothing. And half of them couldn't do the PT and it was just a make-up
6 where they looked for a guy who would lead the way, who would do it first and show
7 them that it can be done. Like me, I'd go up the confidence course first and then I'd
8 come down and I'd say, "Hey, if I can do it, you can do it." That's the way. I tried to
9 lead by example.

10 RV: Joey, tell me, when you get to Benning you're obviously feeling confident
11 about yourself, but are you feeling—what are you prepared for? What's going to be
12 happening?

13 JW: Jump School?

14 RV: Yeah, tell me about what you would go through. What was a daily day like
15 there?

16 JW: Okay. You're up and you are—this is the old Jump School—you was
17 inspected from head to toe and I mean every crease, every, everything had to be perfect
18 or you got so many demerits. And then you shuffled, I would say, across the field into
19 the PT area. And then you would do your exhausting PT and then run and then you
20 would start on—they had to train you and show you first. You'd start on one apparatus
21 and then you'd—let's say the first thing was you had to make sure you had a stand into
22 the door. Let's take it right from the beginning. So you'd have to stand in the door and
23 then jump in the door and the commands and then how to land. They would start you by
24 jumping off of little platforms. So then they put you on this like ten-foot high sling land
25 train and you're swinging back and forth and they've got you by the rope and you don't
26 know when they're going to drop you. That's all ground week. And ground week sort of
27 conditions you and weeds out the guys who are not in condition or do not have the
28 discipline. They just don't have it. I mean, you either had it or you didn't have it. There
29 was no—I didn't feel abused at all in Jump School compared to basic. I mean I was
30 definitely pushed to the max, but I was challenged but then I got sick and I was worried.
31 But since I met the challenge, where in come cases they might have let another guy go,

1 they let me stay on light duty for a week. So then I just met up with the next class. The
2 second week is tower week where you jump out of the thirty-four foot towers, they show
3 you how to exit, and then you go up on the two hundred and fifty foot tower and they
4 drop you out. Every morning, though, you do have your hardest inspection that you can
5 find. Everything has got to be perfectly straight and spit-shined, only to go and crawl
6 around in the sawdust and run. When you come home you are soaking, muddy, wet, and
7 exhausted. But at night there wasn't any activity. They didn't mess with you, you
8 couldn't go nowhere, so you was usually—I usually went up to the boxing ring. The only
9 reason I didn't box was because I got sick. Because I would have fought that weekend
10 but then I just—once I got Mont Reef up there, the guy said, "Okay, he'll be your
11 replacement, Welsh," because he knew I was sick and that I was a good soldier. You
12 know when you have a good soldier or someone who has the potential to be a good
13 soldier. You know why? He's motivated, disciplined, and he's aggressive.

14 RV: How do you tell? I mean, you can see the motivation and you can see the
15 discipline, I guess. What is the aggressiveness? Leading, getting out in front, or taking
16 chances?

17 JW: Not being told what to do. Just doing it. Being the first up out of bed and
18 having the bed made when the guy turns on the lights. Like me, I never slept under the
19 covers. When that guy turned on them lights, shit, my bed was made; I was ready, being
20 ahead of everyone, anticipating what was going to happen. You knew what was going to
21 happen. Now, goddamn it, he's going to scream at you all day if you don't, so just stay
22 ahead of him. That's what I felt. This way the attention is taken away from you and put
23 towards someone who isn't quite as on the ball. And so what happens? You get less
24 harassed and you learn faster. I was just a quick learner. I thought it was real simple. If
25 I get up early and I get in there and shave before everybody I'm going to be done before
26 everybody. I gave up sleep but it didn't matter. I would be first. And as far as spit-
27 shining boots and all that, I got very few demerits. I never dropped out of a run. I was
28 just totally, totally gung-ho, totally gung-ho. And they could see that. They knew that I
29 was sick and looking back on it now; they knew that—because I had to stay in bed for
30 like three or four days and then when I brought that kid up, it showed that I was saying,
31 "I can't do it but my buddy's going to take my place." But I wasn't saying that. I was

1 just making Jimmy fight. (Laughs) You know, I just wanted him to fight. But he said,
2 "Okay, Welsh, he'll take your place since you're sick." And then it was all right. I went
3 through the second week with no problems and the jumps—the first jump wasn't nothing.
4 I don't even remember being scared because I didn't know what to expect. And they
5 tried to jump you two times Monday, two times Tuesday, and one on Wednesday. Due to
6 weather and aircraft they wanted to try to get it done. Well, the first jump you don't
7 know what to expect and you're so geared that when they slap you on the ass, you jump.
8 Well then, oof. The second jump, you're like, "Holy shit!" And I was like fourth man
9 from the door and I remember the guy went out and I heard, "Boom, boom, boom, boom,
10 boom." He was hitting the side of the plane. But then you just go. You just go for it and
11 it's such a tremendous—not like today. This was only the best made it into that plane. I
12 don't know how many we started with. I have no idea but I know that there was about a
13 hundred and fifty-five or a hundred and fifty-six on the plane manifest so that's how
14 many lasted.

15 RV: How long would it be before you actually got up on the plane to jump?

16 JW: Well, they only trained Monday through Friday so you trained ground week
17 Monday through Friday, then Saturday and Sunday, then tower week Monday through
18 Friday, so that's ten days. And then Monday morning you make your first jump.
19 Monday afternoon, your second jump. Tuesday morning, third. Tuesday afternoon is
20 your fourth and that's your full equipment with this bag that's bigger than me and you
21 can't move. You fall out of the plane, but that's the big equipment jump. And then the
22 fifth jump would be on a Wednesday morning and all you had to do is get out of the
23 aircraft. I've seen guys with blown up legs that were hurting bad but all you had to do
24 was get out of the aircraft on the fifth jump and you got your wings. And then they came
25 along and they pinned them on. That's when they used to slap them on and you'd chant
26 "Bud wings." And man, you felt like you was ten feet tall and it was good. It was good
27 training. And that was Wednesday. And so Wednesday afternoon they would tell you
28 where your assignment was because they already made the assignments based on figuring
29 they'd loose a percentage. So you would go up and you'd get your wings sewed on and
30 your patch and you're Billy Badass now. You're walking around and then the next day

1 they say you're all levied and you're going to Germany with no leave and everyone,
2 Friday morning, the whole class, and eighty percent of them were headed for Vietnam.

3 RV: So that's a really quick turnaround.

4 JW: Oh yeah.

5 RV: What do you think you were best at, at Jump School? What did you excel at
6 when you look back at it?

7 JW: I guess like I said the discipline and the motivation. I was so motivated that
8 like I said, I was a quick learner. By then, after being through the basic I went through I
9 learned routine real quick. Like I said, if I'm up before these guys and I'm done shaving
10 and my stuff's ready, I'm going to be ready. And the faster I'm ready the less I'll be
11 messed with and the more the other guy will be messed with. And plus, I don't know. I
12 just had a knack. I was always a sharp dresser as a kid. That's just the way we grew up
13 in South Philly and stuff like that. So, having to dress neat and polish boots and all that,
14 to me was nothing and I'd sit up for hours at night and polish my boots and all that kind
15 of stuff. I'd be meticulous. My father brought me up that way. That's why my name
16 was Brasser because my bike was always the shiniest and I kept myself—my father put in
17 me that if you keep it maintained then it lasts longer. That went for everything. (Laughs)
18 That went for your shirt, your car, your bicycle, it didn't matter. And my father was very,
19 very meticulous. And I'm kind of—my wife says—anal about it. I mean if you came
20 into my house you wouldn't believe that everything has got to be just right dressed, cover
21 down, everything has got to be just right. There is no room for something being out of
22 place. When I was a bachelor it was the same way. I was a bachelor for over ten years. I
23 mean girls would come to my house and say, "God, your house is cleaner than mine." I'd
24 say, "Well, it's the way you're supposed to be." When you open my closet everything
25 was dress right dressed. And then when I got to the O9, that's the way that place was
26 run, dress right dressed, cover down, forty inches all around or get on down and beat your
27 face on the sidewalk. It was very, very, very—you had to be there six months to earn a
28 three-day pass and that's in a regular unit. How you earned it? By soldiering. And we
29 went up to guard mount and we would have one guy carry your weapon, one guy carry
30 your pistol belt and you would walk stiff-armed, and they would place you into formation
31 and you would go against—they'd ask you questions and whoever looked the sharpest

1 and answered the most became the Colonel's orderly and he did not stand guard. He was
2 on standby and he would go with the NCOIC (Non-commissioned Officer In Charge) and
3 he would take down the flag and the whole time the Sergeant Major's on top watching it
4 and then raised the flag in the morning and then he would report to the Sergeant Major.
5 Now, this Sergeant Major was my idol. I mean, to me, he was—I don't know if you've
6 ever heard the expression, "When the E.F. Hutton speaks..." well, when he spoke you
7 listened. This guy had been in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, he had three CIBs
8 (Combat Infantrymen's Badge), five combat jumps and he was harder than woodpecker
9 lips.

10 RV: Now what was his name?

11 JW: I can't remember. Total blank. But you would go and you would spend the
12 day with him if you were Colonel's orderly. And then he would ask you, "When do you
13 want your twenty-four hour pass?" And you could have the biggest inspection known to
14 the unit. If you picked that day you could lay in that bed and all you had to do is hold up
15 that piece of paper. Of course you'd pick a Saturday. And I had a friend of mine, we
16 were very competitive and I had a friend of mine, Chulchatschinow, who was a
17 Mongolian from Philadelphia. He made it like eleven times straight. He had the record
18 in the entire brigade. I was there ninety days and I volunteered for Vietnam and four
19 months later I went home on leave and then went to Vietnam. Then I found out he got to
20 Vietnam and he got wounded. He came over and found out where I was and what
21 happened was the guy came out of the spider hole and got a round off before he did but it
22 hit the M-16, blew up the M-16 and put a couple holes in his stomach. So we hung out a
23 couple days and then this other wild man I was with, Dutchy, I told Dutchy, he said,
24 "Where you going? Are you going to stay with Lurch?" I said, "No, I'm getting the hell
25 out of here, man. The division's coming." This was December of '67 and I said, "You
26 know, they're all playing war heroes down in Saigon during Tet." I said, "I'm going up
27 to E Company 20th LRRPs (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol) with Johnny Stromeyer
28 and them." He said, "Well, I'm going to do one more tour and I'll meet you up there." I
29 said, "Have you seen Chulchatschinow?" And he looked at me and with that look he
30 said, "You didn't hear?" I said, "No." He said, "Yeah, he got killed on Christmas Eve."
31 We talked a little bit and Dutchy winded up actually—I went over to LRRPs and Dutchy

1 winded up coming in after me with these other guys. We tried to get him—we went and
2 told the 1st Sergeant—as a platoon we went and told the 1st Sergeant that
3 Chulchatschinow —see, he didn’t make Corporal. I made Spec 4.

4 RV: Now, this is over in Vietnam?

5 JW: No, this is Germany. Before we went to Vietnam we all went to our Platoon
6 Sergeant and said that Chulchatschinow should be promoted to a hard Corporal for his
7 reward of making it eleven times. In the brigade he’s made it made it more than anyone
8 in the brigade. Nobody could beat him. And we went down the 1st Sergeant as a platoon
9 and he threw us out. (Laughs)

10 RV: Really?

11 JW: Yeah, he threw us the hell out. Yeah, he threw us out. He was smart. I’ll
12 never forget him because I was in country about six months and I was riding shotgun to
13 go pick up new troops and who jumps off the truck? 1st Sergeant from Germany. I said,
14 “Yo, what’s up?” No 1st Sergeant or nothing. I was a wise-ass. I’d been in country
15 seven or eight months. “Oh, how’re you doing, Welsh?” “Outstanding, how about you,
16 Tom?” And he shook my hand. Things were different now.

17 RV: Well, tell me a little bit about finishing up Jump School and heading off to
18 Germany.

19 JW: Well, like I said, I finished up Jump School and usually if you was going to
20 go anywhere else you went home on a two-week leave at least and then go to Vietnam.
21 In our case the VA (Department of Veteran Affairs) decided that they needed
22 paratroopers so we were the ones they picked. We just graduated on Wednesday,
23 changed our orders on Thursday, put us on a plane on Friday and we went to a
24 replacement detachment over there. I was there about three or four days and then I went
25 to the 509th. At that time it was Airborne Infantry Mechanized and it was one brigade
26 with two battalions. I was in Headquarters 1st Battalion in a recon platoon and all we did
27 was train.

28 RV: What year was this, Joey?

29 JW: I arrived there—let’s see, I graduated in July of ’66. Beginning of August
30 ’66. And then I wasn’t there but a few weeks and then we went somewhere in Germany.
31 I don’t know but I know it was freezing. Then you go and make your cherry jump, your

1 first jump with the unit. This is when they used to jump in the v-formation, with a lead
2 plane and two, one on each side. Eventually they stopped that because some of the guys
3 in the lead planes were getting hit by the planes behind them. (Laughs)

4 RV: That's not a good thing.

5 JW: You know, you're used to "Get ready, stand up," and all that. Well, they
6 really, really, really bust them for you, man. I mean, when they opened the door, that's
7 the last thing I remember. I was just trying to hook up my stuff. They had me
8 sandwiched and this guy was pushing in my face. He had nylon. It was really a piece of
9 parachute he brought with him and he's going, "Hey, you're shits falling out over here,"
10 and I'm like, "Wait, wait, wait." My feet didn't even touch the floor. They would
11 actually get up on the seats and start jumping up and down and screaming, "God's a
12 punk. We don't have two streamers in here." And we had a one-eyed guy named
13 Jonathan. He was an E4 with fourteen years in and a PFC (Private 1st Class) Evans with
14 about eight years in. And they would push the stick. And that meant when the green
15 light went go, they would just run. They would be behind you and just push you. There
16 was no separation; there was no touching the door. I was just sandwiched between two
17 guys thinking that my parachute was coming out of my pack and all this shit when it
18 wasn't. And that's how they broke your cherry. Then you would have races, the one
19 plane against the other planes and the Colonel was involved in all this. He's set it up.
20 "All right, we're going to have a race today. The two trails will be blah, blah, blah."
21 They would say, "Go," and the last ones to be unloaded would have to buy the beer that
22 night. And then we had—because of the weather and all—oh, first of all there was no
23 drop zone. There were no drop zones. You jumped—we jumped in wine vineyards and
24 I've seen guys impaled on wine vineyards. I seen another guy get his streamer in. That's
25 the first time I seen somebody's chute didn't open. It hit in his thighbone and came out
26 his chest. We just started singing, "Gory, gory, what a hell of a way to die and he ain't
27 going to jump no more."

28 RV: You would sing this?

29 JW: Oh yeah. I mean it was just—they would take us out and they'd jump us in
30 the middle of a town. Guys were landing on barn roofs and all kinds of stuff. Then
31 they'd say, "All right, get on the truck." Well, there wasn't no truck. There was a truck

1 to put your parachute on and then you'd walk back eighteen miles. So the whole brigade
2 would be jumping so there'd be hundreds of guys in the air and hundreds of guys on the
3 ground and we were walking. We had just started walking up along the side and this guy
4 came out—it's called a streamer—and he ain't got it. And you could hear the bellowing.
5 Every man in the air and on the ground is yelling, "Pull your reserve, pull your reserve."
6 Well, if you hear that, everybody looks up. But this guy didn't. He just stayed folded,
7 closed and he just streamered in. And you could hear him screaming. We were yelling,
8 "Pull your reserve," and boom, he bounced in and that's what he did. He bounced. And
9 one of the old timers picked up, "Gory, gory what..." And that's got about twenty
10 phrases. We sang that for about eight miles. I was in Headquarters Company, which,
11 Headquarters contains the administrative, commo, supply, recon, and Medics and my
12 guys were on Medic drop zone duty and they said they picked that son of a—they said,
13 "We picked that guy up and his thigh bones came out his chest. He was about four feet."
14 They just laughed, too. That's just the way it was. So we would have to do jumps out of
15 choppers sometimes because of the weather and all and man, it would be non-jumpable
16 times.

17 RV: What do you mean by that?

18 JW: Well, a little bit too windy to jump. But we had to get the jumps in so you
19 just knew when you hit the ground pull that damn thing and release. And I'll never forget
20 the Colonel was—and it was muddy all the time over there—the Colonel was just being
21 drug. And everybody tries to knock everybody down but we were out there and I think it
22 was only like the guys who were really hurting for jumps. You know, the pay hurts. You
23 had to jump once every ninety days, minimum. So there must have been maybe fifty or
24 so of us, I don't know. But I remember the Colonel coming and he had one white, clean
25 strip about eye-to-eye down the front and back. We were laughing like hell. He said,
26 "Oh yeah, I'll give you something to laugh about. Come on around here." And he
27 opened the back of his truck, a three-quarter ton, and he had—it must have been about
28 five cases of beer on ice. And he said, "Let's drink. (Laughs) We jumped, let's drink." It
29 was great.

30 RV: Sounds like a good guy.

1 JW: Oh, the camaraderie, yeah. Well, we would start our run and we'd run
2 around posts for maybe ten, fifteen, twenty minutes to get warmed up and then we'd run
3 anywhere from five to eight miles through the town. Well, of course I had only been
4 over there a while and we would stop and we would be running in place for trains and
5 shit and the people hated us. The people hated us. They called us the Mainz Little Zoo,
6 because I remember when the Colonel called us all together, which was very rare, but he
7 had the whole brigade there and he read a letter from the political committee of Mainz to
8 the President of the United States. This is serious, this is true, I swear. He said that they,
9 "Request that the animals from Mainz Little Zoo be removed because they are terrorizing
10 their families and children," and stuff like that because guys were jumping the fence
11 every night because they couldn't get a pass. We were just crazy. And fight, oh my god.
12 As soon as you get off post, paratroopers were just geared to fight. I mean, they would
13 show you—in them days they had—it's called an overseas cap, that little thin one, but
14 they would block it like Beetle Bailey. It was blocked like that and then the glider patch
15 would be on the left side if you was enlisted. And they show you how to sew in a silver
16 dollar in there and fold it so that you could use it as a weapon. And then when you put it
17 on it's actually blocked. It wasn't on there straight. It was blocked, just like Beetle
18 Bailey, and we called it a cunt cap because of the way it opened and all. And then they'd
19 show you that the rope, the French fortege on your rope, how you could rip that off and
20 use that as a weapon. It was just tremendous training, constant training. They would
21 take you out and you would load up every piece of equipment and every ration you had,
22 you'd drive ten miles and you might sit for two hours and they'd say, "Okay, let's go
23 back." Or you might get on an airplane and you might jump out somewhere and go on a
24 two-week mission. You never knew what was going to happen. That was the Cold War
25 days so we were the strike battalion. We were the only—well, there were some LRRPs,
26 small-unit LRRPs in Germany, 7-Corps LRRPs but we were the major strike force for
27 Europe. So we were constantly being called out. But it was good training. Airborne
28 Infantry Mechanized is unheard of. I mean, what the hell are you going to do with
29 tracks? But since we were in the recon and the headquarters, we would always be the
30 OP4 (Opposing Force). It's real hard to detect but we would set up on this ground in this
31 area and we'd have a lookout and then we'd have the rest of the platoon back. And of

1 course you could hear the tract coming and you could hear them get out and then they'd
2 take about ten steps and boy, we had trip flares and all this shit. And so of course they'd
3 get online and charge and you'd start firing them up and then they'd chase you and then
4 you'd run right through your people and then they'd run right into our ambush and we
5 beat every company, every company in the battalion and every platoon. Nobody could
6 beat us because we had the trainers. We had a guy from Korea; we had a black guy that
7 was great. He made Corporal; I mean he made E5 twice over there in six months.
8 They'd bust him down and then he made Sergeant and they'd bust him down again but
9 still he was such a good infantryman, he taught us so much that we didn't care if they
10 sent a company. We'd always get them. Even if they came on foot he just taught us so
11 much about it and it was small unit tactics that he was teaching us because we were the
12 small unit OP4 and it helped a lot.

13 RV: Were you all thinking that you were definitely going to go to Vietnam or was
14 that—did you all want to go? What was the attitude and the mood surrounding Vietnam
15 when you were in Germany?

16 JW: Well we didn't have that many returnees at first except for higher-ranking—
17 and see, in Marines there is a very, very strict class structure. There's enlisted, NCO, and
18 then officers. In the Army it's enlisted and officers. In Special Ops it's Special Ops. We
19 were in Cherry Point, North Carolina in the Marine Corps, I mean the Naval Air Station,
20 and we were standing in line. It was a Colonel, a Lieutenant Colonel, an E8 and myself
21 who was an E7, another E7, and the steward came out and said, "Excuse me, sir, but the
22 officers eat over there," and he said, "No, I eat with my men." And the Sergeant Major
23 was there, too, and he said, "Yeah, we eat wherever the fuck we want." That's the way
24 he told them, you know. And we did. We waited in line. She said, "You don't have to
25 wait in line. You can go over there." And we were all E7s and above and we said, "No,
26 we'll wait in line." And the guys around, the Marines, are looking at us like, you know,
27 but Colonel put it to them nicely but the Sergeant Major said, "We'll eat where the fuck
28 we want." In other words, "We'll go over there and eat in the goddamn officer's place if
29 you don't shut the hell up." So that Special Ops was very, very close on a first name
30 basis.

1 RV: Why were you all so close? What makes it so different? And I'm talking
2 about the people listening to this years from now. How can you make them understand
3 that?

4 JW: Because you go...all right, that's probably why the Marines are probably
5 pound for pound the best trained and discipline service, because it's small. It's very
6 small. But they've got three divisions. You see what I'm getting at? Four divisions
7 where we've got ten, eleven or twelve and when you get into the Special Operations
8 community, very rarely will anyone ever leave it. So you become very familiar with your
9 teammates. You have got to rely on that teammate. He has got to rely on you and when
10 a Team Leader shows up who's a brand new Captain, he should get the SF (Special
11 Forces) now. In the old days they had to go through the same training as the enlisted.
12 But when they get their SF, usually a good Colonel will say, "Captain, I want you to pay
13 attention to your Team Sergeant," and maybe he'll mention someone else on the team
14 that he knows, "For the first couple of months until you get settled in. Don't go in there
15 trying to bust down no doors. Just do it that way and I think you'll be a lot better off."
16 Some of them would tell them that. Of course it would be real simple—the same way,
17 when I was in the infantry, if I got some Lieutenant in and he started yelling and
18 screaming and hollering, I'd say, "Hey, sir, can we talk?" If it was a Platoon Sergeant,
19 I'd say, "Look, we have an ED," which is an Emergency Deployment exercise, "coming
20 up and we're graded in that. We're graded in that at the battalion level. Now, my
21 platoon took first place last time. But you know what? They could stumble, they could
22 fumble, they could screw up. Anything could happen in situations like this and they
23 could wind up coming in last." And they'd look at me like, "Well, this is blackmail." I'd
24 say, "No, sir, this is the fucking Army and you've been nowhere and done nothing and I
25 run this fucking platoon and either you want to win and you let me lead and you take care
26 of the troops until you've got your feet on the ground or they will lose for me. They will
27 lose." And that's just what I'd tell them. In SF you went about it a little bit different
28 because you was a senior NCO. The slots are 1E8, 8, 77s, a Warrant Officer, and a
29 Captain. I'd basically tell them, "Hey, sir, if that's the way you want to be, fine. Just
30 remember, you're the one that issues the signs for the ammo." I'd tell them just like that.
31 In other words, "You sign for the ammo and that means if we get into close-quarter battle

1 training or any kind of battle training, you just might die.” And that was basically it. Of
2 course, they’re only going to spend eighteen months. Remember that. An officer is only
3 going to spend eighteen months or two years and punch his ticket and he’s on his way.
4 That E6, E7 is going to be there for eighteen years.

5 RV: That’s a hell of a difference.

6 JW: Yeah, you’re damn right. So you either straighten them out or they just don’t
7 perform for them. And there’s a lot that take it out back and we take it out back and
8 that’s it. And so you become very, very close. Now, we don’t call—I never did, I never
9 called their officers by their first names except when we were alone and they said that.
10 You know, “Joey,” and plus we ate—you have a cover story. When we’d go to the
11 Philippines we would not wear anything out of the ordinary. No patches or nothing like
12 that and they know we’re in the Army. They’d ask you what your assignment was and
13 my unit was the 10th ASG (Area Support Group) in Japan and I was an Army
14 photographer and that was my hobby and I had to know that. I had to know that story; I
15 had to know what I was talking about. That was our cover story.

16 RV: Who made that up? Was that you or was that kind of designated by—

17 JW: They sort of fit the profile of the person. A buddy of mine, he was what you
18 would call a contracting engineer and that was his job. And he knew exactly how to
19 present himself in a civilian sector to make them believe that, where I was at a
20 disadvantage. I was tattooed up, right? So I would usually say, if I was in Thailand, I
21 would say I was retired from the Army and now I’m a freelance photographer or
22 whatever. So built your cover story to fit your personality and of course your knowledge.
23 Of course I did travel in plain clothes for a couple of years. I carried a weapon on and off
24 aircrafts so you had to have the cover story down real good. They’re known as the quiet
25 professionals and they occasionally we’ll get out of hand but we try to police ourselves.
26 We don’t want to be drawing any attention or any international incidents.

27 RV: Why would you, or where would you use the cover? When was this
28 employed?

29 JW: Downtown. Say we were going downtown, say we were on a mission and
30 we finish up the mission in Thailand and then we would spend a couple weeks and we
31 would go out to an island or go downtown somewhere. We never could wear fatigues,

1 you would wear civilian clothes. So if you're in the Philippines, the Filipinos know.
2 They know you're in the Army because most of the time in the Philippines you could
3 wear your uniform. In Thailand you can't, not in any major city. Well, I spoke Thai, too,
4 so that made it a little bit easier. But we would be out and we would be out on these
5 islands and there would be British girls and from all over the world that we would
6 converse with and hang out with. We got into some interesting things because the Brits, I
7 mean, Jesus, they think that what they've actually done, trying to colonize everybody,
8 they actually think that we are trying to dominate the entire world. This is really their
9 idea and we went to dinner with two girls one night and fortunately the girl I was with
10 wasn't in to politics and I wasn't but the other girl, she darn sure was. Now, they thought
11 for sure that we were civilians over there and it never even entered into their mind. I told
12 them that I had spent a few years in the Army because I have one that says,
13 "Paratrooper." I can't get away from that. But that was forgotten about. And this girl
14 came right out and said, "You know, you go over to these countries and you take them
15 over and you want to turn everybody into a," and they went on and on and on and I had
16 an enjoyable evening laughing at them because—I did have to mention to the girl,
17 though, I said, "Isn't that sort of in your history of what England did?" She said,
18 "Alright, we don't have to get into that now." And I was just laughing at her and we had
19 a great time and they went for the cover story. And then if the Marines came in we were
20 told, we were notified right away. The Marines are in and they would say, "The fleet's
21 in." So we would get out of the resort towns. We would get out of the resort towns and
22 let the Marines take it over because they would just go crazy and you cannot afford to
23 have what they call an international incident where you get involved in anything to do
24 with a foreign national because you're supposed to be in there undercover. And I've seen
25 guys get in a little bit of a problem and within three hours they were on a plane and gone
26 before anybody even woke up. And the police would come around, tourism police.
27 "We're looking for so and so and so." "Well, I'm sorry, he's not here." We just became,
28 especially when I was in Okinawa, we were locked up on this island, we were locked up
29 in this old NAS (Naval Air Station) area on the beach, which was entirely fenced in.
30 There was no windows in these buildings. It was a brick building and so you become
31 very close and you do everything together. We didn't have any barracks so most people

1 had to live off-post or in another—I stayed in the Air Force Base. And the way they
2 notified us, they had Armed Forces Network. If they needed us, you know how they run
3 that neon strip along the bottom of the TV? They would say something like “Private
4 Johnson from the 432nd Air Wing, report to your unit.” And they might do that three or
5 four times. That might be out key to mean, “Let’s go.” And then we all go because there
6 was no telephone communication. We would all get our stuff and go in. So you just
7 become very close and you’re just very competitive but you also stick together as a team
8 because you’re counting on each other. Because when you go into a country and your
9 training may be a hundred guerillas, you tell them, “Okay, if the enemy comes and they
10 overrun is, this is how you’re going to escape,” and you give an E&E (Evasion and
11 Escape) plan. Well then, you privately give your team an E&E plan in case the guerillas
12 decide to overtake you. I mean, that was commonplace in Vietnam, especially when
13 you’ve got Montagnards and Vietnamese together. Boy, that was really hit and miss. So
14 you would always make an E&E plan for you get the hell out of dodge. Because in our
15 case we’d be in the middle of Thailand, maybe fifty miles from the Burmese border and
16 you know, there’s a hundred of them and ten of us. Or maybe if we had a Thai team it
17 would be twenty of us. If a coup went down and they decided to go with the other side,
18 they could overrun us real quick. So we had our plan to escape from them, which they
19 didn’t know about. So you become very close and they’re not all superhuman, they’re
20 not all excellent, excellent soldiers but the majority of them are very sincere and
21 dedicated in what they’re doing.

22 RV: Joey, let me as you this. When...

23 JW: Is that it?

24 RV: No, no. Let me as you one more question. When you received orders for
25 Vietnam when you were in Germany—

26 JW: I requested it.

27 RV: You requested it. Tell me why you requested.

28 JW: Well, I felt that I’m in the Army; I requested it after Jump School. I felt that
29 if I was going to be in the Army I should be where the war is. It’s just that simple and
30 that was it. “Why the hell am I freezing my ass of in Germany when I got to go? I’ve
31 got to go. I’ve got to see how I’ll do. I have to see how I’ll do and I have to go.”

1 RV: How did your parents feel about that, your family?

2 JW: I'm sure that everyone at that point in time knew that their kid, if they went
3 in, was definitely probably going to go. They knew when I went to Germany and I told
4 them that I was going to eventually go to Vietnam. Of course my father, being in the 2nd
5 World War and all, they supported me. And then when I came home and they were all
6 ecstatic that I was going home and then when it settled down they said, "Where are you
7 going to be stationed now?" And I said I was going back to Vietnam and then that
8 caused a little bit of turmoil. And I had never planned on leaving Vietnam. I would
9 probably still be there.

10 RV: Wow!

11 JW: Like I said, you had a hundred and seventy-nine days you could get out of the
12 Army. Well, after my first tour I went home for thirty days and I record was supposed to
13 be sent to LRRPs. Well, they were never seen again. So when I was done with my six
14 months I extended for Special Forces, which we had been working with in Pleiku and
15 they came back and said, "You can't go." I said, "Why?" They said, "Well, you only
16 have a hundred and fifty days. You shouldn't even be in the Army." I said, "Well, if I
17 wanted to get out of the Army so I wouldn't be extending. So extend me ninety days to
18 put me over the hundred and eighty days and send me because I don't want to go
19 anywhere but over to 5th Group." And they were taking us left and right because we had
20 been working with them so much. And this is how—now, you have to understand,
21 administratively I had never been in trouble, I really didn't understand the system of
22 administration. All I knew was how to soldier. But I just thought about it the other night
23 when I was telling this story to a guy. They said I was supposed to be out of the Army
24 and I said I didn't want to get out of the Army. I wanted to just stay in Vietnam and they
25 could have. But they said—see, at a certain time your records moved up to the
26 administration to move you. I didn't have any records but they said, "It's too late, your
27 orders are already cut and you're going to Fort Bragg." I said, "Wait a minute. Isn't this
28 kind of contradicting? I'm supposed to be out of the Army and I want to stay in the
29 Army and you won't extend me ninety days but you're going to send me back to Fort
30 Bragg? By the time I get out of here, go home on leave; I'm going to have about a
31 hundred days." So I said, "Well, I'll just get out." They said, "No, you can't now.

1 You've got to go." So I winded up going home and I went home for thirty days and I
2 went to the Pentagon and the personnel center up there and I requested to go to Drill
3 Sergeant in California. "No." So I requested to go to Drill Sarge in Fort Dix because my
4 mother needed me close to home because I had been deployed for almost thirty months.
5 So they put me on a two-week extra leave and the medical decision was no. And my
6 mother did have a hysterectomy and she was quite concerned and they said, "No, you're
7 going to Fort Bragg." So I didn't go. I went to Fort Dix and turned myself in. And the
8 next day—and I was in Class A, E5—they put me in a cage and I sat there overnight.
9 They didn't say a word to me and they treated me like a piece of shit, punk-ass MPs
10 (Military Police) and then in the morning some young E4 would come up and as soon as
11 he seen me I looked at him and I seen them wings on his chest. He walked right over,
12 grabbed them keys and nobody said nothing. He said, "How are you doing, Sergeant
13 Airborne?" and I said, "How are you doing," whatever his name was, and he said, "What
14 the hell's going on? Come on over here and sit down and he's a clerk." Nobody said
15 anything and he said, "Want some coffee?" Nobody said nothing to me. Two
16 paratroopers meeting and that was it. And I told him the honest to God truth of what had
17 happened. And he called up to the 1st Sarge in the 82nd. Now they just know a name a
18 number is supposed to arrive. And the guy's screaming and yelling, and he's saying,
19 "No, 1st Sergeant, you do not have to send anybody up here, two guards, to get him. I'm
20 telling you that DA, and I have it all here in writing, the DA (Department of the Army)
21 put him on two week's leave pending a medical board and then he came here to try to get
22 a hop and he's going to be reporting to you." So he saved my ass, really and he said,
23 "Guess what?" See, I figured if I signed in there they'd say, "Hey, man, the guy's got a
24 hundred days. Let's just have him stay here and he can work a replacement and help
25 out." But no. He said, "Sergeant Welsh, we've got to take you to the air crafts."
26 (Laughs)

27 RV: Right. Well, Joey, I think this is a good stopping point.

28 JW: Yeah, yeah, so I winded up going to the 82nd with maybe a hundred and ten
29 days left.

30 RV: Okay. Well, I'll tell you what. We'll pick up on Friday talking about your
31 trip over to Vietnam. Thanks.

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 3 of 10
May 31, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone continuing my oral history
2 interview for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History Project with Mr. Joseph J. Welsh.
3 Today is May 31, 2005 and it is 2:15pm Central Standard Time. Joey, you're in
4 Castroville and I'm in Lubbock. So where we left off, Joey, you were basically getting
5 ready ship out and go over to the Republic of Vietnam. Can you tell me a little bit about
6 your arrival in country? Did you go over by civilian air or did you go with military air?

7 Joseph Welsh: No, I went by—since I was an individual volunteer and left
8 Germany and went what they called on an individual basis, they had contracts with
9 civilian air. So we went in civilian air.

10 RV: Do you remember the flight, what it was like?

11 JW: I guess you could call it kind of quiet. I was excited. And then right before
12 you get there they tell you, "We're getting ready to approach. We're doing a little bit of a
13 steeper approach than normal," and stuff like that. But once you've been through that
14 once and the second time back you realize this ain't no steeper than nothing else. I think
15 it was just to fire people up or whatever. And when you land, we landed in Cam Ranh
16 Bay and it was a blast of heat. I went over in February and I was in Class A's and then
17 they put you on busses and you to the 90th Replacement. You take them off and you put
18 on jungle fatigues. Now, a paratrooper's tradition was he keeps his jump boots and then
19 another paratrooper that's leaving will come up to you. Normally they're grunts because
20 their boots are all beat to shit. They'll say, "Hey, what size you got?" They'll introduce
21 themselves and I found the guy who wore my size and I gave him my jump boots and he
22 gave me his jungle boots. Now I've got broken in jungle boots and he's got new jump
23 boots. That was tradition the whole time I was there that you always made sure that you
24 found somebody to give your boots to and then you have a broken in pair of jungle boots.
25 You don't have to break them in. Nothing really happened there. It was turbo form, just
26 a processing system. I did meet a hometown friend from there and he had been stationed
27 there. He was an admin. He said, "We get mortared once in a while but no big thing."
28 And I had requested to go to the 173rd Airborne and I wound up with orders to go to the

1 101st. I guess I was there maybe three to five days and then they put you on a plane and
2 then I went up north on the east coast to Phan Rang where the airbase was when the 101st
3 was. From there you go up on the hill as a replacement and that's for the incoming and
4 outgoing.

5 RV: What do you mean, "go up on the hill?"

6 JW: Well, we call it the hill. It's in the base camp. It's up on the hill closer to the
7 perimeter because that's where they run the in-country two-week orientation course
8 where they put you through. Regardless of what your job is they put you through small
9 infantry tactics, booby traps, and it's also getting you acclimatized.

10 RV: How difficult was that for you?

11 JW: Not difficult at all. I loved it. It was hot just because it was February when I
12 left but that's another reason. They want to get your body acclimatized at the same time.
13 And they show you different weapons and how to set up Claymores and how to do this
14 and booby traps and then they break out their zoo and they show you every critter. They
15 bring out spitting cobras and all this kind of stuff. You know, all the critters that you
16 could run into and how to handle it. In the meantime, the old timers, they're out there
17 yelling, "Cherry," and all that and busting your butt. It's just tradition. But you spend
18 about two weeks there and then from there, once you've done that—and it's good. It's a
19 good initial indoctrination because not only does it get you acclimatized but for people
20 who don't have a combat arms MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), they really do put
21 some good stuff in their head that they need to know. Whether you're staying in the base
22 camp or you're going out in the field it's really great stuff that they do. And the guys
23 who run it have all been there a year or two years or whatever on the line so it was real
24 good.

25 RV: What are those guys telling you about what's happening there?

26 JW: Well they sort of give you an idea of what you're up against. What the
27 enemy's like, a little bit more than you ever knew, how it works. They run around town
28 during the day and shooting at you at night. There's the VC (Viet Cong) and the
29 difference between the VC and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and then what to do on
30 how you work perimeter guard and what to do when you're on perimeter guard as
31 compared to what to do if you were on a patrol. They take kids on patrols and you get to

1 fire the M-60 and the machine guns, the LAWs (Light Anti-Tank Weapon), throw
2 grenades, and then grow up and throw grenades in bunkers and lay right next to it while it
3 explodes and stuff. It gets you some good realistic—to some people who had never been
4 through that it's really good training. I had done it before but it was still great. The
5 pounds just start shedding. I mean, I went over a hundred and seventy and got back a
6 hundred and thirty-five.

7 RV: Wow.

8 JW: But I mean I was hard as a rock but I was light.

9 RV: Do you remember anything they told you about specifics about the enemy
10 and about the terrain and the critters, as you said?

11 JW: Well, yeah, it's all mixed in with, "This is, even for you guys who are
12 coming out of Tiger school," which was guys coming right out of infantry training where
13 they have a simulated Vietnam area. They said, "That's in Louisiana. This is Vietnam
14 and so you've got to pay attention. You have got to pay attention to that private. If
15 you're an E5, pay attention to that private because that's who they're going to hook you
16 up with because that private has been there seven months. He's survived. You officers,
17 you better pay attention to your Platoon Sergeants because you know the average life
18 expectancy of a 2nd Lieutenant is ninety days and that's stretching it. So you can take that
19 book and stick it up your ass and pay attention here and listen to your Platoon Sergeants
20 and they'll get you through it. Or you can go out there and play King of the Hill and
21 you'll wind up going home in a casket." I mean, they were straight forwards and there
22 was no harassment. It was just good, strict telling you straight out how it is and what you
23 can run up against and what to look for and how to be suspicious of workers on camp. If
24 you see someone, keep an eye on them. Get to know them and they get too friendly. I
25 mean some of these guys, they lived in air-conditioned barracks the whole time and they
26 had maids and stuff. They said, "Always be watching. You'll watch a guy and if he goes
27 out and he's pacing off, if he looks like he's pacing off something or walking the same
28 route every day take note of that. Report it to your S2 Intel, because what he's doing is
29 he's marking for mortars and rocket attacks." It was so much and it was great until some
30 monkeys got loose and they were squirrel monkeys. All these crazy guys went and tried
31 to catch them. I wasn't that dumb. As they were climbing on the tents this one guy

1 grabbed one by the tail and six of them were on him now, chewing him up. It was real
2 good training. It was quick, hard, fast, but you was acclimatized, you was used to the
3 weather, the water, the conditions, and stuff like that at that level, which was meaning
4 that besides a few nights of patrolling that you got some good hot chow and then from
5 there you were shipped to your unit. You went down to your unit, got your equipment
6 and you either went forward, which I did, or you stayed there or you went wherever your
7 unit was because being only one brigade with maybe three battalions plus a support
8 battalion and artillery, they could be split up anywhere. So I winded up heading up on
9 my first convoy. Oh, this is something I gotta bring up. At night we started seeing these
10 fires along the outer perimeters.

11 RV: This is at Phan Rang?

12 JW: Yeah, this is at the base camp and we asked, "What's that?" He said, "That's
13 our outer security. The ROK (Republic of Korea) Marines are up there." We said, "Why
14 the hell are they lighting the fires?" He said, "That's to let the VC know where they're at
15 so they'll come and get them." They never ever attacked Phan Rang. I mean, that's how
16 crazy the ROKs were up there. They covered that whole perimeter outer. We took the
17 inner but they would light bonfires. Of course they wouldn't sit there but they would
18 light bonfires and say, "Come on, come on, Charlie."

19 RV: Tell me your impression about the ROKs.

20 JW: Oh, hard, hard as nails. I went through a MACV (Military Assistance
21 Command Vietnam) reconnaissance school with four of them and one of them was the
22 honor graduate. They were in—the first week is—well, for the Americans you had to be
23 in combat or in a LRRP team for six months before you could be accepted to this school.
24 When I went to school I thought I was in pretty good shape. Well, about the third day
25 you could hardly move with the pain. I mean, you couldn't even laugh. Well, the
26 Koreans would work out. We would sit down and take a break. Well, I had some martial
27 arts experience so I started working out with them and I was loosening up. I was feeling
28 good. I got to know them and a black guy I knew real well from the 25th who had been in
29 Korea spoke enough Korean where us guys started hanging out. And every day at every
30 break I'd work out with them and in the evenings when we had time. And the soreness
31 went away from the stretching and everything and I made it through the first week, which

1 was unbelievable. And then the second week they take you out in the field in a field
2 environment and then you put into practice what you learned in the classroom. And one
3 of them is small-boat infiltration and we'd have to take out large fifteen-man boats and
4 row them out there, flip them over, flip them back over, and roll them back. And it sort
5 of was like a two-boat race for competitors. So we were out there that one day training
6 and my Korean buddy, who was a little guy—of course he's a black belt and all that—we
7 start messing and around and so everybody gathered around. I said, "Come on, come on,
8 come on." Nobody else would ever go near these guys. The black guy said, "He wants
9 to spar with you." I said, "What are we going to do here? Is it going to be heavy, light,
10 or what?" And he said, "No, he'll go at your pace." So we started kicking the shit out of
11 each other and throwing each other around and we must have fought for fifteen minutes,
12 man. I'll tell you what, it was fun. It got into it and if he got dirty, I got dirtier but if it
13 was a real situation I would've tried to kill him and he would have tried to kill me. But
14 he knew that I had it in me to take so much and what I could do and so he just made me
15 bring it out. Shit, we got a standing ovation and screaming and yelling and he's bowing
16 to me and all that and the Koreans are all shaking my hands like, "This American's got
17 balls," you know. After that the Americans damn sure didn't mess with me and I became
18 super buddies with them and we swapped a uniform exchange, which is tradition.

19 RV: What is involved in that?

20 JW: Well, we give them an entire set of camouflage, or tigers in their case
21 because they were smaller, and then he gave me a set of his camouflage uniform.

22 RV: That's cool.

23 JW: Yeah, oh yeah. It was great. And then the guy who was the Army Korean,
24 he was the honor graduate. I mean, he was harder than nails. In SF they do the PT
25 different. They do their warm-up, stretching, and then their runs so their rough marches
26 is first and then when they come back, then they do calisthenics till you're dead. This
27 way you're already warmed up, you know? Well, the first day they take you out there, a
28 couple miles and back so you get oriented. Then after that, you go out and you've got
29 full field equipment—everything. Weapons, full ammo and everything, and you either
30 carry a radio and rations or they put a thirty-five pound whatever it is, as much as they
31 can get in your rucksack and they weight it and they put it on your back and they open

1 the gates and they say “Go.” When the time is up—and you start off with two miles.
2 You go two, three, four, five, six, seven, or something like that and when the time is
3 closed and done they close the gates. If you’re on the other side of the gate, you pack
4 your bags and you cannot walk it. You’ve got to be able to run at least half of it. About
5 the third day I come back in and I went to school with three other guys from the unit.
6 And one of them was missing, missing totally, and he had been over there about seven
7 months. Well, they found him laying on the side of the road, we found out later, and they
8 Medevaced him and I never seen him again. Apparently he had a heart murmur this
9 whole time that the Army never picked up and he had been humping the hills for seven
10 months but it took a toll on him and they Medevaced him to the States and he never
11 returned. He basically had a heart attack and he was only like twenty years old.

12 RV: Wow. Okay, well, getting back in country, you mentioned the ROKs.

13 JW: Yeah, so my first deployment was—I got my stuff and met my platoon and
14 we were heading up northwest to Quang Dong, the place was called, a long convoy, you
15 know? Of course you’re nervous about everything. I’m riding shotgun and we pull over
16 and it’s real thick jungle and all. “Everybody take a break,” so we’re taking a break and
17 watching and everything like that. We’re waiting and I said, “What are we waiting for?”
18 The Platoon Sergeant said, “You’ll see.” All of the sudden I hear the shifting of gears
19 and here comes two brand new shell tankers, shiny aluminum shell tankers. Two of them
20 go riding past us, one guy in there driving and one guy riding shotgun. I said, “What the
21 hell is this? How did they make it?” He said, “They pay the NVA.” I said, “Get out of
22 here.” He said, “How else do you think they make it?” So boing! You wake up and
23 we’re getting in and as we’re getting out a guy turns out, turns out, turns out. As we turn
24 out I’m checking the side and the rear and I look and I said, “Hey Sarge, wait a minute.”
25 He said, “Shut up.” And I see a guy by himself slipping into the jungle and he said, “Just
26 shut up.” And we keep going. After we start moving I said, “What the hell is that?” He
27 said, “A sniper.” I said, “By himself? Jesus Christ, we’ve got like thirty miles to go
28 before the base camp.” He said, “Well, the units are spread out but yeah, that’s where
29 he’s going.” I said, “Damn, man. I’d like to be with him.” He said, “No, you wouldn’t.
30 (Laughs) You think so now.” I said, “But I thought you had two-man snipers.” He said,

1 “Well, they do at times but this is a different thing.” By himself this guy just wandered
2 into the jungle and to me that was totally awesome.

3 RV: Did that make you go, “Hey, I want to do that some day. I want to be able to
4 do that some day,” or something similar?

5 JW: Oh yeah, I probably would have went then but I didn’t know enough. And
6 snipers, it’s hard to get into snipers in the Army. You have to be at the right time and the
7 right place. Once you’re over there and you’re locked in the system you’re kind of
8 locked. Usually they’ll come from the infantry battalions or scouts and they’re
9 handpicked and they’ve got to be really, really good. Same way with the Marines.
10 Nowadays we have the Sniper School and then we have the Special Forces Sniper
11 School. You know, there’s a lot more of them and each unit has them trained up already.
12 And then we went up there without any incident and I’m figuring we’re going to get hit at
13 every turn and basically the Platoon Sergeant said, “We’ve been pretty lucky.
14 Occasionally something will come down but they know who we are.” I said, “Who are
15 we?” He said, “Well, they call us the chicken soldiers with black sticks,” meaning the
16 101st, the Screaming Eagles with the M-16. He said, “That’s why we don’t get our
17 perimeters hit and our convoys, because of our... You’ve got to realize we’re riding
18 through the countryside but our men, our infantry are working all around us. If the
19 enemy knows that if they attack us then they’re going to catch hell.” I don’t know if he
20 was doing that to comfort me or what but it didn’t work. I was still scared shitless.

21 RV: Were you really scared?

22 JW: Well, you’re not scared, you have anticipation. You know, you want to do it
23 and see what happens. You need that baptism, you know? And it didn’t take long. We
24 got there early in the evening and we didn’t have time to really build anything so we
25 threw some sandbags and some logs and we had some ROKs with us, the ROK Army and
26 they had these five-ton trucks with thirty millimeters sitting on them. They were placed
27 around our defense. There was a few of them. And that night, I don’t know, somebody
28 shot something and I remember seeing some tracers and then all hell broke loose and
29 man, we were just shooting and everything was in front of us.

30 RV: Where were you?

1 JW: I was laying behind a big log with some sandbags and then all of the sudden
2 it scared the hell out of me. The truck, which was only about thirty or maybe twenty
3 yards from me, that thing opened up man, and I just froze, man. I just looked at that
4 thing and that guy with that .30 cal was just wiping out. (Makes gun noise) Everybody
5 else just stopped shooting and a couple of them opened up for about ten minutes and then
6 we stopped and there was silence that that was it. The next day we went out there and
7 there was dead dogs, dead cows, anything that was out there but they didn't find any
8 bodies so we don't know whatever happened but it was pretty neat. Except you feel so
9 naked. I thought I felt naked until I got really into the stuff.

10 RV: What do you mean, naked? Can you describe that?

11 JW: Well, yeah, I mean you get this little log and God forbid if it's a company
12 size you ain't got much defense because you haven't established your perimeter yet.
13 Once we got there we built bunkers and we put up tents and we'd have nine high, two
14 thick sandbags all the way around each tent and you'd have a bunker. You know
15 something that you could have some cover with because concealment was impossible.
16 You're not going to conceal a base camp like that. Well, we called it an FSE, a Forward
17 Support Element. That's where we would establish the base camp and we would run the
18 supporting systems out to the grunts and the grunts would come back forth. They'd go
19 up first, clear the place, and then we'd move in and that's how they'd move the troops in.
20 And then I got with the scouts so I got more into moving forward with them and stuff like
21 that. Dismount it and mount it, and then it became a little bit different where you got to
22 go in there first. And then when you go to LRRPs then it's entirely different. But when
23 you go to LRRPs you also have to go to another couple weeks of training there and then
24 they take you out on patrols and the peers decided whether you stay or go or you can quit
25 at any time. If you quit, you quit, and that's it because it's all volunteer. And after
26 you've been on a couple missions and they feel that you're good enough then you'd go to
27 Recondo School run by Special Forces Project Delta and that is the best school that I
28 have ever had in twenty-five years in the Army because it's the only school that in order
29 to graduate you must go on a live combat mission and come back. And it was nothing
30 but total, total professionalism. Experience—the guys—in fact when they did the
31 interview on the history channel and the whole hour was about Recondo School, my

1 instructor was sitting there and interviewing. I couldn't believe it, I started yelling, my
2 wife liked to jump out of her seat, I ran down the room, I'm grabbing this book, and I pull
3 out a notebook I had because his name was Clancy. And I was showing her, "Look, look,
4 Staff Sergeant Clancy. See, see." She said, "Okay, take it easy." And he's sitting there
5 with his Green Beret and his little SF association but they were hardcore guys. He had
6 been over there like thirty-eight months and they trained you up and they kept five men
7 with one SF guy. You went through the whole thing together and when you went in on
8 your mission they would pick a Team Leader. You would rotate around and then they'd
9 pick a Team Leader to lead the mission. And he was there just in case something went
10 wrong. The 101st was mostly jumping from place to place and chasing—we were
11 basically in the II Corps zone up and down the east coast, mostly. We went from Quang
12 Dong up to Duc Pho. Now, I don't know if they wanted, on your service written, if you
13 make a water-born assault or something, you get this thing for an assault. I don't know
14 what the idea was but they put us on, the 101st Airborne, they put us on LSTs (Landing
15 Ship, Tank) which are these big, huge, gutted out boats where they put all your vehicles
16 and all down the bottom and then you sleep in between that and the top. The top is flat
17 and we spent twenty-four hours going up the coast and they had already had the infantry
18 forward element in there supposedly keeping the area clear. And I'll never forget, we
19 dropped the thing down and off we go and the first one just sunk right up. We didn't
20 know what the hell we were doing.

21 RV: When was this, Joey? This was—

22 JW: This was about three months, after I was there about three months. We had
23 moved out and moved up to Duc Pho and like I said, instead of flying us up there they
24 were going to try to do this basically beach assault. Of course, after the first truck sank
25 all the way in then the engineers that were there, they started pulling us off and showing
26 us how to do it and then we just dumped everything on that beach and that was the ammo
27 point and everything and then we moved inland and we established a big base camp,
28 which took weeks. Well, during that time we left the ammo on the beach so that was the
29 ammo point, which was about maybe half a mile with a little knoll you had to go over
30 and drive to the beach. And then they hit the beach. They didn't hit the base camp, they
31 hit the beach. And that thing went up and it blew up for hours and then I remember

1 about, oh, it must have been about ten o'clock at night I was walking—I was living next
2 to the Medevac and the biggest explosion I have ever felt or seen in my life lit up the
3 whole world and knocked me at least five feet up in the air, threw me right down on the
4 ground, and that was the end. They had finally reached the big stuff and it just—the guys
5 that were up there told me once they started getting hit they just all stopped their vehicles
6 and ran to get over that knoll. And they just let it blow up. There was nothing, you can't
7 do nothing about it. And when it finally hit the big stuff, like I said, it just created the
8 biggest explosion I've ever seen and it knocked me down. It knocked me down and there
9 wasn't another pop after that. And we went back the next day and just about every
10 vehicle was turned over. I mean, the whole beach was shredded. So what we did is we
11 had been looking for them because they were doing was, and they do this a lot, you put
12 an outer perimeter like out on the hilltop and then you'll have your inner perimeter in
13 your base camp.

14 RV: Can you tell me or tell people listening to this how you guys were trained to
15 set up a perimeter? What exactly would you do?

16 JW: Okay, well first of all usually your engineers will clear a good, maybe fifty or
17 a hundred yards all the way around the perimeter. That's your safety zone. In that area
18 you can do several things. We used to bury fifty-five gallon drums of JP (Jet Propellant)
19 fuel and have electrical charges, depending upon how long you're going to be there. And
20 then you establish, at a minimum, several layers and strands of concertina wire and high.
21 And then behind that you'll start building your bunkers. Some of them are underground
22 and above ground and that consists of maybe four-thick, eight-high sandbags with PSP
23 (Perforated Steel Planking), which is what they used. It's steel, interlocking long layers
24 with holes in it to build airstrips. You lay that on top and then you'll put more sandbags.
25 And you'll leave little portholes so that you can watch and fire out of and make it harder.
26 And then in there you'll build a grenade stop so that if something comes in the terrain is
27 built so it rolls down into these holes in the corner and hopefully it rolls down in the hole
28 and goes off before, if your grenade does come in. And that's basically what you do and
29 then everything is—your helicopters are all covered, little square—I shouldn't say
30 square, I should say like a U where they can back into and hover so they're covered so
31 that if anything comes in from the sides or back, they've got covering from the sandbags.

1 Filling the sandbags was an everyday, ongoing, always, always improving your position,
2 making it better, stronger, and more defensible.

3 RV: Did you all hate doing that or just knew that it was part of the drill?

4 JW: Well, it was just like burning shit. You had to burn shit every morning, too,
5 because we cut the fifty-five gallon drums off that a quarter way or halfway and we'd
6 build these little wood makeshift latrines and you'd go in there and take a dump and then
7 you'd have these little hinge doors in the back and you had a piece of wrought iron that
8 you'd hook onto and you'd pull it out and you'd put this mixture of fuel and diesel in
9 there and you'd burn shit every morning. It was just part of the tour. Yeah, you didn't
10 like doing the sandbags but when the shit hit the fan you was damn sure glad you had
11 them because if something came down, what you'd do is roll off your bunk, get your
12 stuff, and you could low-crawl and right out into a bunker if you was smart, if you
13 happened to be sleeping or something like that. So unless you get a direct hit, you've got
14 a pretty good chance. I've been in bigger base camps and in the major base camps they'll
15 build double towers so there's one on the bottom and one on top. And these things might
16 be twenty feet in the air. They're the ones for the big base camps. However, if they
17 happened to hit one of them, which one of my best friends was, everything goes up that's
18 in there—all your grenades, your machine gun, all your ammo and everything explodes
19 and he got hit on one of them double towers. He was the only guy that had survived.
20 They found him a hundred and twenty foot away with no legs and half an arm missing.
21 But because he was on the base camp and he was not even five minutes for the chopper
22 ride, that's how he survived. They never even found the other three guys. I mean it was
23 just pieces. But that's something you do and you work out of there for weeks or a month
24 and then you move to another place and jump TOC. You know, you jumped your
25 Tactical Operations Center. In the meantime the Cav is out there in the outer perimeter
26 working and then you have your infantry battalions spread out even deeper and then you
27 have your forward support artillery bases that are out even further, halfway between you
28 and the troops so that they can reach out and touch somebody and your commo guys. So
29 there were staging areas. I would say it takes, on average, five to seven men to equip one
30 infantryman. I mean, from the time it comes off the ship or plane and it gets to the man
31 in the field, his beans, his bullets—you know, ammo, beans, bullets and stuff like that—

1 and we always called them REMFs, Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers, excuse the language.
2 But without them you learn later as you become more experienced, without them you
3 can't survive. You can't survive because they're the ones that are humping this stuff.
4 And I've been there with them driving shotgun when them guys would be unloading
5 ammo at night and boy, I mean they come flying in there with them forklifts and 155
6 rounds and they zoom at night. And they'd pick it up and throw it on the back of the
7 truck and I said, "Jesus, God, I'd rather be out in the field than have one of these go off."
8 But they were some hard working son of a guns and when I came back into the Army I
9 made sure that every one of my men knew and understood how the system worked and
10 that they're really busting their ass. And they get their ass shot at and mortared and
11 everything else. Not as much as urban like Iraq is now because we're in different terrain
12 but without them you're nothing. You can't survive. They used to bring out to the
13 grunts, because the grunts would stay out two, three, four weeks, they'd bring out a sling
14 load underneath a chopper and it would be all brand-new uniforms. What you do is take
15 off the one you got and the one you're carrying and you put on new uniforms and nobody
16 takes the new boots unless yours are really destroyed because the last thing you want is
17 any new boots. And once in a great while when the terrain is right and the situation is
18 right they'll fly you out a hot meal. But a grunt, statistics have proven, and I can send
19 you this in black and white, that the average age was not nineteen; it was twenty-two
20 years old. Racial-wise we outnumbered every other race. The other thing was that the
21 entire time the grunts spent in World War II or Korea, the average days spent in combat
22 for them was forty-four. The average grunt that spent a year in Vietnam was two
23 hundred and forty-two days of seeing combat. That's a hell of a lot of difference.

24 RV: Yes.

25 JW: I mean, there were some big battles during World War II and Korea, but
26 that's just what they were big battles at that time for so many days. But the average of
27 the time they spent in all of World War II it might have been forty-four days in combat,
28 where you had three hundred and sixty five days in Vietnam and you average about two
29 hundred and forty to two hundred and forty-two days in combat. So it was a stressful
30 thing. And then of course you knew you only had to be there for a year. I think that's
31 what could have been different. Of course you don't want to leave them there for two

1 years or three years but there was guys who spent—I know guys who spent seven years
2 there. And I myself, I'd probably still be there. I tried to stay there. I felt that's where I
3 should be. If I'm going to be in the Army I should be where the war is. When I went to
4 extend my third time they said, "You can't." I said, "Why?" See, what they did was,
5 because of the draftees they only had to serve twenty-four months. By the time they went
6 through training and a year in Vietnam, they'd wind up with seven or eight months so
7 there's no sense in really sending these guys back. So they'd let them extend for a nice
8 job in the rear until they had one hundred and seventy nine days left. Then they would
9 out process them back to the States where they could get out of the service six months
10 early. Now, in my situation, when I went to extend, I was enlisted, though. But they
11 said, "You only have a hundred and fifty days. You shouldn't even be here. You could
12 have got out of the Army." I said, "Well, if I wanted out of the Army, do you think I'd
13 be extending? So add thirty days or sixty days or ninety days, whatever because I want to
14 stay and go over to SF." Well, this went on for two or three days back and forth and they
15 said, "Well, there's nothing we can do about it. You're going to Fort Bragg." I said,
16 "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. You can't keep me here in Vietnam because I'm
17 supposed to be out of the Army but you're going to send me to Fort Bragg, where by the
18 time I go home and go on leave I'm going to have like a hundred and twenty days left?
19 This is stupid. I want to get out of the Army." They said, "Well you can't. You've
20 already got orders." Talk about a catch-22. I was like, "This is totally unbelievable. I'm
21 trying to stay here and I've already been accepted to Special Forces LRRPs over where I
22 was. We worked with them in Pleiku and you're denying me the right to stay here
23 because I don't have enough time left in the Army. However, you're going to send me
24 back to the United States to do what? A hundred and ten days? This is stupid." Doesn't
25 matter, that's what they did.

26 RV: Joey, let's go back to those first few months there in country. Can you tell
27 me about some of your first missions going out with the 101st and what you guys did?

28 JW: Well, what we did was when we got up to Quang Dong we were going out on
29 night patrols trying to find out—what was happening was the VC would get in between
30 the perimeter and the guys on the outer perimeter and they'd fire at both of them and then
31 they'd get out of the way. So then the perimeter's unloading onto this unknown force

1 and this unknown force is unloading onto the perimeter and they had us shooting at each
2 other until somebody realized. I'm being new and not realizing what's going on, that this
3 is what they're doing. They're running these little sappers that get through and they fire
4 up both sides and then they take off and by the time you get done shooting at each other
5 somebody might get killed. So what we did, our mission was to go out on the beach
6 along the beaches because we thought the only way they could come in—because we
7 were blocking the inland—was here but how would they get in through the beach? Well,
8 to make a long story short there was like a big hill, not a mountain, I wouldn't call it,
9 several hundred meters down from where our stuff was on the beach. I was on patrol one
10 night and went out there with starlight scopes and what we did is we kept an eye on this
11 hill because we knew our guys were on the top. Well, come to find out, I saw somebody.
12 I said, "Man, I see somebody." They said, "Wait, let me see. Yeah." They were in the
13 bottom of this hill, which was actually in the ocean. There was a cave and what they
14 were doing was coming from the other side of the hill and into the cave and then at night
15 they'd come out into the cave, get in between us and start up and then they'd get back in.
16 And all I could see at that distance was figures. And the only reason it was, was because
17 they had to come on the beach a little bit which was illuminated and the starlight scope
18 picked it up. So we reported that and we wanted to go forward and they said, "No, just
19 stay in place and watch." And what they did was—because they had to be careful
20 because our guys were around the crest and top of this hill so they didn't want to throw in
21 any artillery or anything like that yet. They wanted to see what was going on so what
22 they did was the very next morning they must have sent guys from up on the hill down
23 there and needless to say, they were gone but what they did was they set explosives all
24 around in there and actually collapsed the cave and the whole thing and sort of tore out
25 the terrain all around the bottom of that mountain. So we felt pretty good about that, that
26 we were the ones that got them. We didn't get them, they wouldn't let us, but that
27 stopped that and it taught me a lesson real quick. And I know some guys knew that this
28 had happened in the past, but it was my first experience. They'll do that. They'll get it.
29 If they can get in between two elements, they'll shoot both ways and then take off and
30 before you it by the time, everybody starts talking on radio and all and you realize you're
31 shooting against each other. And they even do that when you're moving in a company or

1 battalion size and your companies are split. They would do that, especially at night.
2 They would try to get that firefight going. So that's why you always had to know where
3 you was always. You had to know where you was and where your friendlies were.

4 RV: Was that hard to do over there?

5 JW: Oh yeah. The max road you had to do—well, in LRRPs we did aerial
6 flyovers the day before so we'd get a feel for the terrain that we were in and we would
7 mark prominent terrain features and blue lines and stuff like that. So we knew where our
8 primary LZ (Landing Zone) was that we were going to attempt to go into and then our
9 alternate. And then we'd plan, not concrete, but we'd plan how we wanted to move,
10 depending on the mission or what direction and what to look for. So that aerial flyover
11 the day before would help you a lot. When you get into a higher up level and you're put
12 in companies it doesn't really matter because we never infiltrated between eleven and
13 two. That's Charlie's pot time. He sits up on the hilltop, he shoots up his opium, he
14 smokes his dope, and he just waits and listens. Now, you try to infiltrate a hundred and
15 thirty-man company. Well, what's going to happen? It's going to take ten or fifteen
16 choppers. So they just sit there and wait and when they hear it, they watch it and they
17 pinpoint it and they already know you're there. They already know you're coming. They
18 know where you're landed and everything so they've got you pinpointed already. And
19 that's why my slogan is, "SALSA, Stay Alert, Stay Alive," that's the way we felt.
20 Because we knew all them tricks. We knew what they did. So we would fly in and be an
21 individual ship and like he'd be doing a VR (Vulnerability Reduction). He'd dip down
22 and then he'd come up and he'd dip down. We might jump off and then he'd come up
23 and dip down and then he'd dip down again and we'd already be off and in the wood line.
24 And if we hadn't hit anything we'd wait like fifteen minutes, twenty minutes. If
25 everything was good we'd make a commo check with a CC ship that's out of sight and
26 then we would start out mission. Now, that didn't always work. Sometimes the one we
27 picked was the wrong one and it would be hot. Sometimes it would be hot and you could
28 get out of there without getting off. Sometimes you'd get off and—see, because they like
29 shooting down choppers. That's a reward to them. So sometimes they would wait and
30 go after choppers. Because we'd never let them touch the ground. We'd jump six or
31 eight feet at least so he could just flare and we'd be gone. The 101st and most of the

1 others were doing that kind of stuff, just mounted patrols where we would lead the
2 convoys and then mount a patrol and then dismount it with more running the edges of
3 these perimeters. We would be in the middle instead so the VC couldn't get in. We'd
4 run patrols and set up ambushes at the core. And then I extended for the LRRPs, which
5 at that time was Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol, and I was accepted to go there.
6 However, in December of 1967, the 101st went Airmobile, which was a smart move, due
7 to the success of the 1st Cavalry having an Airmobile Division over there. When you
8 have your choppers and you live with your choppers and they're part of your unit and you
9 have your aero platoons and your rifle platoons, you become very, very close-knit and
10 well toned because of working together all the time.

11 RV: And this is the LRRPs, this is not—

12 JW: No, this is why I went to LRRPs and this is why the 101st went Airmobile.
13 Because if the helicopter pilots are in the unit and they train and live with the grunts there
14 becomes more camaraderie and they train together and they stay together and they're
15 always there for you. They put you in, they take you out, they never leave you, they'll do
16 anything to come and get you. Where we would have to rely, when I was with the 101st
17 before it went Airmobile, wherever we were gone, whatever unit we were helping out,
18 some aviation unit would show up and provide us support. You know, overall they were
19 good but we didn't know them and they didn't know us and we had problems with that
20 with LRRPs on several occasions. Now, some LRRP companies, like our sister
21 company, they had a chopper unit assigned to them so these guys lived, ate, breathed and
22 fought with each other so they would be more liable to volunteer to take a risk or to do
23 anything to get them guys out or put them in or do anything because of being in the same
24 unit. In fact, some of them wings belonged to our association because they had worked
25 so long with us and they're in our association. When they went Airmobile, in September
26 '67 they formed E Company 20th LRRPs. They took half the guys from the brigade
27 LRRPs, which really raped them pretty good as to be leading cadre because they had at
28 least six months experience. Then they took new guys and they formed the E Company
29 LRRPs up in Pleiku up in the Central Highlands. At the same time they were changing
30 Airmobile. So to a young GI, he sees the flagpole coming. Oh, the whole division's
31 coming and we're going to have Airmobile. Well, what happened was, when they

1 arrived in country, Tet hit so the rest of the division that was Airmobile that came over,
2 they did their first major fighting in Saigon and all. That's where they spent almost two
3 months before they even got up there to us because they just happened to come in the
4 country when Tet hit, which really helped them to get into it and everything like that and
5 it helped the people down there in Saigon. Because we weren't catching much of it. In
6 fact, they were flying planes in through our base camp, once again, because we weren't a
7 strategic target like Saigon and also we were well known for defending ourselves. We
8 got some stray rockets and mortars but nothing like they were getting so we were taking
9 them planes from down in Saigon. And I met up with a friend of mine who left in
10 September who was in my unit and he told me, "Man, you got to come up to E Company,
11 man, this is the greatest unit going," and all that. So I extended for E Company LRRPs to
12 leave the 101st, which I did. I got there February 10, '67 and I left around the same time
13 in February '68, right after Tet or at the end of Tet. And that's when basically the
14 division was moving up into Phan Rang and setting up and I was leaving.

15 RV: Joey, tell me, what was your experience with Tet?

16 JW: Not much, like I said, because I was basically on my way out. So when they
17 hit in December and January, I was back at base camp in December. In fact, I got to see
18 Bob Hope.

19 RV: Oh really?

20 JW: Yeah.

21 RV: What was that like?

22 JW: He came to Phan Rang for the 101st.

23 RV: What was that like, do you remember?

24 JW: Oh yeah, it was great; there was women, naked women. (Laughs) They
25 weren't naked but it was kind of dream-like. There's Bob. You're sitting right there in
26 front of him and he had a beautiful black girl who was famous. I forget her name. And
27 then he had another famous star with him. He had a bunch of them. Of course, I can just
28 remember the women. And then he put on just a hell of a show. He had our hat on with
29 our—it was just a great morale booster. Nothing like it. It's once in a lifetime. I just
30 happened to be there and fortunately the rest of the guys, most of the guys, were pulled in
31 because of that. See, that's when Tet started. That's supposed to be—right after that is

1 their New Year's kind of thing and we got to see him and then the shit hit the fan. And
2 by then I only had about thirty days left or so, so I was mostly doing just perimeter guard
3 and stuff like that at the base camp and watching as these planes came in and out and
4 hearing about our division down in Saigon, which was really taking care of business,
5 which was good for them because they weren't in country but a couple weeks and they
6 were at work. And that really—they got their baptism right there so by the time they
7 reached us after a couple months down there they had proven themselves. There was a
8 lot of publicity about that. Of course they pushed that because the 101st shows up in the
9 nick of time. They would say normally, "Here comes the Cavalry," but now, "Here
10 comes the 101st Airmobile." So it was a good introduction of the 101st and a good test of
11 their skills and stuff like that but my mind was set. I knew the LRRPs, I knew the guys in
12 LRRPs and their morale was kind of low because they had been taking some pretty bad
13 stuff. In fact, that company and all the ranger companies has the most KIAs (Killed in
14 Action). They're number one. We're number three on the list out of the thirteen
15 companies. However, we probably—well, Shelby Stanton stated in *Rangers of War* that,
16 "We saturated more than fourteen provinces and probably killed and gathered more
17 information and trained more indigenous personnel and provided more Intel for the US,
18 ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), and Koreans than any other company,
19 showing that a Corps level"—we were the largest company, we had two hundred and
20 thirty men or we were allowed two hundred and thirty men—"showing that when used
21 properly, the flexibility that a Corps level ranger company can produce." When
22 everybody tries to talk about who's the best, I just say, "Hey, open the book. What did
23 Shelby say?" Now, this Don Hall just put out this *I Served*. It's been out a couple years
24 and they made a documentary and all. He was real smart. He watched us guys write
25 these books for the last fifteen years. What he did is he waited and this whole time he
26 waited until all this stuff got declassified and he actually even opened his own publishing
27 company to do this book, he and his wife, and what he did is using after action reports
28 from Tet—because they were in the II Corps area, and that was the corridor from
29 Cambodia straight through to Saigon. We were right above them in the III Corps. And
30 so he used all the after action reports and actual historical documentation and all. And
31 they did. Them being out there in that II Corps zone spotting all these regiments

1 probably helped Saigon from being overrun. So they pushed that really big. Nothing
2 against them but I mean, they only lost like seven guys.

3 RV: Hey Joey, could you give me an evaluation of the enemy, what your general
4 impressions were and what you thought their strength and weaknesses were?

5 JW: Well, the way I looked at it is, I know that many, many times they would be
6 there but they wouldn't hit us. They would know that it would be better for us to just
7 not—even though they might have had a good shot at us, to let them get on by because
8 they needed that area for one reason or another. Because like I said, if you land in a
9 company of men, they know and they track you and they follow you. And when they hit
10 you, they definitely made sure that they had the advantage on the large-scale units.

11 RV: So they would attack normally when they were ready and they felt like they
12 could get away with it?

13 JW: Right. Or, you had just stumbled upon them. It's like the battle of Dak Tho
14 and Hamburger Hill. Why the hell did we ever do that? I mean these guys were dug in
15 there for thirty years. Thirty years. I mean from before the French. We kept on sending
16 guys up the hill and up the hill and we were putting in everything in that thing and these
17 guys were so well entrenched that—what I would have done was I would have pulled
18 everybody back and I would have nuked it. I mean I would have arc-lighted that until
19 there was no more mountain. Like the battle of Ia Drang in '65 is the Mel Gibson story,
20 *We Were Young Soldiers Once.*

21 RV: *We Were Soldiers Once.*

22 JW: Yeah. That was overall the worst battle. That's the number one ranked
23 battle. But of course we were new then. That was '65. But when you get to '67 and '68,
24 it don't take a rocket scientist to say, "Okay, we ain't getting up this hill. I mean, we're
25 slipping and sliding on our bother's blood. Let's back the hell up and take out the hill.
26 We can remove this terrain feature." That's what pisses us off because once you take the
27 hill then you leave it. You leave it! Yeah, you beat them and they ran away and now
28 you've got their stuff but you lost all these men but now we're going to leave the hill so
29 they can rebuild again. That was the frustrating part. That's where they were smart.
30 They would defend when they felt they could. They would hide when they had to. They
31 would strike at their advantage and/or if they were cornered and there was no other way

1 out. And when they did plan something, like when they overrun SF camps and all, this
2 was months and months and months of planning and gathering and getting ready because
3 they knew once they started that assault that they had better go through with it. And
4 that's when they came around and we had intercepted transmissions. You know, you
5 have linguists intercept those transmissions that basically the LRRP teams or whatever
6 they call them—us—were in the area beyond the alert and they actually had hunter/killer
7 teams developed to come and find us. Because they knew if we found them we had the
8 authorization which not many people did to call in everything from an artillery on up to a
9 B-52. So they knew if they hit us they had to knock us down and out quick or they were
10 going to pay. And we did lose teams. Our company, thank God, never lost an entire
11 team but there are several companies that lost entire teams. I mean five or six men. I've
12 been up against—because the chopper pilots will tell you later what it was like and what
13 they were seeing around us, when you're in the middle of all that and they were like, "Oh
14 my god, if you guys only knew." Well, we're glad we didn't know. There's a lot of
15 stories like that of several teams. And when you move into what I was going into next,
16 which was Command and Control North—you had Command and Control North and
17 South, which was SOG (Special Operations Groups) they were the LRRP teams made up
18 of SF and indigenous personnel that that would do cross border operations and a lot of
19 them never returned. I can say this now and I'll say it anyway, but we were doing cross
20 border operations ourselves.

21 RV: Your LRRP teams?

22 JW: Right, into Cambodia. But they were going up into Laos and deeper in. I
23 remember on one, when we called for infiltration, the chopper said, in code, "No, you're
24 in the wrong grid, you need to be in this grid," which was two or three kilometers away in
25 South Vietnam. So I said to the guys, "Turn off the radio. Don't do nothing because I
26 don't know what's going on. These guys don't know what the hell's going on," and we
27 walked out. We walked out and I walked that team out. We turned it off, total radio off
28 because I didn't know if we were being set up; I didn't know if somebody intercepted our
29 transmission. I didn't know what was going on because the pilots were briefed. And
30 what had happened, and this was one of our biggest shortcomings, besides our sister
31 company who had aviators, is that they changed pilots in the middle of a mission.

1 RV: Why would they do that?

2 JW: Because they could and the people who were above us—we might be
3 attached to the 25th Infantry or whatever—did not understand our mission and what they
4 were compromising and it was just poor leadership and lack of leadership for the people
5 who were running our company. We had a Major for a commander but up there out in
6 the middle of the bush you might have a Captain there working with their S3 or S3 and
7 when their Colonel says, “Well, our men need this ship,” well I’d call for Medevac and
8 they’d say, “There ain’t no Medevac.” What do you mean there ain’t no Medevac?
9 We’d have to take wounded guys out on McGuire rigs and rope ladders. That was the
10 biggest thing that hurt us. That’s why we got hit that day is because when we found that
11 bunker—we hadn’t found anything but I had found markings where there were marking
12 and leading—and we all felt that this is it and it was getting dark so we went around the
13 side of the mountain and got in the thickest stuff we could. Well, they knew we were
14 there and they didn’t want us to get any closer so what they did is throughout the night—I
15 don’t know how but they’re quieter than a snake—they crept up on us and at first light,
16 right before first light they hit us and we were just basically ready to be overrun. We
17 were sitting on the side of the mountain so the choppers can’t land. I called for Medevac.
18 They were refueling. I said, “Wait a minute.” I had to take out my dead Team Leader on
19 a McGuire rig, which is just three pieces of nylon and a wrist strap and the two new guys
20 and pulled them out on that and they went rolling and tumbling down the hill because the
21 guy didn’t tie right until the knot grabbed and then I had to get out the other two guys on
22 a rope ladder and try to hook the equipment on the bottom of that and one guy scampers
23 up there and the other guy falls off and he rolls down the hill. It’s a nightmare but they
24 weren’t going to let us—even though I called in everything—artillery and all that kind of
25 shit and the gun ships are running and all that. We probably didn’t put a dent in them
26 because it was definitely underground. Now, this is all you hear. They’re sending in a
27 company to investigate. We got credited with like eighteen kills or something, I don’t
28 know, or something like that. Who knows? Now we had been sent in at times to do—in
29 fact, I was returning from a mission and these guys started jumbling around up front and
30 all that stuff and the chopper was hit from some other unit. He looked at us and I said,
31 “Let’s go. We’ll go in.” And so we went around, we circled it and we seen the choppers

1 were there and we couldn't get down. There was no way down. We had no rope ladders
2 or nothing so we stayed with them as long as we could until the gun ships came in and
3 then what they did is they—I told them, “If you have to, we’ll drop some charges down
4 there and we’ll blow a hole in there and we’ll get in. But we won’t leave you.” And so
5 we stayed with them until the gun ships came in and pulled them and then the search and
6 rescue came in. You know, the guys with the ropes and all that, and then we took off.
7 Them helicopter pilots never forgot that. I mean, we told them, “We’ll go in. We’ll go in
8 right now.” We just couldn’t get down in there. But there was a couple guys alive. I
9 don’t know how many lived.

10 RV: Joey, can you describe a typical LRRP mission? What were you all doing?
11 What exactly was your basic mission?

12 JW: Okay. It started off as long-range reconnaissance, meaning that there was
13 Intel giving down from higher headquarters that there was activity or troops or some
14 target in this location and no friendlies were there. Rather than send in a company and all
15 that kind of stuff that would alert everything, we would go in and we would sneak around
16 in their backyard for two or three days and try to verify the fact that there is something
17 there. And if there was we would take whatever action was needed.

18 RV: What do you mean? What kind of actions would you take if you found
19 them?

20 JW: Well, if there was well-used trails we’d set up ambushes and if they
21 happened to come by we let them have it. Or, if we came across something where there
22 was a base camp or something like that, we would make the decision whether we were
23 going to try to get close or pull back and let them know what was going on and get a
24 reaction force. There was a time when we were doing roller coasters, up the mountain,
25 down the mountain, up the mountain, down the mountain, and the drag man felt that we
26 were being followed so we did a loop around and we went down the hill and then we did
27 a ninety and went back up the hill and came down the hill. Well, when we came down
28 and came back up the hill we started hearing this firing and not two hundred or three
29 hundred meters from us it was a platoon or so shooting rockets and RPGs (Rocket
30 Propelled Grenade) and mortars at the hill where they thought we had just come down,
31 which we did the first time. But we had went behind them, you know what I mean? It’s

1 an old trick and it worked so we just layed where we were and we called in the jet
2 fighters and told them what was going on. I'll never forget this as long as live because he
3 looked me right in the eyes. I know he couldn't see me but he knew where we was and
4 we pinpointed them perfect and he came in and he came screaming down the valley in
5 between the two mountaintops and we were sitting on the side. And he looked right at
6 my eyes and smiled as we seen this five hundred pound bomb being launched. I swear he
7 looked right at me. He knew whereabouts we were but he was just smiling when he
8 dropped that sucker and boy, it hit. Another one came in and it hit and there wasn't a
9 peep so we said BDA, Bomb Damage Assessment and the bird dog was up in the air, the
10 little Cessna 182s. The unit said they wanted to do a BDA and thank god the bird dog
11 said, "There's nothing there. Don't waste your men's time. I can guarantee you, I'm
12 flying treetop level. They're gone." And we got like twenty-two or twenty-eight for that.
13 They sort of estimated. He flew around and he said, "They're gone and everything is
14 blown to shit and I can see them laying there. You don't need to send your men there."
15 That ain't how they talk but that's basically what came on and we just went on up and
16 continued our mission.

17 RV: Tell me about what kind of equipment you would take on these missions. I
18 guess it depended on where you were going what you were doing. What would your
19 uniform look like?

20 JW: Well, uniform would fit the terrain. Now, the 101st LRRPs, they would go as
21 far as putting on black pajamas, conal hats, sandals, NVA web gear, AK-47s, the whole
22 thing. They were going where there was no friendlies so they knew that there wasn't the
23 least chance of them running into anything but enemy. So what they and the enemy
24 would do, if you happened to pop up in front of each other, he hesitates just for that split
25 second.

26 RV: And that's enough to buy time.

27 JW: That's enough, yeah. Now, on the other hand, if somebody screws up
28 because of these old maps and they don't know where they're at and they don't know
29 how to pinpoint themselves and all, it can get you in a world of hurt. But there was times
30 when what we would do is a bird dog would fly out sometimes and we would use a
31 mirror and I would just flash the mirror. I'd clock them in and then when he would be

1 flying directly over me, before he hit our position, I would say like "Bingo" and he'd tilt
2 is wings and just do a fly around and he'd give us a ten digit coordinate so we would no
3 exactly where we were at. And we were usually, I would say, really close to where we
4 thought we were. I mean we weren't a thousand meters away. If you're within three,
5 four, or five hundred meters, you're doing darn good. But when you had the opportunity
6 we would do that. I've done that, it worked, and them bird dogs would just be flying
7 around and they were used to that. They're used to a single chopper flying around and
8 same way when we did boat Intel. They're used to a single boat doing patrols every
9 night. You know the humdrum thing. They know when to hide, when he's going to
10 come. We'd get on the back of these boats and when they'd do a turn we'd get off and
11 go in by water, which is kind of freaky.

12 RV: You want to tell me about what that kind of mission was like?

13 JW: Pardon me?

14 RV: Tell me what that kind of a mission was like, when you would go in by
15 water.

16 JW: Well, let's back up and I'll tell you about the equipment.

17 RV: Yeah, please.

18 JW: Equipment, basically everybody carried maybe three days of rations and
19 we'd break it all down and we'd put like a lurp in the pocket and we'd mix it up so it
20 would be wrapped up and then we'd eat on the run. I carried about—let's see, seven,
21 fourteen—around twenty-eight magazines. That would be two ammo pouches. We'd put
22 four in staggered with tape to grab the one on top. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, and then at
23 least a minimum of one bandolier of seven, maybe two bandoliers. [Cell phone rings in
24 background] Excuse me. Then we'd all have Claymores and C4, where we would put
25 the Claymores out at night and preposition them. Sometimes we'd daisy chain them so if
26 you blew one, all of them would go off. And we carried regular HE (High-Explosive)
27 grenades, smoke grenades, and white phosphorus hand grenades. These were by hand.
28 Then no uniforms. Maybe a pair of socks or something like that. A poncho liner to keep
29 warm, extra radios, we'd have an ERC-10 which is a special radio that when turned out
30 you can't hear it but it sends out a distress signal within a five-mile radius and any
31 aircraft or something like that could pick up on that. So with your rations—and

1 remember we had c-rations in them days but we didn't have to use them, thank god. We
2 had lurps, which were dehydrated foods so everything was light so you could mix it up in
3 the morning and eat some of it and put it in your side pocket. You didn't want to do
4 cooking. Sometimes, depending on where you was and where the wind blows and the
5 terrain situation you might take a piece of C4 and heat up some coffee or water
6 sometimes. Ninety-nine percent of the time you didn't smoke. You never talked. You
7 never spoke. You always used hand-arm signals or it would be a whisper in the ear. And
8 we'd move very, very slow, very, very cautiously and for short periods of time. We'd
9 stop and we'd move and we'd stop and we'd move. Normally Americans are not very
10 patient so you had to have patience because you might stop. And once you stop and set
11 up you make one adjustment and that's it. You can't be moving around or nothing. You
12 just sit and you freeze in that position. And I've had it where I was sitting there, I leaned
13 against a tree and I could hear this rubbing against a tree and pounding and there was a
14 new guy with us and I started pounding the dirt and pounding the dirt and pretty soon a
15 deer—there were small deer over there—a little baby deer started coming and the guys
16 were all shocked. We were all cammied but we were scummy, dirty, and smelled like it
17 and all. And the deer came within, I would say, maybe ten foot. Then he must have
18 caught the scent. He was right there, right in the middle of us. These guys are like, "I
19 can't believe this." But he was calling his mom by thumping his thing and all that and
20 then he just—he didn't even dart away. He just sort of looked around and turned and
21 took off. That's when you feel good. You know you're good then. You know when the
22 animals don't know you're there. Then you feel pretty confident you have a good team.

23 RV: Yeah. How long would it take for you guys to have that kind of level of
24 secrecy and synergy and coordination to do something like that?

25 JW: Well, this is the problem we had. Once you get on the team and you start
26 working together it starts meshing together. Remember we formed in '67 and half the
27 company had been in country six months, meaning February and March, six months later,
28 that half of that company could be leaving. So in the management process, within ninety
29 days they should have started receiving new replacements because we had a TO&E
30 (Table of Organization and Equipment) of seven, six-men teams in four platoons. Well,
31 we were down to four, maybe five five-man teams if we were lucky. You've got guys on

1 leave, you've got guys in the hospital, you've got guys on R&R, this, that, and the other
2 thing, and they did not manage the transition well. Fortunately some guys extended so
3 that took up some of the slack. But in their—I don't know, maybe they did and I don't
4 know about it but within ninety days we should have started receiving a lot of new guys
5 because within ninety days after that, half of the company could have went home that
6 were left because their year was up. That really started hitting us around when I got there
7 in March or April because the guy who told me all about the company and everything
8 like that, when I got there he got killed like six days prior. And what a way to start. Here
9 you're going to see one of your best friends and he was dead and he had thirty days left.
10 And when you have thirty days left you're not allowed to go out on mission. You can be
11 a hindrance to the team. And basically he said, "Oh, come on, guys. Let me go out one
12 more time, one more time." They said, "All right." Well here they made contact and as
13 they were doing a peel-off, you know, one guys fires and back and forth and back and
14 forth, Johnny went forward. He just ran forward and there was nothing they could do.
15 They couldn't stop him and he just ran forward and they fought and fought and fought
16 and fought and they finally got filled and they went back the next day and they found him
17 and there were some dead gooks and he was all torn up. When they inventoried his stuff,
18 come to find out the seven thousand dollars that he had saved up, his mother had given to
19 his younger brother for his college or something and he basically went out there to die.

20 RV: Really?

21 JW: Yeah.

22 RV: He knew it.

23 JW: Yeah. That's what happened to him. And then it was a law. No one with
24 thirty days or less. I mean, nobody was to know any better. He never let on. It was
25 when they inventoried his stuff and consolidated it all they found the letter and it was
26 saying, "I took five thousand dollars so that your brother could do this and that," and I
27 guess he felt like it was gone. That's what we figured. That's what the LT (Lieutenant)
28 told us, that that's why he went forward. He was on a death wish because he was too
29 damn smart and too damn good. He had been over there almost two years and you don't
30 leave a Ranger and the team that was there couldn't. They were being pushed back and

1 they were peeling off and peeling off and on his turn to peel, he went forward. And he
2 just went in there and fought until he died.

3 RV: So it was way out of character, basically, for him to just—

4 JW: Oh, for anybody.

5 RV: Yeah.

6 JW: You don't do that. I mean it's not like you're taking over a machine gun or
7 something. These guys are coming at you, you peel off, and then what you try to do is
8 get enough distance so you can start dropping stuff like mortars or artillery in between
9 you or gun ships to cut you off. Charlie knows, if he gets inside close enough you can't
10 call in that stuff. We'd call in stuff and they'd say, "That's a danger close." I said,
11 "That's a damn Roger. Shoot the shit because their coming." And we'd have artillery
12 shit splashing all over us. You know shrapnel and stuff coming right through the damn
13 trees. But hell, they were coming. But the guy would say, "I say again, that's danger
14 close," and we'd be screaming now. "I say again, shoot that shit." And so they'd shoot
15 it. So it depended. Sometimes we'd wear the green camouflage; sometimes we'd wear
16 the tigers. It would depend on the terrain. But then it led on to bigger and harder
17 missions. Snatch missions—we'd go out and try to actually get a POW or get a certain
18 person. They were doing double-teamers, where they would take two teams, put them
19 together, load them up with a couple 60 machine guns and they were hunter/killer teams.
20 They were going out and purposely seeking out, setting up ambushes and looking for
21 them and making contact.

22 RV: Hey, Joey, let's take a break just for a moment.

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 4 of 10
September 6, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history
2 interview with Mr. Joseph J. Welsh, better known as Joey or 'Brasso.' Joey, you're in
3 Castroville, Texas, I am in Lubbock, and today is September 6, 2005 and we are
4 continuing our account of what you were doing in Southeast Asia. And I wanted to pick
5 up where we had left off back in May. We had gotten you into the LRRPs and we had
6 talked about some general things and I wanted to ask you about some of the missions and
7 really, what did you see, first of all, as the purpose or the goal of the Long Range
8 Reconnaissance Patrol teams? What do they tell you what you're supposed to be doing
9 out there?

10 Joseph Welsh: Okay, well, they originally had LRRPs when then went over there
11 but only at brigade level, like 173rd. Now, that was Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol.
12 It became evident that they needed somebody out there to play the same game because
13 they had been there too long. I mean, they had been there, living there thirty years, you
14 know? They'd sit on the hilltop and watch eight or ten helicopters dropping off troops.
15 They could do whatever they wanted. So basically every—not every unit but every
16 division over there, the brigades, some of them detachments. There was a total of
17 thirteen. One was the only National Guard unit to serve in Vietnam. It served one year
18 and it was a LRRP company. But there was thirteen that were original and they were
19 Long Range Recon Patrol. You'd be like Headquarters 101st Long Range Recon Patrol
20 when they was first over there. What happened was they expanded it more and they
21 wanted somebody that would work at a corps level. Now you know it was cut in
22 quarters, Corps I, II, III, and IV and since the Marines had 1: primarily tied up they
23 established a Corps level which was the largest company of two hundred and forty men
24 by taking half of the men from the 101st and really ripped them out pretty bad. But they
25 were just going airmobile at the same time. This was 1967. At that time I was in the
26 Scouts and was planning on going into Brigade LRRPs for my extension. But since they
27 went Airmobile and the LRRPs weren't like they used to be...a friend of mine, who was
28 one of the guys that left in September '67 to go form it, told me, "Hey, you've got to

1 come up here. This is great. Everybody's up here." So that's what I did. I transferred
2 there. Their sign basically was—and this was one hell of a unit—it was the largest one
3 and II Corps was the Central Highlands, all the way across, right next to the Ho Chi Minh
4 Trail and a pretty big area. Our unit was assigned with highly trained and motivated
5 soldiers. Most of them had been over there at least six months and then they had to
6 undergo an intensive selection program before they were even assigned and it was all
7 volunteers that could quit at any time.

8 RV: Why did they make it all volunteer?

9 JW: Well, I was a four-time volunteer. I volunteered for the Army, I volunteered
10 for Jump School, I volunteered for Vietnam and then I volunteered for LRRPs. There
11 were certain things like Jump School and being airborne. You can quit the Special
12 Forces. You can quit because they don't want you there. You can volunteer but only
13 certain ones are selected. And most of these guys—basically the unit was organized to
14 provide long range reconnaissance, surveillance, target acquisition, and we also did
15 special-type missions on a Corps level basis and we usually operated in four to six-man
16 teams. But we also had the capacity, in the way they trained them up, as a platoon-sized
17 force and we could conduct regular recon and enforce missions. At the time we were
18 attached to Special Forces units and we were all trained by them at MACV
19 Reconnaissance School which was a requirement if you didn't get peered out. You went
20 on a couple missions and if everyone felt that you could then you stayed and went to
21 Recondo School. Otherwise you left. I mean, they would just put a report on you. And
22 some guys quit. But it's nothing but—my slogan is, "SALSA, Stay alert, stay alive."
23 Because if you have a really good functioning team that has worked together and has the
24 proper support, you've got a real darn good chance of getting in there and doing what
25 you've got to do and getting out. You're not coming in on eighty choppers and you're
26 not beating the bush and everything like that. However, if you bump into something, it's
27 going to be a beehive and teams have went and never come back.

28 RV: Tell me what kind of makeup the team would have. How many people
29 usually and what were their different roles?

30 JW: Well, in RTO and E we were authorized seven six-men teams in four
31 platoons. It was tailored that so many teams would be on the support, supporting teams

1 out there, the other ones would be on rest and then they would rotate. Of course, that was
2 only on paper (laughs) and so you had six men and the Team Leader, who should have
3 been an E6 slot, assistant team leader at E5, then you had your senior scouts at E4 and E3
4 and RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) and stuff like that. But basically that's what it
5 was, was Team Leader, assistant Team Leader, senior scout who was usually your point
6 man and then you had your scouts and anybody could carry the radio. It was depending
7 on who the Team Leader felt was the most comfortable speaking with it.

8 RV: So we're talking about a small group of people here.

9 JW: Well, these seven six-men teams eventually winded up being, if we were
10 lucky, maybe five six-men teams or six five-man teams and you can't have everybody.
11 The reason being and I'm sure that somebody must have done something, but being in the
12 Army I realized, "Okay, I've got this unit. Six months of them—I mean, half of them
13 have already got six months in. They'll be leaving me in six months so I've got to have
14 everybody on their toes." And they did that in about three months. And that was
15 everybody going through training locally and then going through Special Forces training
16 and MACV Recondo School and then actually starting to conduct missions. And that
17 was from September to December. Then in January we hit Tet. It was Tet. That's when
18 I was transferring from the 101st and I went home on leave afterwards and then came to E
19 Company. And by the time I got there in March, the guys had maybe four months left,
20 three or four months. And people get killed, sick, they're on leave, it's just winding
21 down while I'd just seen the beginning of it. But they were bringing in Kit Carson scouts
22 which are Chieu Hoi and even though we're trained by Special Forces we don't get
23 trained like Special Forces get trained. That's why professionals realize they're in a
24 nation and they're the guest. Even though they're doing the training and all, when you
25 get out in the middle of an A camp and there's two hundred Vietnamese and twelve of
26 you, they could turn on you at any time.

27 RV: Did you all fear that? Was that something that was in your mind?

28 JW: No. These guys believe it or not, because of their lack of experience, they
29 called everybody a gook. Not everybody. Of course we had a Montagnard reaction force
30 that stayed with us, the 2 SF guys, and traveled with our platoon. So if we got in some
31 stuff they would attempt to get the reaction force out there so that they could either not

1 only help us out but go chase the people or get us the hell out of there. And I said, it was
2 different because you had your Yards, which had different tribes. They were okay. But
3 when you put the Yards and the Vietnamese together, it was no good. The Yards were
4 hill people and the Vietnamese were city people. It was almost a 1930s black and white
5 thing. But the Yards, as a single force, and some of the South Vietnamese Rangers and
6 the CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group), which was basically your group that you
7 form your civilian—a regular defense group. From that province you draw all the guys
8 out and you get them before the VC get them.

9 RV: So you guys recruited them and got them basically before the Viet Cong
10 came out?

11 JW: Yeah, well we had guys out there recruiting in PSYOP (Psychological
12 Operations) and all that that had already been experienced. That's the way they worked
13 it. It's just like when they came to get LRRPs. They look for something and the same
14 way with today's present-day Rangers. I would look for gee, maybe five foot ten, a
15 hundred and fifty-five or a hundred and sixty pounds, graduated high school, played
16 athletics. That's the kind of kid I would be looking for. You know what I mean?

17 RV: Yeah.

18 JW: And that's basically almost the mold of the average Vietnamese. Twenty
19 years old, five foot ten, a hundred and sixty pound or something like that. You know
20 what I mean?

21 RV: Why particularly that size? What was special about that size?

22 JW: Because they're anatomically not only strong, they're very, very agile
23 compared to a guy who's built really big. Their agility is—and then they're in that let's
24 say middleweight division. They're not a little guy; they're not a big guy. They're in the
25 middle. And so they can have a cocky attitude. A man once said, "He was young,
26 rowdy, bold, and sometimes offensively swaggering. Yet, when the chips were down he
27 was the most soul-satisfying comrade a man could want on the battlefield." And that was
28 General Maxwell Taylor talking about the paratrooper. The Rangers are the ultimate in
29 what they do. Our unit was one of the best. Of course everyone's going to say they were
30 in the best but in the time we had there was from September '67 to October '71 we had
31 saturated more provinces, worked with more US, Vietnamese, and ROK units and trained

1 them. I was telling you about that book. The big peel in that book is Tet because they
2 were our sister company. They were the III Corps LRRPs. There was only two corps
3 LRRP companies. All the rest were under a brigade or division. 82nd, 101st, 25th, 4th ID
4 (Infantry Division), but 1st Field Force Vietnam and 2nd Field Force Vietnam was our two
5 guys. And what happened is their quarter was south of us so during Tet they caught a lot
6 of guys coming in and by that, could have saved them getting across to Saigon, etc. I'm
7 not saying that they didn't do well but statistically—have you ever read Shelby Stanton's
8 *Rangers of War*?

9 RV: Not all of it. I've read parts of it.

10 JW: Oh. If you see it, grab it. It has a good chapter on every unit and we were
11 called the Typhoon Patrollers, E Company. And at the end of every chapter he gives his
12 same bleep, same format evaluation. And all you have to do is read the last page of every
13 unit and ours is by far—he said that if anyone proves that it could be done at a corps
14 level, because you need a lot of flexibility. You've got people that don't know what the
15 hell a LRRP—they think it's a meal, which it is. (Laughs) We did have some really bad
16 times because even though we had a representative up at their headquarters, the
17 commanders weren't using us properly at times and that can be very frustrating and
18 dangerous.

19 RV: Tell me how you all would be used. What were the types of missions that
20 you would be sent on?

21 JW: Well, primarily it was reconnaissance and surveillance. Now, because we
22 were corps level, we would receive from high, high, high headquarters that there was
23 something going on in this area. There was no friendlies there and we want you to run
24 around their backyard and find out if what we were seeing and hearing is true. And then
25 if it is, you get the hell out of there and we make the plan to go get them. That's the ideal
26 recon, to get in and out, find them, fix them, fight them. But most of the time if we seen
27 them we would definitely attempt to bring hell on their ass. And that could bring hell on
28 your ass because you ambushed eight and that was just the lead party of eighty. Oh shit.
29 (Laughs) You know what I mean?

30 RV: That could be tough.

1 JW: Yeah. So that's all in the jungle but I wouldn't change it for anything in the
2 world. As much as it has driven this guy—he said, "I want to tell this doctor that I'm
3 ready to freaking kill somebody but he's just not on my page." So he couldn't hold it in
4 any longer and he said, "Well, that's it," because he knew the routine that was coming up.
5 He was going to say, "That's it." And he just stood up at him and he just yelled [yells]
6 really loud into his face and said, "That's how I feel, Doc," and walked out. He's crazy.
7 And he jumped on his Harley and drove away. But he couldn't get it out. He didn't ever
8 tell anyone how he felt. He could think it. Because believe me, when we came back and
9 people started this shit and it started becoming a habit they were saying, "Bullshit"
10 because they hadn't worried about the Korean and second World War and all of that. Of
11 course they came home to a welcoming committee, too. Our guys came home kind of
12 unannounced and didn't want to be known. So it was entirely different. When I came
13 home from the Gulf it was like a superhero's welcome and I actually snuck home from
14 Vietnam. They snuck us out the doors and said, "Don't stop anywhere and do this and
15 get on the plane."

16 RV: Can you describe kind of like when you guys would go on reconnaissance
17 missions? How would you operate?

18 JW: Okay. Once you develop a team you develop an SOP (Standard Operating
19 Procedure) for how your team reacts, which comes from everybody's training and
20 experience. Your equipment is packed so that you can jump up and down and there's no
21 movement. You have to be, which Americans aren't, very, very patient. When you go
22 through school, you sit down. You can make one movement and then if you make
23 another movement you're thrown out of the class. And you might sit there for fifteen
24 minutes and you might sit there for an hour and half. You never know. If a bee is
25 stinging you on your cheek, you'd better not move. Okay. Maybe not to that extreme,
26 but you know what I'm saying. And it's because you have to be part of the environment.
27 You didn't shower, you didn't clean, you wanted to be dirty. We owned the day and they
28 owned the night. We would set up just prior to darkness in the thickest stuff we could
29 get. Well, let's back up. The mission. Okay, we're on a mission that they believe that
30 there's a communication site located in this area and they give you an approximate area.
31 And you're going to be infiltrated on this day and exfiltrated on another day. So what

1 you do is you put out the plan to your men of what you're going to do and what
2 equipment you want. And what you do is the Team Leader will go up and do an aerial
3 flyover, just like a chopper flying around. They're commenting every time. And that
4 gives you a good bird's-eye view of what's down there. Of course you need a primary
5 landing zone and if you get shot out of that, most of the time somebody will keep going
6 to the alternate. I would say, "Wait a minute. I think we made contact. Why don't you
7 just send some guys in there?" They chewed around to another one. But during this time
8 you'd prepare where you felt, after you came back, where you felt the best way to go in
9 and travel towards this site and recon it and the best way to get out. And then you
10 presented it to the team and the staff and they said, "Okay, you rehearse it," your little
11 actions, and get all cammied up and we'd paint ourselves all up. And we wouldn't
12 infiltrate between like eleven or two or three. That's Charlie's pot time.

13 RV: Between 11 pm?

14 JW: No, like 11 am to 2 pm. During the hot hours is not a good time to go in, I
15 feel, due to the fact that he's sitting up there and I've found them shooting opium and
16 sitting on a hill smoking a joint and just, like I said, it's not time to be making an eighteen
17 helicopter assault. If it's five miles away he can see you. So we would try to get in
18 earlier than that so we'd have the day to move. Sometimes we'd go in later but then
19 you've got the darkness coming on you. So we would load up and one of the problems
20 we had was that the III Corps LRRPs had an aviation detachment assigned with them
21 together. They lived together, ate together, flew together. They had five or six Slicks
22 and five or six gunships, which is fantastic because if you live, eat, and breathe together
23 you become very close with your pilot. I mean, all the pilots were great, but every pilot
24 we had, we might be attached to the 173rd working for the brigade and they're being
25 supported by the 155th Aviation who is from—anyway, at times that could cause
26 problems. It would have been much better to have—and we winded up with a squadron
27 at the end. Actually being assigned to the squadron made it easier. Then we would fly
28 out and there would be a command and control ship way up in the back and then there
29 would be gunships behind that. We'd be flying along and then we'd do low-level flying
30 and he'd dip down like we were going to land and we might land. Well, we don't land,
31 but we jump off. It's called a false insertion. Because helicopters fly around so much,

1 sometimes or most of the time you had one out of three places to pick and it was all
2 coordinated which one it would be. And then you jump off directly into the bush and he
3 would continue to fly on and then you would freeze and look, listen, smell, feel what
4 you're about. If there's no contact or no problems and you feel settled then you would
5 make a commo check to the C&C ship—just a commo check.

6 RV: How would you do that?

7 JW: By code.

8 RV: Okay. Over the radio?

9 JW: It would be like [whispers] "Thirty-two, thirty-two. This is three-three.
10 Over." You see? I mean it was very, very—you can't hear the guy. You've got to cut
11 them off and he's got the vines on the control under everything. It was just a commo
12 check. And four times a day we sent in a situation report and you'd just say like, "Alpha,
13 Bravo, Charlie, Delta," and you would say a keyword or numbers and that would be it.
14 And then if the man calls you or if you're talking to the man and you stop talking and
15 he'll ask a couple of times and then he'll say, "Spray squelch twice if you can hear me,"
16 and you just squeeze the trigger.

17 RV: I see.

18 JW: That means you're in deep shit and you can't talk. And we did not talk at all.
19 We moved very, very slow and tedious. We had the point man who picked the best route,
20 the slack man who guided him like on a compass-wise, even though the point man was
21 on it anyway. Then usually the Team Leader and then the guy carrying the radio and
22 then the rear scout or two rear scouts. But usually a rear scout and he would be actually
23 covering our trail as much as he could. And everybody was—everything was done by
24 hand and arm signals and if you move too long you're going to get noisy so you take a lot
25 of breaks and you're always watching the map because they were so old and you want to
26 make sure you know where you're at and where you're going. So you're trying to find a
27 blue line that can coordinate with you. That was one of the major problems, was how old
28 the maps were.

29 RV: Where did the maps come from?

30 JW: Oh, I imagine they came from the Vietnamese army. I was just down there
31 with a map. (Laughs) In any unit you go to, it's, "Here, here's the map you're using."

1 But of course we were very compact and lightweight as much as we could, even though
2 we had to carry a lot of stuff. It would be CO, then acetate. It would only be twice as big
3 as the area we worked it. We weren't carrying anything big. Forget about it. If it's five
4 clips—anyway, what we would do is move along and if we felt everything was going
5 good, fine. If we came on the trail, depending on the mission we might follow the trail. I
6 have stepped on trails but not traveled on.

7 RV: How do you do that? How to you learn that? Is this something that's taught
8 to you at recon school?

9 JW: Yeah, yeah. Well, you don't want to be on the trail because that's where the
10 enemy travels but sometimes you're forced to get from point A to point B. The best way
11 is to get the hell down the trail. But actually in real life, the way that they do it is two
12 guys come up for security and then one will go across and he'll provide security, then
13 another, another, and another, and the last one, as he's going across, he's got a brush with
14 him and he wipes the footprints. That's really getting into it but some of them are beaten
15 down, hard clay. Some of them are rocky, some of them are muddy. It depends. But
16 then if it looks like a good place or maybe if it's getting dark then we would set up an
17 ambush where we would likely that they might come. And even we didn't we would set
18 up in as thick as we could and we'd set out Claymores around us so that if we were hit at
19 night it would ignite Claymores. When it first started, Charlie was pretty darn good. He
20 would come up, pick up the Claymore and turn it around. It never happened to anybody
21 in our unit but I know it happened to people and wham, that's how quiet he was. He
22 lived there. You was in his backyard. So we would daisy chain them together and we
23 would also sometimes put a trip-flare or something that if he messed with it he would get
24 a big surprise. And we daisy-chained some of them so that when we ignited one the det
25 cord would go two different directions and ignite the other four. It's a pretty awesome
26 anti-personnel mine. It's not like two hundred ball bearings and you just can't be behind
27 it. That would be when we were in the kill zone, we would set up Claymores and then
28 we would have a guy set up on each side for security. Sometimes we would go heavy
29 and we'd take a sixty or a Pig, an M-60 machine gun. It evolved into where we started
30 doing a little bit more and we'd go out and we would set up target personnel as detectors,
31 these little things that they gave us that we'd put in the ground as sensors. It's pretty neat

1 if you don't get caught. Sometimes you were sent out to try to catch a prisoner, to snatch
2 or to go get a certain target and I've been on a reaction force. The team that's on support
3 and in the back and you have your reaction force. If the guys are in some big shit and
4 they've got air support going and all but it's still not working, these forty and fifty guys
5 are trained and ready. They get on and then they come in from another angle and then
6 fight their way in. And then it got to be, depending—and this is again depending on who
7 you was with, we'd have two-teamers. So where there would be ten or twelve guys, a
8 couple machine guns and you went out there and you went out there hunting. It would
9 depend. But sometimes you would need that because you was in some really big stuff or
10 there was a lot of activity going on. So if you had two good teams—if you had to good
11 teams that worked together as a team and they could join together as a team because they
12 were in the same platoon, you could have a very, very powerful ten or twelve man force,
13 and very, very smart.

14 RV: How often did the enemy know you all were there?

15 JW: Oh, quite a bit, I'm sure. I've seen him and he's seen me and we kept on
16 going. There wasn't no sense in shooting at him. I couldn't hit him and I knew my shit
17 was up (laughs) and I'm sure he's seen us more than we know about. But it behooved
18 him and that's the way he picked the fights. He might see the infantry coming in but if
19 they were going the opposite way of where he had anything, he wasn't going to go chase
20 him all the time. He would let them go or he would organize to strike them at his
21 advantage. And basically after a while, when we caught some prisoners and all, they had
22 trained whatever they call us—Ranger Killer Teams or whatever to hunt us down. And
23 there was supposed to be rewards for us and all that. But you hear that from everybody.

24 RV: Was that true?

25 JW: I'm damn sure it was true about helicopters because the last thing you want
26 to do is when a helicopter's hovering is stand up with an AK-47 and shoot at it because
27 you know you're catching hell. But if you knock it down and you get a thousand bucks
28 or whatever, it must have been some kind of incentive because I wouldn't stand up. I
29 might shoot at it but ain't going to stand. No, they loved to catch them choppers at their
30 vulnerable part in time because they won, especially if you're half-loaded or you haven't
31 left. They've won. They've knocked a chopper down and now you've got more injured.

1 Of course that brings in more gun ships but they might move closer. So they did play the
2 game. As I was saying, we would set up prior to darkness and we would be all settled in
3 and in the thick as you could get so you couldn't see your hand if possible, and we would
4 wagon-wheel and we would do an hour or hour and a half or whatever of so-called watch
5 and then before it got daylight we were all up, alert, and ready because that's when
6 Charlie's moving. He's already packed up and he's moving.

7 RV: Is your object to count heads?

8 JW: No, no, no. What I'm saying is he will come during the dark and set up and
9 he'll leave during the dark. The twilight, the dark, because he owned the night. It was
10 his backyard. I mean we were stumbling all over. Not that bad, but compared to how
11 they could move, especially if they were in an area or division or something like that had
12 been for years. They knew every trail, which way it went. I was talking about the
13 missions like to go see the communications site. We'd go out there and we'd get in the
14 general area and we hit a pongee stick field. That's a pretty good indication. Then I was
15 going down the saddle and there was about a six to eight-inch, maybe smaller, brush, like
16 a small little tree. I just happened to notice was cut once and it fell. It was a very clean
17 cut and it was pointing up to the top of the saddle. And so we take that as a sign that—
18 we know it's cut by a machete. Which direction it's gone we just guess. It was getting
19 late so rather than getting up on top of the saddle, we went around the side and got in the
20 real thick stuff. Well, little did we know that inside that saddle was an underground
21 communications thing. You could have drove a deuce and a half through it.

22 RV: Wow.

23 JW: Well, they had been there for thirty years fighting. They had hospitals
24 underground, caches of weapons and everything. But when you get too close they've got
25 to bite you and I think we were all right up to that time but we should have moved real
26 quick in the morning but we didn't so we eventually got hit. Fortunately we got out of
27 there and then they just pulverized the whole entire area. I've been on places where
28 you'd be sitting on a hill overseeing the area around you and then during the night there'd
29 be bombing going on over where you could see it and then the next day you see that,
30 "Damn, there's a hill missing. It was real beautiful. It was green and now it's a dead

1 piece of brown spot.” So it can wreck havoc on you—they had a lot more psychological
2 problems than most units.

3 RV: You’re unit did?

4 JW: No, I’m saying these type of units and that’s why we’re rowdy and bold and
5 crazy because we’ve got to let off the steam. Before we go in we get isolated so we’re
6 not drinking or nothing. For a couple days we’re planning and everything like that. Then
7 when we come out we go into what they call like detox. Once you get your debriefing
8 and everything then they let you alone and you do whatever you want. Because we’ve
9 always got these barracks that are off in a corner somewhere. Then the next day, if the
10 location is right they’ll let you go downtown and the best thing to do when you’re in a
11 war, when you’re not fighting, you should be fucking. That’s it.

12 RV: That’s what you all said?

13 JW: Yeah. When you go over there, hell, you’re eighteen or nineteen year old
14 guy. I had already spent seven months in Germany so I was used to it but there was a kid
15 who was going off to war and he gets a couple days off and it’s just like sex, sex, sex,
16 sex, sex. What the hell else? I was authorized, and LRRPs were authorized an extra two
17 out-of-country R&Rs and one in country. I was there for two tours and part of my third
18 and I had one out-of-country R&R.

19 RV: Wow.

20 JW: I didn’t request any.

21 RV: You wanted to stay in?

22 JW: Well, no, what happened was I got Medevaced and I was supposed to go on
23 R&R to Bangkok with a couple guys but since I got Medevaced I winded up getting sent
24 on my own and I went to Hong Kong. I had a good time and all but no, if fact when I
25 was staying there the third time I wasn’t going home on leave or nothing. I was just
26 staying six months. Now some guys, what they did eventually, once they got the routine
27 down was if they were changing units they would go to the unit for thirty or forty days
28 and then they’d go home for thirty days and come back so they would get settled in. Or a
29 lot of guys wouldn’t go home. They’d go to Australia, Bangkok, or whatever. They’d
30 take two or three weeks because every six months you extend for you get a free thirty-day
31 leave. And really at the beginning when the advisors started, they were from Okinawa

1 and the 46th Company in Thailand and that was the Golden Triangle. You was either in
2 Vietnam or back in Thailand or in Vietnam or in Oki and they were doing six-month
3 rotations at the very beginning. And then you would spend two years on Okinawa and
4 then you'd go for a year in Vietnam and then you'd go to maybe a couple years in
5 Thailand. Geez, I missed out on that. (Laughs)

6 RV: Well, I assume that was by choice. You wanted to—

7 JW: Oh yeah, because you don't want to go back to the States. Oh god, no.

8 RV: Why not?

9 JW: Well, if you're in the Army and you like it and there's a war going on, I just
10 felt that that's where I wanted to be. Now there was a lot of times I said, "I gotta get the
11 hell out of here," but overall I still wanted to stay. Now, if you can bear with me just for
12 a minute, we had—I was regular Army. I did that on purpose so I was guaranteed to go
13 to Jump School so I enlisted for three years. Now right two weeks before basic training
14 was over they said, "Now we have draftees that are coming in for two years. Anybody
15 that wants to go to jump school, raise your hand." So I raised my hand and we went
16 down and took the PT test so these guys didn't even enlist for it. It just so happened that
17 whenever they needed volunteers they just took the guy. Anyway, I'm still glad I did it
18 because it gave me the time and I was guaranteed. But when I graduated I just hit that
19 class that they said, "Wait, every one of them men will get on a plane tomorrow and go to
20 Europe and fill in spots in the 155th," which probably really helped me because I spent
21 seven months there and all I did was train, train, train, train. I mean, you had to be there
22 six months before you could even apply for a three-day pass. It was very, very rough. It
23 was very stacked. It was basically the 8th Airborne of Europe.

24 RV: Well, you had to be that way because you were—you're doing these very
25 small-unit dangerous missions.

26 JW: Well, no. When I went there from Jump School, I was in a recon radar
27 platoon. But this was in Europe. But it gave me some really excellent training, a seven-
28 month training with some guys who had been in combat so I really got an extended
29 period of training so that I felt a lot more confident in myself and I knew the Army so
30 much better that when I did go to Vietnam it was actually—I came in the Army in
31 February 25th, 1966 and I didn't go to Vietnam until February 10th, 1967 because I went

1 through all the training in Jump School and I spent seven months in Germany. But that
2 seven months really, really helped me, tactically and personally. It just made me feel
3 good because—well, of course it was a pain in the butt but we were constantly on alert,
4 constantly on alert, constantly training, constantly jumping. And rather than me just
5 going through basic training, Infantry School, Jump School, get on a plane, and here's
6 Vietnam, I was just three hundred to five hundred percent better.

7 RV: I imaging you had more confidence, more experience.

8 JW: Yeah, I had more confidence. I was really—see, when I got there I asked
9 them, “How long”—now, you had to be careful how you said that—but, “How long do I
10 have to stay here?” They said, “Ninety days and you can put in a 1049 request to go to
11 Vietnam. No problem.” I soldiered my ass off, I worked hard and I learned all I could
12 and the ninety days came and I put in my orders, a request for orders and that was around
13 September. I got there at the end of July and I left December 19th of that same year. In
14 fact, I got home on Christmas Eve and I had been in the Army going on eleven months
15 then. And that was all training. It was all training and it was all good. I had a thirty-day
16 leave and then in February I went to—I didn’t go with a unit, I went what was called
17 Individual. There was a whole planeload of you but you reported to either Fort Dix or
18 down in Oakland or wherever. They wanted me to go to Oakland and I went to Fort Dix
19 because I had been in the Army and I knew how to go early and twix. They would send
20 you to the commo down there. “Hey, we’ve got them up here. We’re just going to fly
21 them out of here.” I wouldn’t have known that. I would have flown to Oakland. It’s just
22 things like that that I knew. And they flew us there and we were in this big replacement
23 detachment for three or four days and then you come down with your assignment. At the
24 time I wanted to go to 173rd and I got orders for the 101st. It was good. And then when
25 you get to your unit you’ll go to their base camp and you went through a two-week
26 survival, indoctrination and acclimazation—getting you acclimatized. So that’s what that
27 first—because it was February when you left United States.

28 RV: And that’s not Vietnam weather.

29 JW: Right. But even no matter what time you come in. So you would be up on
30 the hill and you’d spend ten or twelve days up there training. Everybody got the same
31 training whether you was a cook or a grunt. All the booby traps and the snakes and the

1 spitting cobras and they'd let the monkeys loose. Plus, on the other side of the buildings
2 was the guys who were leaving. So it was kind of a chant and shout thing. Although one
3 thing that was very traditional and I learned before I went there and I did it on purpose, is
4 we went over there in either khakis or greens with spit-shined jump boots. Now what we
5 would do is when we got to replacement detachment—a guy came up to me, I didn't even
6 have to do it. A guy came up to me and he was Airborne. His boots were white and he
7 said, "What size shoe you wear?" And I found a guy that matched up and it was tradition
8 that I gave him my boots and he gave me his because they fit me and they were broke in.
9 Kind of a weird tradition but it was actually a thing. I did it. I gave away my jump boots
10 to a guy that wore ten-regular, and I got his ten-regular jungle boots and boy they were
11 just so soft and nice. Even though you're going to be issued other stuff. And then you
12 get your training and then you go to your unit. We were 1st Brigade. We were spread out
13 all over and their missions were—well, first of all, they were very well respected by the
14 enemy. We would have ROKs around our base camp in the mountains and they would
15 light bonfires to let them know where they were. The Koreans would light bonfires to let
16 the Vietnamese know, "You know, come on." So we were pretty secure in that area.
17 Once we got to another forward support element, which could be—we were on the
18 coastline north of Nha Trang and Phan Rang and there was an Air Force Base there and
19 that was our base camp. I was there maybe three weeks or so and then I didn't see it for
20 seven months. Once we left we just kept on jumping from place to place. And then I got
21 Medevaced and then instead of sending me back when I got back to the holding area, I
22 told them I had orders. I was supposed to go on TDY (Temporary Duty) but I was
23 Medevaced. They said, "Okay, we'll let you go now. Since you're here, you'd better
24 go." I said, "Where do you have open?" "Hong Kong and Hawaii." So Hawaii was for
25 married guys so I went to Hong Kong and spent all my money and sold everything back
26 the night before and partied. It was a very long year. It was a very long, long year.
27 Yeah, it was a long year. I like the fact of knowing that I could do six months and either
28 stay six months or go somewhere else and that's what I had planned on doing. That's
29 what I was leading up to, that if you were a draftee and say you went through basic
30 training, infantry training, your leave, or let's put you Airborne—Jump School, your
31 leave, and then you went to Vietnam, you had already done maybe six months of training

1 so you had what? Eighteen months left? And by the time you do a leave and all—so you
2 might come up with serving twelve months in Vietnam and only having maybe five
3 months left to go. So they put the cut-off at six months, a hundred and seventy-nine days.
4 In other words, it was worthless for them to send you back to the States for a thirty day
5 leave, go to a unit where, in ninety days you're going to be getting days. So it was called
6 a hundred and seventy-nine day early out. I mean, they would take you off line and
7 everything. They'd leave you twelve months on line and then, "Okay, go work in supply
8 for two months. You did a good job." Then they would go back to the States and get out
9 of the Army. Well, when I put in my extension they came and said, "Well, you can't put
10 in your extension." I said, "Why?" They said, "Because you ain't supposed to be here.
11 You've only got a hundred and fifty-days left in the Army. You should have left." My
12 records were lost and all that. I'm going to try to make this quick. "If I didn't want to be
13 here, I wouldn't ask. Just extend me for thirty, sixty, ninety days, whatever, so I can stay,
14 because I want to stay or I wouldn't have asked." So they said, "Okay, we'll see what we
15 can do." And then they came back and they said, "Oh, well, they've got you going to the
16 82nd Airborne." I said, "No, I can get out of the Army. How can have reassigned me if
17 you just told me I can get out of the damn Army? So now I want out of the Army. Either
18 send me to Special Forces or I want out of the Army. Because under the hundred and
19 seventy-nine day rule, I'm not supposed to be here." Well, you know where I winded up,
20 Fort Bragg. But I didn't go right away. I went up to the National Personnel Records
21 Center and tried to fight it to go to a different place than Bragg. But anyway, I winded up
22 in Bragg in October of '68. I did nineteen months and then winded up in Bragg in
23 October, November, December, January, February. I spent four months there and got
24 out. The place was just terrible.

25 RV: It wasn't Vietnam.

26 JW: See, I had a critical MOS. Once you was—to get to recon, you had to be in a
27 LRRP, a Ranger, a recon, CO—we had Thai, Korea, and Vietnamese forces go through it
28 with their separate instructors and it was run by the B-52 Delta Project, guys that had
29 been around for several years over there. And it was the best school that I've ever went
30 through or seen because it was the only school in the world where you actually had to go
31 out in a live combat mission for four to five days and come back and graduate. It was

1 very intensive. That's why you had to have at least six months in combat and be in a
2 LRRP unit. So the first week was just everything you can imagine—map reading,
3 demolitions, intelligence, and the PT was excruciating. For five straight days they tried
4 to eliminate and weed out the ones real fast. But the instructors were fantastic. We got to
5 learn how to call in fire, how to do everything—Medics. We did IVs in ourselves and all
6 that kind of stuff. And then we took that and went to the field. And I say the field. It
7 was a pretty safe area. You're still out in the training area over on an island and we
8 would do the infiltrations, exfiltrations, we would do the rope ladders, we qualified and
9 were familiarized with like 42 farm weapons, we did patrolling and immediate action
10 drill, what do you do here, what do you do there, did mortars, we called in artillery
11 strikes, we called in air strikes. I mean, this is all happening in ten days and it was
12 coming fast. And then you applied all that and they entire time you broke down into a
13 five-man team and one Special Forces instructor was your Team Leader. But he wasn't
14 ever your Team Leader, he would just be the team coordinator and when you went on a
15 mission, someone was assigned as team leader and basically he was the evaluator/"I'll get
16 us out of here." It was great and they taught us how to go in by rope ladder, how to repel
17 in, how to go out by stable rigs, go in by water. That's how I went in. I went in by
18 rubber raft and did my recon and came out in a helicopter. Others went in a helicopter
19 and came out the water. It was just the craziest school you could ever imagine. It was
20 just so intense and it was hard. The Special Ops does their PT different than the rest of
21 the military, especially in the Army. We do a good warm-up and stretch and then we'll
22 do our five-mile run or three-mile run or whatever and then we'll do multiple different
23 stations of exercise to muscle fatigue and then we'll go take a shower. The next day
24 we'll get up, we'll warm up and all, we'll throw on a sixty-pound rucksack and we'll ruck
25 our asses off for four or five miles, then we'll come back and we'll do calisthenics until
26 muscle fatigue. That's just how hard they train. But it's better that way. It's so much
27 better to get the run and the ruck and you're so ugh, so hot, so warm, so stretched, so
28 ready. So what they would do is they would give us the calisthenics and then you would
29 have full field equipment. I mean, lock and load it and everything because they opened
30 the doors and you was going through the village and everybody went by with a forty-
31 pound ruck or something like that, a thirty-five-pound ruck and it was a sandbag or the

1 radio. And you'd weigh your ruck and then you'd go. They start off at like two, three,
2 four, five, and then seven miles or something like that. The first day was just like a mile
3 or so and they showed you the route and everything and then it got bigger and bigger. It
4 went two, three, four, five seven. And that's the first five days. And you think you're in
5 shape. We had one guy that had been over there seven months and humping the hills in
6 my company and he had a heart murmur and they Medevaced him and we never seen him
7 again.

8 RV: Really?

9 JW: Yeah.

10 RV: He was gone, that was it?

11 JW: No, he wasn't dead.

12 RV: No, no, but he was no longer...

13 JW: Yeah. It was just so intense. Like the second day, GI Joe, when he gets a
14 break he's going to go out there and sit down and smoke. I couldn't even laugh because I
15 hurt so much. So we had a Korean team there and I was with a fellow from the 25th who
16 had been in Korea. It was a black guy, and E5 from the 25th Infantry. I said, "Man, I
17 should work out with them guys." He said, "You want to?" He knew some Korean. So
18 anyway, I started doing that. On breaks I would work out with them and my pain was
19 gone right away because I had done martial arts before. We were doing all this crazy
20 stuff. If you don't constantly stretch and then gave us chow from hell and the chow was
21 great. In fact, they would have two warm beers every morning. It was that open. And
22 then your team came back after that second week and you spend two days planning your
23 reconnaissance and then you would be infiltrated. Five-man team, Americans, and I had
24 an Australian officer. It was a five-man team and the sixth man was the Special Forces
25 instructor and one of the students was the Team Leader. I happened to be the Team
26 Leader on mine but at any time he could rotate you or do whatever he wanted to do. He
27 was interviewed on the MACV Recondo hour. I've got like eight hours or LRRPs,
28 Vietnam, Recondo in Vietnam and stuff like that. His name was Ed Clancy. I'll never
29 forget because he was maybe five ten and a hundred and sixty pounds but he was burnt
30 city. He'd been over there like thirty-two months or something like that. That's basically

1 what they did. That training time was really a break for them and they'd rotate in and out
2 of there.

3 RV: Joey, let me ask you about some of these other missions. You guys did the
4 reconnaissance. What other things would you do besides reconnaissance missions?

5 JW: Okay, we would do the killer teams, a two-teamer.

6 RV: Can you describe what one of those was like?

7 JW: Well, like I said, depending on the mission, if you get a good area and you
8 get in there and you see them before they see you, it usually works out real well.

9 RV: Now, you were sent in to look for one person or was it just anyone?

10 JW: Well, yeah, it's possible that you could be looking for one person. That's
11 what they call snatch, or they try to snatch a prisoner. In other words, have an ambusher
12 or try to find a few guys and at least bring one back. Or they might have intelligence that
13 a tacks man is running up and down this area. Search and rescue—if a chopper goes
14 down they would send the two teams in to rappel in and secure the area. We had guys
15 just run into battalion-size base camps and then we've had guys set up and all of the
16 sudden at like two o'clock in the morning they woke me up with their hand over my
17 mouth and I knew that meant "Hmm," so I didn't move. I just looked over. I didn't have
18 to move far because I'd say about thirty-five meters there were eight or ten gooks sitting
19 around a fire, talking and joking and laughing and eating. We're in this thick underbrush.

20 RV: That's incredible. What do you do in a situation like that?

21 JW: Well, what I did, being the Medic of the team is—well, first of all you feel
22 pretty damn good that you hid yourself that well but now you've got to get everybody
23 alert but relaxed. So you had coding. We had amphetamine coding like everyone but
24 coding was really used to sustain calls. And so what I did was I doubled the dose
25 because I knew that it would definitely knock you down. But I knew the adrenaline in
26 conjunction with the narcotic effect of that hopefully would mellow them to where they
27 could just relax all of us. I don't mean just cough but just relax because they eventually
28 fell asleep a little bit and they packed up their stuff and started heading out and then we
29 just waited until they got a little bit and we called in the situation. We fought a little bit
30 and then we called in dead right on them. We asked, "Do you want a BDA?" A

1 Bombing Damage Assessment. And the FAC (Forward Air Controller) says, "No, I can
2 count them from here," and we just went about our own way.

3 RV: How often did that happen?

4 JW: It's only happened to me twice. Well, only once where they actually sat
5 there and ate. When I was with the 101st we were setting up and we heard some clanking
6 and clanking so what happened was we had set up so close to their perimeter that they
7 had to move their mortars back. Uh-oh, not good. As I said, that's why we try to get in
8 just as it was getting dark so by the time we are settled in and our stuff is set up it's dark.
9 Then Charlie settles in right after dark and then before it gets too light he takes off and
10 gets on the road because he knows the road. You, you've got to wait until a light gets
11 going and you get adjusted. So then you take off. Of course, you don't know the road
12 and you're going to be pecking around. It fries your nerves. It does. And now this
13 whole entire time there's no talking or whispering. Everything is so unearthly quiet.
14 And then at the first ring of the shot it just becomes total pandemonium.

15 RV: So you go from absolute silence to this craziness?

16 JW: Yeah, it's not like somebody would say, "Headquarters, headquarters, we're
17 in contact." They guy screams, "Alright, mother fuckers, we're in contact!" And
18 commo, forget commo discipline when it comes to a LRRP team. We know exactly what
19 to say, "Shut the fuck up. Listen, this is what I need. We are in contact." Of course
20 you've got one guy and that means if he's talking, he ain't shooting. But if you're set up
21 and preparing to initiate, they know that you are doing that and it's different because they
22 know where you're at. But if you're moving and something happens, which is what you
23 would call a chance meeting, your immediate action drill will take place. If they're
24 coming—actually, if you get ambushed you should turn and run into the ambush. That's
25 the best way to fight your way out of an ambush.

26 RV: To turn it and do it?

27 JW: Right. Just go right forward because they've got you in a nail and where the
28 hell else are you going to go? So what you try to do is break through it. That's the
29 textbook side of the story.

30 RV: Now, how often would that happen to you?

1 JW: Well, I was lucky. I never really got stuck in an ambush. An ambush is
2 where they're plotting and waiting but I've been attacked because I was sitting there and
3 I shouldn't have been sitting there and I felt I shouldn't be sitting either but there wasn't
4 nothing I could do. We were sitting where we shouldn't have been sitting. And they
5 dang knew that we knew that they were somewhere around there and we were going to
6 bring hell because we had the authorization. As an E4 Team Leader on the LRRP team
7 you had the authorization to call in a B-52 strike. That's about as high as you can go.
8 Shit, half the time the Platoon Leaders would take an hour to do something like that
9 where ours would just say, "Hey you better be about a thousand meters in terrain picture
10 away." Of course we worked more with the artillery, trying to push them back, gun
11 ships, cutting them off, and then air strikes and then Slicks trying to get us the hell out.

12 RV: How much could you call in? Could you guys call everything in or were you
13 limited as far as support, air support?

14 JW: No, there was no—well, let's put it this way. You had an artillery section
15 assigned to that mission for you and then you would have choppers, Slicks, and guns
16 assigned to react and to carry the reactionary force and then you could have fast movers
17 that were assigned to that AO (Area of Operations) and then you had a FAC, which was a
18 little bird dog that flew the AO and sort of kept an eye on you. Because we would be out
19 so far that we would have to put a ten or twelve x-ray team, a radio relay team. They
20 would have to put them out in the middle of the top of the hill so that we could have
21 commo because we were where no man had ever been before and there was no friendlies
22 or nothing. Nowadays, I mean, geez, I was sitting there in the Philippines and I break out
23 this little antenna that looked like a fan and plug it in and then get the mike and I was
24 shooting azimuth to get as close as I could. I'd say, "One," and I'd keep on saying, "One,
25 one, one," and it would bounce back, "One, one, one, one," and then when you got your
26 highest bounce back you left it there and then you called Okinawa. And we had them
27 damn prick-25s (PRC-25). We had RP-10s, too, which is if all else fails you turn this on.
28 It can't be turned off; it can't be heard by anyone. It transmits within a five-mile radius
29 an emergency signal to any flying aircraft and hopefully that happens. But what we do a
30 lot of times is we'll do spot checks. Bird dog will be flying by and we'll use a mirror.
31 We'll use a mirror and flash him and then we'll work the frequencies and get on him and

1 then I'll guide him in. I'll say, "We're at your three o'clock at two thousand meters or a
2 thousand meters," and then he'll start flying and I'll get him in. When he gets flying over
3 us, right prior to that, we'll say a special word like, "Bingo," and he flaps his wings and
4 he marks on his map and that pilot's going to give you a ten-digit coordinate. Now
5 you're watching your map. He's going to give you to within ten meters of where you are.
6 And you feel pretty damn good. If you're within a couple hundred meters you're doing
7 damn good. And then sometimes they would hang out with you if you was having
8 communication problems. But they were amazing in what they did, too. They did a lot
9 of the aerial over flights also because the Platoon Leader, his job was to support the
10 teams. He didn't go out in the field. I shouldn't say that. Ours never did. They could if
11 they wanted to on occasion but they were supposed to run the support team behind him,
12 keep everything flowing, go out there with the bird dog, check on them and stuff like
13 that. Sort of like an operations intelligence man. Usually—well the FACs was—they
14 were damn good.

15 RV: Tell me about the FACs. How would you describe their role and their
16 effectiveness?

17 JW: The what?

18 RV: The FACs, the Forward Air Controllers.

19 JW: I don't know. I've heard different stories. I'd have to ask Chief about it.

20 RV: What did you witness?

21 JW: They were very—a chopper is a hotrod. That sucker can zip and zap and
22 that's where you save someone's live and we won every battle with the helicopter. We
23 could be from point A to point B faster than any other war we had ever been in. If we
24 had a man who was wounded really bad, in that hospital within an hour he had a ninety
25 percent chance of survival. Now, this guy here was just a slow hanker. He was like a
26 Cessna 182 or whatever they were. Some of them had these little rockets on them. They
27 used to put a box of hand grenades in there so the guy in the back could throw them if he
28 had to and he'd just cruise around. And he was the Forward Air Controller so he could
29 control artillery or aircraft or both. And so that was his job, to coordinate that everybody
30 was on the right sheet of music and going in the right location. And sometimes they'd
31 come down and they'd be shooting and throwing grenades. And then you had the Puff

1 the Magic Dragon, you had the C-130 that would ride around and it had the automatic
2 thirty-caliber machine gun that could fire like six thousand rounds a minute. If it went
3 across a football field it would put one round in every square inch. That's how intense it
4 was. They would bank and you might now see them. All of the sudden you'd see this
5 red trail and then later you hear "Roar!" Because—well, that was when you wasn't real
6 close to them. They were outstanding. And gun ships are real good to work with
7 because you can get them pretty tight. Now, artilleries are going to say, "Danger close,
8 danger close!" And you say, "I said, 'Fire for effect, you son of a bitch!'" Because six
9 hundred meters is danger close. But Charlie knows that if rounds land behind him then
10 he's going to try to come closer fast and then you can't get in between him. It would just
11 depend on your assets. I've had Naval—but we got chased out of there but then I wasn't
12 around to watch, which I would have loved to have seen if it was sitting way out in the
13 ocean there. This one we were trying to get, they said, "Where are you going?" I said,
14 "To that boat, one way or another." That's the only way out. But they had sixteen-inch
15 guns and once we were exfilled they just leveled the area. And that was looking for a
16 well. A well! We were looking for a very big water-producing well along on the
17 coastline and without that they couldn't survive. So that's why they didn't let us get at it.
18 Fortunately we got out of there and they chased us out of there and we used gun ships and
19 all that kind of stuff.

20 RV: How many missions total do you think you went on?

21 JW: I don't know. I had them counted at one time.

22 RV: Would it be like ten or fifty?

23 JW: No, more than that. No, not fifty. Because you go on—like you might go on
24 a mission that is over in two days or you might go on three missions that last four or five
25 days each time and then you're going somewhere. There's just always something. But
26 as soon as I got to E Company—they only give you about a week of indoctrination. I
27 went out on a mission and I was back a couple days. Went out on another mission, was
28 back a couple days, was going on another mission and by then they had said that they
29 wanted to keep me and they were happy with me. "Was I happy there?" I said, "Yes."
30 They said, "Pack your bags because you're going to Recondo School and it starts
31 Monday," and this was like a Wednesday or Thursday.

1 RV: Pretty fast turnaround.

2 JW: Huh?

3 RV: That's pretty fast turnaround. I mean, you got there, they took you out to see
4 how you were and then you say yes and then you're off to Recon School.

5 JW: Yeah, well, that's where they want you. But I mean I had already been in
6 country a year so I was different than a guy who just came in country for three or four
7 months so I was a different situation.

8 RV: Which did you like better? Did you enjoy working with E Company better
9 than your first tour?

10 JW: Yeah, but see, what was happening in E Company personnel-wise, we were
11 getting Kit Carsons. The younger guys didn't like them and some of them are to this day
12 loved by guys. Because hell, you put them up front, the walk point, but it was just poor
13 management on behalf of the Army, that they should have known, at the six-month point
14 after we've been training for three months we've got guys that are ninety-day loss
15 already. So they should have had replacements coming in, in the ninth month to meet up
16 with the twelve-month rotation. A lot of guys stayed, a lot of guys were dead, a lot of
17 guys went other places. But they still should have had that and that's what can destroy
18 your morale, is to get with a team, whether it's a five-man or a six-man team and after
19 you run several missions together and you're just sticking together you just love it. You
20 just know it's right and then they say, "Hey, we need you and you to go here." Not that
21 you don't like the guys, you love the guys, but you haven't worked with them. It's ad
22 hoc and that was starting to happen. Then all that should happen with me, I was trying to
23 go to the same place where I was but it was B Company 5th group and work with the
24 Yards and do long range, long, long range patrol with the Montagnards. That's what they
25 did up in the central highlands. In other words, going to Laos and stuff like that.

26 RV: That's what you did?

27 JW: Yeah, that's what I volunteered for on my third tour. Now, I had already
28 been in—I can say this now.

29 RV: What?

30 JW: Well, everybody knows about it. Our company was outside Vietnam before
31 we were supposed to be.

1 RV: Right.

2 JW: They were supposed to be out there but they were doing it like six or eight
3 Montagnards and three or four Americans. And they lived and breathed and ate together
4 and it just became a way of life. And I wanted to stay. I figured if I would have stayed I
5 probably would have stayed there and from there if I didn't stay there I would have
6 probably went maybe down to Nha Trang and Headquarters or something like that. But
7 as soon as I mentioned Nha Trang, they said, "No way. B Company." I said, "Okay, I'll
8 take B Company." B Company was great because people didn't understand but Project
9 Omega was going on which was this big thing around the III Corps area, which was in
10 the Central Highlands and inland. And Project Omega, which was the Special Forces
11 project, they were getting called to do all the recon stuff. So the Special Team, B-36, and
12 not many people know about it, they picked up the slack while the Army purposely
13 developed a corps level Recon Company. That's the reason why it was done, was to free
14 up the SF guys so that they could go about their business and then we took care of this
15 side of the border mostly. In fact, I met a guy who was on—I mentioned B-36 and he
16 said, "What did you say?" I said, "B-36." He said, "You knew about B-36?" And I said,
17 "Yeah." He said, "Oh, okay." I said, "Why?" He said, "I was there." I said, "Get out!"
18 He said, "No." A lot of people didn't understand. Once again, being in the Army and
19 being around and then being with Special Forces and then wanting to go to Special
20 Forces and working with them, we basically knew what the operations were all about and
21 why we were there. We freed them up to go farther and further and do what they were
22 supposed to be doing. And then everybody woke up on 1 February, 1969, all thirteen
23 LRRP units, which were now lettered LRRP, the E Company 20th Infantry, F Company
24 58th Infantry. Even though they were assigned to the 101st Airborne they were F
25 Company 58th Long Range Patrol. It was just a designator. They brought back the old
26 regimental system and they changed everyone in country and there was two LRRP
27 companies. One was Stateside, one was in Europe and one was A and one was B and
28 then they made them lettered Ranger companies and they took the lineage from Merrill's
29 Marauders, which were the 75th Rangers—actually they started out as the 4705 Provincial
30 and they're the ones that fought in Papua New Guinea and China and that group. They
31 were away from the battalion so to speak and then they became the 75th Infantry in

1 Okinawa. Then they deactivated them. So then the reactivated them on 1 February, '69,
2 and we, being the biggest and the baddest, became C Company. And we had C through P
3 but we never used J when we name a company. We don't use that letter because it can be
4 misinterpreted as other letters. It's like A, B, C, D, E, F. Yeah, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I,
5 K, L, M, N, O, P. There's no Julia Company. And we were Charlie Rangers then. When
6 I went back in to the service I saw the Rangers, the sound, the name, but the people who
7 came to our unit—we had guys like Dave Tolby who had been there five years and had
8 already won the Medal of Honor. He could have went anywhere. Where did he go? He
9 came to our company. Other guys who had had the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross)
10 who had been over there four or five years, where'd they go? Charlie 75th Rangers
11 because we were taking care of business. And then when they hooked us with the 173rd,
12 which was November Company, they were ass kickers. We fit in perfect. It was a good
13 way to end because we started out of the 101st, evolved through the help of them to
14 become Charlie 75th and then was assigned with the 173rd LRRPs when we finished and
15 they were the only two Airborne units in Vietnam except for the 82nd and they sent the 3rd
16 Brigade there for a year and realized that they screwed up.

17 RV: Well, Joey, why don't we stop for today and we'll pick up from here.

18 JW: I was just about to say that.

19 RV: Okay, good. We'll pick up here in our next session, okay? Thank you.

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 5 of 10
October 27, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am conducting an oral history
2 interview with Joey Welsh. We are continuing today on October 27, 2005. I am in
3 Lubbock, Texas, and Joey is again in Castroville, Texas. Joey, let's pick up
4 approximately where we left off last time. We were discussing some of the missions and
5 some of the different things you did while out on your patrols and your missions. I
6 wanted to ask you if you could make some comments about the effectiveness and the way
7 you all operated in such small groups. Most people didn't do what you did. Most people
8 worked in larger, platoon-size or maybe squad sometimes, but really platoon-size or
9 company-size operations—those who were in the Army or the Marine Corps on the
10 ground. What can you say about operating such a small unit and how it worked for you?

11 Joseph Welsh: First of all, like you said, every major unit in the infantry has a
12 recon element. And the first one, the 173rd went over there they had what they called the
13 Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol. It was a detachment because they were brigade
14 level. Then the 101st came over and they had the 101st Long Range Reconnaissance
15 Patrol and these were guys who were hand picked, usually attached to the headquarters
16 element and through the S2 we learned from lessons learned that we're not sending in a
17 hundred and fifty men. They are not going to find the enemy unless the enemy wants to
18 find you. Because they'll sit on the hilltop and they'll hear them fifteen choppers
19 coming. So there was a need for small units that are trained basically to shoot, move and
20 communicate behind enemy lines. Basically our unit was organized with really highly
21 trained and motivated soldiers. In fact, most of them had at least six months in combat.

22 RV: How important was it for them to have that experience to be with you all?

23 JW: Well, very important because we would be going—at the time there was only
24 brigade-level LRRPs. In other words, they went out only so far for their brigade. They
25 worked for their unit. We were going to be a corps asset so we were taking a whole corps
26 of them, which was the III Corps, which, if you begin at the bottom, Delta is I, then II,
27 then III, then the DMZ area is IV. So we had from the west, which was Ho Chi Minh
28 Trail entry all the way across to the east. That's the way they cut it down. Most of the

1 guys had at least six months in combat and they had to undergo an intensive selection
2 program before they were assigned. It was all volunteer. So in my case I volunteered for
3 airborne, I volunteered Vietnam, I volunteered for LRRPs. So I was a three-time
4 volunteer and most of them were. Really only the best could prevail because once you
5 went through the training you would be assigned to a team and they would take you out
6 once or twice and if you didn't cut it you were gone. That was it. You could be peered
7 out. If you was good and they felt you was worthy of it and everything like that, they felt
8 that you was going to work out then they would try to get you down to the MACV
9 Recondo School, which in my twenty-five years it was probably the best school ever. It
10 was run by the old B-52 guys from SF and it was only school in the world where in order
11 to graduate you actually had to go on a live combat mission.

12 RV: Yeah, you already describe Recondo School.

13 JW: Oh, I'm sorry.

14 RV: No, that's good. Well, once you get out and you start operating these small
15 units, how long does it take for you to prove yourself?

16 JW: Our unit wasn't formed until 1967 and what we did was we took half of the
17 unit from the old-timers from the 101st so we really kind of raped (laughs) one of the best
18 LRRP companies around and then we got the new guys. So our unit was organized to
19 provide long range reconnaissance, surveillance, target acquisition, and special site
20 missions on a corps level basis and usually operated in four to six-man teams. Now we
21 also had the capacity to operate as a platoon-size force and conduct regular recon and
22 force mission. Or we could do search and rescue or snatch mission, which is trying to get
23 a POW or POW rescue. And a lot of times we were attached to Special Forces units
24 quite a bit. We were in Pleiku and B Company was there. We trained with them a lot
25 and plus we went through Recondo. When they formed it we had the largest unit, two
26 hundred and forty-one men and that's just on the platoon side. That's four platoons with
27 seven six-men teams plus you had your communication platoon and your headquarters
28 platoon. Now due to the Army manpower mismanagement they had to start thinking that
29 six months from September, half of them guys are ready to leave because they've been in
30 combat for six months before they made up the company. So we slowly started losing
31 guys and you'd lose guys for one reason or another—KIA, got wounded in action, any

1 numerous amount of reasons. We were running like maybe four or five-men teams.
2 Now if you get with a team and you develop yourself—well, let me put it this way.
3 When you first get there, regardless of your experience you will be assigned to a team or
4 you will go through two weeks of indoctrination and then you're assigned to a team.
5 Then the team takes you out and they critique you. They help you. They don't try to get
6 rid of you. They try to help you and see how you're doing.

7 RV: How long does it take for them to kind of accept you?

8 JW: Well, it depends. I had already been over there for a year and had been
9 running patrols.

10 RV: So that gave you instant credibility.

11 JW: No, no, not at all. What it did was I was a lot easier—it was easier for me to
12 adapt than a guy who might come from a grunt unit or just from the States but things
13 were getting so bad that we needed to be pulling guys from the States and that's why they
14 had to go through the selection program because in the summer of '68 we were running
15 really low. So I went on two missions and went straight to Recondo School. And four of
16 us went to Recondo School, one—as a matter of fact, the first week—one was put out
17 academically the second week, I graduated the third week and one was recycled for one
18 week. So it was really an intense, very, very professional but very, very intense school.
19 And the only people who did go through it were US LRRPs and Rangers, Korean LRRPs
20 and rangers, Thais, and Australians. The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)
21 could not and would not go through it. We were called upon to train them and we sent a
22 platoon up and after two classes the commanders, the ARVN Commanders, were a little
23 bit—they were pissed off because only thirty percent of the people were graduating.

24 RV: And that's not enough for them

25 JW: No, the attrition rate wasn't too good. So basically the Platoon Leader called
26 back and said, "Hey, we want them all to graduate," and he said, "Hey, pack it up and
27 come home." We weren't going to do that. Now, they weren't ARVN Rangers. ARVN
28 Rangers are an entirely different operation. They're trained by SF. But the ARVN, they
29 just weren't—I guess everybody had been doing their fighting for them so long that they
30 just didn't have it in them. So we were operating in four to six-men teams at a corps
31 level, meaning any unit working within that corps, whether it's Corps Headquarters,

1 South Korean Army, ARVN Army, anybody that has intelligence about a certain area.
2 It's a lot better to send in four or give men and sneak around for four or five days to try
3 and confirm if this intelligence is good, rather than put in a hundred and fifty men,
4 jeopardize maybe them getting whacked, or if Charlie don't want to be found, he will not
5 be found by a hundred and fifty guys.

6 RV: But you guys could find him?

7 JW: Right, because we knew what they eat and breathe like. I mean once you
8 become—one you get into that type of unit and you bond as a team, there's no talking
9 anywhere but the thought process is always the same. "We know what to do if. We
10 always know what to do if." As impatient as Americans are, I never thought that I could
11 do it. Well, when you're going through MACV Recondo School, they'll say, "Okay,
12 we're going to stop here." You made one adjustment. You might sit there two and a half
13 hours. If you move you leave the course. So the idea was that you had to have patience
14 to just move slow and never talk. Everything was done in hand signals and once you got
15 that team that worked together all the time they were very, very lethal because they just—
16 I don't know, the expression was, "I could smell a boot from five hundred meters." We
17 went into a mechan isolation period prior—no shaving, no shower, no nothing. Scrubby,
18 dirty stuff. We want to smell like the jungle when we go in. Any eating we did, we had
19 the little larp packets. We'd mix them up, eat a little bit and then wrap them up and put
20 them in our pocket and move. I won't say people didn't smoke but when they did they
21 basically knew what they were doing and how to do it. And like I said, in our instance,
22 we were so far out that we needed a commo platoon that would be set out in between the
23 base camp we were working out of and the area we were in on top of the biggest
24 mountain they could find, just so we could get communication relayed back through
25 them. They were called x-ray teams. It could be maybe eight or ten of them. Without
26 them you could not communicate. Nowadays with the satellite and little ten-pound radio
27 you can communicate. I used to communicate from Thailand to Okinawa. It's nothing
28 on satellite but in them days we had a prick-25.

29 RV: Joey, describe that radio. What was the size and weight?

30 JW: It was around twenty-five pounds. I guess what we did was—how we lined
31 up—everybody did different and you can rotate. There's no set rule. It's what works.

1 The situation dictates. We don't go by no, "The FM says this." Now of course when
2 you're in the beginning of your training you've got to start somewhere but once you learn
3 from your experiences you're not going to be following the book. We did what we felt
4 would work. For instance we would have a point man. The point man was usually very,
5 very stealth-like. He wasn't rattled easily and he just had that sixth sense.

6 RV: Do you actually train somebody for that?

7 JW: No.

8 RV: You just kind of find out that this person is ready now?

9 JW: Yeah. Well, like me, I finally became the point man of my team. I wanted
10 that, I had done it before, but I just felt—but sometimes you've got to pull them off
11 because they get burnt. And the slack man, he takes up the slack but he worries more
12 about what direction we should be moving. So the point man doesn't have to worry
13 about messing with a compass or nothing. He's got a general idea and real good map
14 reading skills, he has an idea of what terrain pieces to look for but the slack man keeps
15 him sort of in line and takes up his slack. Behind him would normally be the Team
16 Leader. Behind the Team Leader would be a scout with the radio and then behind him
17 would be a scout or two scouts, depending upon what we had. Some Team Leaders
18 preferred to carry the radio on their own. This way they don't have to look for anybody.
19 They've got it right there and they can do all the talking on their own. It would just
20 depend, like I said, basically on the team. It's not really that much heavier or anything
21 like that. Everybody splits up the load. In other words, everybody will carry an extra
22 battery. If we take out any extra equipment or something bigger, a 60 or something, then
23 everybody carries some ammo so we kind of share the load. So if we were given a
24 specific reason or target then what happens is the Team Leader and Assistant Team
25 Leader get the briefing. They go brief the team and tell them the who, what, when,
26 where, why, and how. "Now, go to work." And what these guys do, a good team, is
27 they're told exactly what to get, they get all the equipment ready, they prepare
28 everything, they get everything ready, and the day before the Team Leader will go up
29 with usually the chopper pilot and the platoon—the Team Leader and the Platoon Leader
30 will go up but the Platoon Leader usually oversees the infiltration and all from the air.
31 What we'll do is we'll explain to the chopper pilots, "Okay, here's our AO and we'd like

1 to fly this route and we're looking at maybe here or there and we need to pick out a
2 primary landing zone and an alternate." It's kind of contradicting to a LRRP. If I go into
3 my primary and they shoot the hell out of us, I think we've accomplished our mission.
4 Now you go chase them. No, wrong answer. As long as nobody's wounded you're
5 going to go into an alternate and find out who shot you.

6 RV: When you say, go into an alternate, what do you mean?

7 JW: An alternate landing zone. In other words—

8 RV: You're going to take it somewhere else and find out what's going on.

9 JW: Yeah. So in other words, out of maybe a six-klick area, you'll fly that thing
10 and what you're doing as the Team Leader is you're getting—you're looking at terrain,
11 how it's set up, can you see any blue lines, can you see any trails, are there any good
12 LZs—not too big but where you can get in—and then you have to find another one and
13 not really that close. So in other words you were doing an aerial observation recon and in
14 that you'd tell the chopper pilot, "Okay, this is going to be my primary. I want to go in
15 on my second dip." That would mean he would be flying your area and just like any
16 other chopper he would drop down and make like a false insertion. He would drop down
17 but he wouldn't leave you off. The second time he dropped down he would be at your
18 primary drop zone and he would drop you all. Then he would continue to do and then the
19 third time he'd drop down and do another fake one and then just do like a fly around like
20 he was patrolling. And we would get off and hit the wood line. As soon as we were in
21 the wood line we would freeze for about fifteen minutes. We don't move. And that's to
22 get your senses right. Then we'd do a commo check with the CC, Command and Control
23 ship, which is out of sight and once we got the commo check that was it and we'd be on
24 our way and we would move in a pre-designated route that we had decided on prior to
25 and we would send in four reps a day and they were only like six-liners and they were all
26 coded.

27 RV: Can you explain that? What do you mean?

28 JW: Okay. You have an SOI, which was—now they call them Communications
29 Electronics Operations Order but it's a little book. It's wrapped around your throat and
30 tied to you and everything like that. It has all your call signs for everything, everything
31 from a chopper on up to a B-52. And when you call in your situation report it will have

1 maybe five lines or something like that. Where you're at, your location, your time, any
2 activities, and a couple other things, just so they pinpoint you on the map. Then of course
3 you have your proposed movement. They try to see if you're staying on your movement.
4 If at anytime the Team Leader feels that we need to move because the maps are old and
5 going seventy or eight knots in the chopper, you don't see what you see when you get on
6 the ground. So we might be in there and say, "Look, there's a blue line down there," or
7 "There's a jeep and we just ran into a huge trail that's being used which we couldn't see
8 from the air due to the canopy." It might be a place to set up an ambush. So we would
9 stop, send in the rep that we are sending along this area, waiting to see if anybody comes
10 along.

11 RV: How long would you have to wait? Was it varied?

12 JW: Well, it would depend on when you hit it. If you hit it in the middle of the
13 day you could sit there for several hours. Charlie a lot of times—when you're good,
14 Charlie has no idea that you're there. You're in his backyard. He'll come tumbling on
15 down the trail at any time.

16 RV: Not knowing you're there?

17 JW: Right, not knowing we're there. Talking and all, you can here them coming.
18 Then again he might come and there might be a hundred of them or two hundred of them
19 so you don't ambush. (Laughs)

20 RV: You just hold tight.

21 JW: Huh?

22 RV: You just hang tight right there.

23 JW: You just hang tight and you don't do nothing. I've had guys stop and take a
24 piss and they'd almost be pissing on you. You'd just let them go and hopefully nobody
25 sees you and then you want until they move on and then you'll call in your report and
26 then usually what we'll do is get the fast movers out and get prepared for an extraction
27 and/or reactionary force to come and then, knowing the routes that they're going and then
28 what we'd do is just start calling in the stuff, everything from artillery to jet fighters. I
29 call them jet fighters but we called them fast movers. We'd just try to tear them up.
30 Then again the order that might be given is "Pursue." In other words, "Where the hell
31 have they gone?" Because they might lead you to a base camp.

1 RV: What was optimal thing you wanted them to do, lead you to a base camp like
2 that?

3 JW: Well, it depends because they're not that dumb.

4 RV: They're assuming they're being watched?

5 JW: In the first group, the way they made a lot of mistakes is the first time what
6 would happen is three or four guys would come tripping along. "Oh man, it's perfect,"
7 and they'd slam them. Well, they didn't know that two hundred meters behind them was
8 a company so they would send somebody purposely up there. Like if we send somebody
9 up there we go up there and go slow but if they're in their backyard they'll send three or
10 four people to walk advance. Now you've got to make that decision when they get in that
11 kill zone whether you feel that we should go for this. I would go for, if they're dressed
12 real good and they're NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and all then they've got plenty of
13 friends around. Now, we can knock these guys down. They might be two miles from
14 their base camp; they might be two hundred meters. There might be two hundred guys
15 following them, there might be nobody following them so you would have to call it on
16 the spot. And once you commit yourself then all hell breaks loose. But usually you'd
17 have that gut feeling and they also had trail watchers, which would be guys that would set
18 up on a trail or on the side of a trail in hopes of finding Americans who had a bad
19 tendency to follow trails come walking along the trail or along side of it across it or
20 whatever. Very rarely did we ever hit a trail unless we were in such thick stuff and we
21 had to get down and across it or something like that. But it would be one at a time and as
22 tactical as we could. You try to stay off the trail but there has been times when you look
23 up and at the same time he's looking down and you're going simultaneously. You're
24 both popping tabs and you know right then and there that his friends are on the way. So
25 you do the most damage you can and you never return the way you came.

26 RV: Now, I think I understand why but explain exactly why you would no want to
27 do that.

28 JW: Okay. You never return the way you came because Charlie would purposely
29 let, especially LRRPs, more so than the grunts, would purposely let you go by if you was
30 not going near anything because they knew that if they struck us, unless they annihilated
31 us quick we could wreak havoc on them. If they were an infantry company they'd leave

1 them go by because they had an ambush set up farther down the area and then when the
2 guys would retreat they would be waiting for them. So whenever you go in to some way
3 you want to come out the opposite way so that the enemy's not already got your plotted.
4 That's basically it.

5 RV: Tell me again how the North Vietnamese, or I guess the VC, but really this is
6 the North Vietnamese Army we're talking about until are responding to you guys in
7 North Vietnam or no.

8 JW: No, I wasn't in North Vietnam. We weren't allowed in there.

9 RV: (Laughs) Well, yes, but we know that both companies operated in North
10 Vietnam.

11 JW: Well, yeah, but you're talking North Vietnam being up in the IV Corps area,
12 which is DMZ.

13 RV: Well, above the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone).

14 JW: We were on the III Corps area which was Central Highlands, Pleiku area on
15 the west coast, which was Nha Trang and stuff like that. That was where one of the main
16 corridors of the Ho Chi Minh trail came in. I don't know if these are declassified or not
17 but we all know that—

18 RV: They're pretty much declassified.

19 JW: That was basically—that's why you had a CCN and CCS, Command and
20 Control North and Command and Control South in MACV SOG. The South would do
21 the cross-border operations from a certain point down, west, like into Cambodia and then
22 the Command and Control North would do the ones up north. We worked more with the
23 CCN program and I was in Cambodia several times before we were supposed to be. It
24 looks the same. (Laughs)

25 RV: It was, it was going across an imaginary line.

26 JW: Pardon me?

27 RV: You're going across an imaginary line, the border, but it all looks the same.

28 JW: Yeah, you just know when you definitely—because you don't do no visual
29 recon so you've definitely got to know where you're at. And as I said at the beginning,
30 the problem and the mistake they made with our company being as large as it was—at the
31 same time as they formed the III Corps LRRPs they formed the II Corps LRRPs which

1 was a little bit smaller but they formed a helicopter squadron with them so they had four
2 or five Slicks and two or three gun ships that were there at their disposal. They were
3 assigned with that company which was so much more effective. Because if you live and
4 eat and breathe with them pilots, a bond forms with you. Now, like I mentioned chopper
5 pilots. If they didn't have the balls and tenacity that they had, they didn't know us from
6 nothing and I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you. But that was written up within six
7 months that we need dedication. We might go with any unit that's in that group in that
8 Corps and they want us to do their Intel and they have the 155th Aviation Company
9 supporting them so now you're like down on the lower level and you get a couple Slick
10 pilots and a few gunship pilot guys in there on the briefing and it's just not as personal.
11 There's been times when—and they're supposed to be dedicated. That means once they
12 drop you off that they sit and wait in case they're needed. But there has been times when
13 I've called for choppers and they didn't have any. Excuse me?

14 RV: What do you do?

15 JW: Yell. I mean we're already getting shot at and commo, we weren't very
16 tactful on communications. We figure if you haven't talked in three days and when you
17 hit contact you're screaming into that thing. "I'm in contact, I've got one man down, I'm
18 at this location, I need gun ships in the air, I need a Medevac, I need extraction, I need
19 some fast movers. Excuse me? What the hell do you mean there's no f-ing choppers?
20 You sorry son..." I swear on my children this guy said, "Run and hide." I said, "Where
21 the hell do you expect me to..." I'm cleaning this up a lot.

22 RV: Joey, you don't need to clean it up. You need to say it like it happened.

23 JW: (Laughs) "Where the fuck you think I'm going to run and hide? If I could
24 run and hide I wouldn't be getting shot at, you dumb-ass! I'll kill you when I get the fuck
25 back there, you pin-pushing motherfucker!" That's basically the way I would talk to him
26 because they let them choppers go somewhere else and I've called for a Medevac. "The
27 Medevac is refueling." "What do you mean he's refueling? How can he be refueling?"
28 Was any of our guys shot? No. That really, I would say, was our biggest downfall. If
29 we would have had a squadron—I say a squadron—the size of our company, we should
30 have had, I say, six to eight Slicks and maybe four to six gun ships. Assigned. Live, eat,
31 breathe, and travel with us and the maintenance section for them and we would have done

1 seventy percent better than we ever done just for that fact. Case in point, I'm in
2 Cambodia. I get to my point, I code in my pick-up point. I get back coded, "Wrong
3 coordinates." He brings back coordinates that has put me—and I'm two thousand meters
4 in—that's putting me back across the border. I do it one more time. He comes back with
5 the same thing. I turned off the radio and told everyone, "Radio silence." And you've
6 got to go up and whisper in their ear, "I don't like what's happening." I know teams that
7 went over there and never came back. Now, the person that put us in here knows where
8 to pick us up and this guy can't be the same guy so we walked out. We walked out and
9 once I crossed that border and we got in a secure position, which I would not give away, I
10 called headquarters and I laid it on them that, in code, we were—"I don't know what the
11 fuck happened but we aborted. We aborted the pick-up due to the fact that the pilot
12 would not come to our coordinates."

13 RV: How often did this happen?

14 JW: It only happened to me once in cross-border operations and everybody was
15 agreeable. They said, "Fuck, yeah, we don't know what's wrong with that son of a
16 bitch." They knew where we were supposed to get picked up. So we took our time,
17 walked out, and once we knew we were across the line and we were in a good location
18 we felt we were secure in then we called. Then they said, "Where are you?" We said,
19 "Well, we don't know about that." "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm not too sure. I
20 want you to send a bird dog out." So they sent a bird dog up and I knew where I was but
21 do you really? You don't know because of the map. So what I did was I gave the bird
22 dog an off coordinates, just so I could see him and then I signal mirrored him in. And
23 what he does is when he flies over he's lined up; he knows he's lined up. Right before he
24 gets there I'll say like, "Bingo," and he'll flap his wings a full turn and he'll put a dot and
25 he'll put you within ten meters of where you really are. At that time I felt that we were in
26 a good location, we had an LZ close by and he took a nice ride around for us and said
27 everything looked good and using him, he called in the gun support and the choppers and
28 into a small LZ and then they picked us up. Now when you return from a mission there's
29 teams—let's say you have five teams. Three are out, one is support, pushing them out,
30 helping them out, and one's on rest, and then they rotate around if you're lucky. Well,
31 the fourth team, as soon as we land they come up and they smother you and they get your

1 weapons and then they take you to what they call a detox. It's an isolated area where you
2 can take a shower and drink beer and just blow off steam. But I had basically threatened
3 to kill someone and so they didn't let me go to the after-action—well, they we send your
4 buddy. They send your best buddy. Because I come off that chopper—he didn't even
5 land and I was off the skids and running and boy they grabbed me.

6 RV: They're going to keep you safe, basically.

7 JW: They took me to detox and there I could scream and holler and rant and rave
8 and all that shit.

9 RV: While your buddy or someone else is going to debrief and take care of
10 business?

11 JW: Yeah. I think I was the ATL (Assistant Team Leader) and the TL (team
12 Leader), he was kind of freaked out so I was sort of running things and he just did what I
13 said and then he briefed. And I told him, I said, "You tell them if they want me, I'm right
14 here. Come and get me. Send that son of a bitch or I'll come up there and I'll
15 fucking..." I was pissed. And basically they risked our lives because they didn't have
16 the balls and say, "No, them planes, them birds are ours." And that in our history is
17 written about our 1st Commander. His report to the Corps Commander was, "We need
18 dedicated air support. We cannot survive and function efficiently when you go to support
19 a unit that's being supported by another unit for their aviation." And it's not the chopper
20 pilot's fault. He's told to go do here and who knows? Why, I don't know. But it's
21 happened to me on a couple of occasions but when it happened to me over there from
22 being with Project Omega and stuff like that and knowing about teams going over there
23 and not coming back, when he told me that he—in other words he was saying he wasn't
24 coming, then I radioed silence and boy, they were pissed because they called me for—
25 well, we spent the night so they called me all that day and the next morning and all. So
26 when I finally made contact, when I felt that I was in a secure enough position to protect
27 my men and also I wanted a witness. That's why I called the bird dog. I told them, "I
28 don't know where I'm at. Send the bird dog to this location around." And this way the
29 bird dog was up there monitoring everything and I felt that that bird dog was—if they
30 tried to do anything stupid, the bird dog was right there.

31 RV: Was the bird dog award that this was probably what was happening?

1 JW: No. I believe that—see, since I was in country the bird dog, they did this all
2 the time, they'd take their little ride. And usually your Platoon Leader was in the back.
3 That's the only place they ever were worth shit anyway. Not all of them, but mine. But
4 you could do that to any bird dog. If you seen a bird dog and it was quiet and no one was
5 around, I'd try to get them on the radio but if I couldn't, I would flash them in a heartbeat
6 and then he'd get onto our frequency and I'd get him to just fly over and give us a grid
7 check because he's going to put you within ten meters. And you feel pretty damn good if
8 you're within two hundred because of the maps. But then you know exactly where you
9 are so you're pinpointed on the map so whenever you move and/or call anything in
10 you've got to know where you're at. That's the bottom line. And that's what probably
11 is—your lifeline is the radio and the map. If you can't function on the ground and really
12 know where you're at, at all times then you know you're moving through shit and get
13 tangled up. That's why you've got two men usually counting the pace and the direction.
14 That's the slack man and usually you'll have the point man who, without even using the
15 map, by terrain analysis keeps you were you're supposed to be.

16 RV: How hard is it to get over to where you are on these kinds of patrols?

17 JW: Pardon me?

18 RV: How hard is it to keep up with where you are exactly on these kinds of
19 patrols?

20 JW: Well, it's not hard because we didn't move for long periods of time.
21 Depending on the terrain, we moved slow, very slow, and purposefully. Everybody's
22 eyes and ears are open. We might move for ten minutes, stop, look, listen, feel, move
23 another ten or fifteen minutes and that would just go on and on.

24 RV: How far apart physically are you from each other?

25 JW: That would depend on the terrain also. If it's wide open terrain you've got to
26 open up a little bit because I've been in some stuff that I felt like I was in upstate
27 Pennsylvania or North Carolina. It was just too open and I didn't like it. And then once
28 we hit a field or an open area that's not on the map then we'll box it, or if we hit a river or
29 a lake. I'll come up on a lake and I'll shoot an azimuth across the lake and get that
30 azimuth where I'm supposed to be on and then I'll do a right angle to the right and then
31 to the left and then to the left and then I'll do a back azimuth so we should be on the same

1 point and continue to go. Same way with the field. We're going to go into a field, and if
2 it's not that big we won't have to shoot it but on a major terrain with a lake or something,
3 you pick something very distinguishable on the other side of the lake that you can shoot
4 an azimuth off of and then you get a back azimuth and then you do ninety degrees
5 basically around it and get back on track.

6 RV: How long does this take to do? I guess it depends on terrain, obviously, and
7 the weather.

8 JW: Yeah, it doesn't matter. You're not going to cross the lake (laughs) but you
9 want to make sure—it's almost like what we used to call a LRRP Astro Projection.
10 You're just going to wind up across the lake right at the same location that you put that
11 compass on so that you're staying on your azimuth. Because three degrees off and in a
12 thousand meters that can put you way off. And what you do is you used the terrain
13 association. You're looking at that map and you say, "Okay, I'm going to move about
14 two hundred meters and I should see this saddle to my left. And then I'm going to move
15 and change my azimuth," and so you use terrain association. If you move two or three
16 hundred meters and you ain't seen no saddle or nothing then you start getting a little bit
17 suspicious. Or let's use a blue line. "Okay, we're going to move and when we get to the
18 blue line and we see the blue line then we're going to do a ninety and we're going to run
19 along the blue line to monitor it for where we might be able to pick up a good spot." Of
20 course everybody needs water. Now there's been times when we've needed water and
21 you can call in for re-supply. I never ever called in for re-supply and we were up in the
22 thick, triple-canopy stuff and we were working with—I won't mention the units but they
23 were calling in re-supply so they fly over you and they drop in these five-gallon plastic
24 barrels. Pretty soon you could here them, "I want two packs of Winston," and in the
25 meantime we were on these big, big, huge rocks, all covered with moss. I would take
26 like three canteens at a time and I was sitting up there and because it is triple-canopy
27 there are a lot of little puddles if you know where to find them. I would just take my little
28 thing and take my time and I'd fill up my canteen, throw a couple tablets in it, shake it
29 up, and we filled everybody's canteens up while we listened to these guys getting these
30 choppers riding over the top of their position, throwing out these bundles and shit and we
31 were saying, "Jesus, why don't you just shoot up flares and let everybody know where

1 you're at?" But that comes with experience. We were underneath—like a huge
2 monstrous rock was jutting out from the side of the mountain so we got in there where we
3 know no one could see us from the top. We had like a little fortress. And then what I did
4 is I scouted up top and found these little puddles all over the place. And after maybe six
5 or eight trips everybody was full of water and that's it. I don't know if they—I know
6 they were in the same terrain and the same area because we were actually helping them
7 out. But usually our mission was from a higher headquarters, say their division, saying,
8 "Okay, we have information that there's a communications system of some sort in this
9 general location. Would you check it out?" Now, this is so far out that we had to have
10 radio x-ray and all that kind of stuff. No friendlies are in the area and have never been as
11 far as they know. So they'll send us out on things like that. From doing it, once you start
12 getting near the place you feel that it might be, because it happens, the first thing that we
13 hit was a pongee field. So nobody got—we got through it so we knew we were on the
14 right track. And then we came down into a saddle and as we started down the saddle
15 there was a sapling maybe six inches in diameter and it was fresh cut, just one slice and it
16 was falling and leaning toward this direction a little bit off to the right where we were
17 going, which was the top of the next mountain on the saddle. So it was coming to the
18 time, it was like four or five. We always set up before dark. Charlie sets up after dark.
19 Charlie moves before light, we move right after light. That's the way the deal was.

20 RV: You learned that from experience or did they tell you this?

21 JW: Yeah, yeah, that's the way it was. He knew that terrain so much better than
22 he could move at night easier because he knew the trail system and everything like that.
23 And we would play hell trying to get out at night when that chopper's got to turn on that
24 big old flood light and stuff. So that's the way we worked it. Right at twilight we would
25 pick the thickest stuff that might take us an hour to crawl into, the thickest terrain we
26 could find and just get bunched up in a little wagon wheel. So if it took us an hour of
27 creeping into it, the enemy, unless they tried to creep into it would definitely have to
28 make some noise to get to us. And by that time it would be just about—the sun had
29 already set and darkness is setting in. And then I've been awoken with the hand over my
30 mouth and the hand on my chest and I know what that means. And I just open my eyes
31 and then I know that there's something there. I would guesstimate maybe thirty yards

1 away there's a bonfire going and there's fifteen or twenty VC out there cooking and
2 eating and just having a good time. We're in this thick stuff but we can see all that's
3 happening. So I reach in and we had—I had the medic kit. I was Medic. We had this
4 really strong codeine. Those would take a half a tablet to sustain you all. I gave every
5 one of them two, which normally we didn't knock anybody out. But I knew that the
6 adrenaline would keep them going but the codeine would keep them, hopefully their
7 bodily functions, from doing anything stupid like sneezing or coughing and we just all
8 laid there and watched and waited and they sort of mumbled off. One guy sat there and I
9 guess, I don't know, at a certain time of the morning when it was still dark they pick
10 everything up. They were making noise. They didn't even know we were there. They
11 packed everything up and they started just while it was still dark and you can barely see
12 them. Off they go. So as they're moving away, once we make sure that they're all gone,
13 what we'll do is we'll send like two guys out just a little bit to watch while we get all our
14 gear together and call in a sit rep and then we make our decision. Follow them or what?
15 But in this one instance the guys that were up there were giving us the thumbs up. They
16 could still see exactly where they were going so we just called in a total fire for effect and
17 the guy said, "Danger close." And I said, "Shoot it," and he shot it and that was it.

18 RV: Do you have a silencer?

19 JW: No, it's artillery. Danger close means it's within six hundred meters of your
20 position and they'll tell you, "Danger close." And I tell them, "Shoot that son of a bitch,"
21 and these two guys—I'd say maybe twelve to sixteen rounds laying within fifty meters of
22 that position in a matter of ten seconds and that was it. We asked, "Do you want a
23 BDA," a Bomb Damage Assessment, and they said, "No, what do you see?" He said,
24 "Just a bunch of shredded everything." Everything was shredded. I mean you've got
25 bigger 155s and there's probably twelve or sixteen of them laying within twelve seconds
26 within fifty or a hundred meters of their position, they're dead. So they just chalk it up
27 where they were and they tell us to continue the mission. That was smart because rather
28 than go down there and take the chance of who knows—eight or ten of them sitting on
29 the side waiting—you don't know. There wasn't much left of anything. There wasn't
30 much left of the terrain so we know there's not like documents that are in place and stuff
31 like that so it's sort of a judgment call. Another time we were doing hill humping.

1 That's up, you've got communications, down, no communications, you're up and down,
2 up and down, up and down. And every time we would go down we wouldn't have any
3 commo. It was a constant hump and it was hard humping up and slippery on the way
4 down and we felt that we were moving too fast and we decided to do a loop. We got all
5 the odds against us, let's do a loop. Let's go back, do a ninety, a loop around.

6 RV: Whose call was that? Was that yours or the Team Leader's?

7 JW: That was the team. We were just getting exhausted and we started losing our
8 concentration. We stopped and we said, "Look, we are throwing up. We're up and
9 down, up and down. If we get caught in a valley we're screwed so let's do a loop." So in
10 other words, what we did is we went back down the opposite way but not the same place.
11 We shot a ninety and went down and then we looped around and we came back up real
12 slow. It took us a half a day and we got back up on the side of the mountain. The same
13 one we started at but a different location. And all of the sudden we heard, "Thump,
14 thump." We said, "Oh shit." You could see the mountain across from you. All of the
15 sudden we're seeing explosions over there. So here Charlie had seen our tracks and
16 figured that we had turned around and went down and was shooting rockets and mortars
17 and he was, I would say three hundred meters on the same hill as us, shooting. No, he
18 was farther than that but he was shooting over at the next hill, trying to catch us going up
19 it. So what we did was we just backed up a little bit, we pinpointed his position, and
20 these were deep, thick mountains. I'll never forget it as long as I live because when that
21 big old fast movers came in, I know he didn't see me but he looked me right in the eyes
22 and smiled as he pressed that thing and released the five hundred pound bomb. And boy,
23 that thing just took out that whole [makes explosion noise]. I'll never forget that. It
24 looked like he was looking me in the eyes but he looked right at our position and smiled
25 with this big grin and all of the sudden you see this big, huge five-hundred pound bomb
26 right on target. And you know that thing just [makes explosion noise]. And then another
27 one behind that and we just continued the mission and they finally got us out because it
28 was just senseless because if you get tired you get careless. We had been around and
29 together long enough to stop and say, "Okay, we're screwing up. We've been beating
30 this bush and if anyone's around here they're either waiting for us or following us." So

1 we made a plan, we did a loop, and it worked. Now there might have not been no one
2 there but it worked.

3 RV: Hey, Joey, how does it feel there in that moment?

4 JW: Oh, it felt like—not as good as an orgasm but that makes your team so much
5 tighter because you just look at each other and say, “Yeah, we are the king of the jungle.”
6 Because we knew we were doing wrong. We were tired. It was down and leaches and
7 then up and commo and then down and no commo and we knew that we were tired,
8 frustrated and we were getting careless.

9 RV: How does it feel to know that you’re being watched? The enemy has its
10 sights on you.

11 JW: Well, at that time we didn’t know. We felt that it’s possible, the way we
12 were moving, that we had alerted someone and they could be waiting for us or following
13 us so let’s do the old loop around, take our time, get our—and once we got out at the
14 outer perimeter of the loop we do a little resting, a little eating and all, and we get our
15 thoughts together and “What do we do if,” and then we go back into the area. These guys
16 must have been tracking or something and they seen where—it was muddy and all—and
17 they think, “Okay, fresh tracks, yeah they turned here and they went back down,” and
18 they’re thinking, “Ah ha. They’re trying to come around and ambush us. Now we’ll get
19 them.” So they figured I guess in the time that we had moved and all and so they started
20 slamming rockets and mortars onto the other mountain. Just basically what we would
21 call recon by fire, just to see if they could get us to fire back. But they really thought
22 that’s where we were. And really we were on the same side of the hill as them.

23 RV: (Laughs) Got to make you feel good.

24 JW: Oh yeah. It makes you feel good because everyone agrees, everyone listens,
25 everyone understands and everyone does their best to put the plan in effect and make it
26 work. And when something like that happens you can’t tear that from us. And
27 headquarters is listening to this. “You’re going to what?” We don’t explain, we just send
28 in a sit rep. And there are some good officers up there saying, “Yeah, they’re in some
29 damn really rough shit. That’s a damn good move because they’re up and down and
30 every time they go down they have no commo. So if they get caught in the down slope
31 they’re screwed.” That’s what they told us later, “Excellent call, smart move.” In that

1 kind of terrain you can only be so quiet and after a while you've got leaches all over you
2 from being down in the bottom and you just—some teams might have kept on going. We
3 were a team that had decided. I remember saying, "I agree. We are screwing up, guys.
4 We have been humping for a couple hours now and we don't know what the fuck. Is that
5 the bottom of the next valley?"

6 RV: And you have no radio contact down there.

7 JW: Right. So we did the old cowboy and Indian thing, you know, or whatever
8 you want to call it. And by that time, not only that but we were rested, we had our gear
9 rearranged, we had the leaches off us and now we were going to be the hunters and not
10 the hunted.

11 RV: So you called in the world on them?

12 JW: Oh, oh yeah. You call in a couple of them and you can forget it because they
13 have the mountain is gone. Now on the guys that were on the campfire, now, we called
14 artillery on them because, depending on your location you have so many supporting
15 units. You might have ARVN artillery, American artillery, etc, etc, etc. If you have
16 some close artillery, especially American, you want to work with them because it's more
17 of a silent kill than this aircraft coming. And because we knew where we were—because
18 when we set up we gave our position and everything like that—and these guys were just
19 on a stroll and we just let them get far enough out. When I called it in the guy said,
20 "Danger close," and I said, "Shoot it." And he knows who he's talking to and when we
21 say shoot it, they shoot it. We talk of fire affect and you've got batteries shooting and
22 you're going to get at least twelve—well, I've got the thirty-six—but maybe twelve to
23 sixteen rounds within twelve seconds within fifty to a hundred meters of that position and
24 there was only about fifteen or twenty of them. There was no sense in doing the bomb
25 damage assessment or anything because the terrain was just a big hole.

26 RV: Was there any chance of any stragglers being left around?

27 JW: Maybe.

28 RV: Would you go looking?

29 JW: Maybe but they gave us a body count of twelve or fifteen or whatever it was.
30 In an ambush it's different. Now, an ambush you crawl up and you try to get documents
31 and never stand up in an ambush and then you try to get as much as you can off of them

1 and pop anybody that's not dead and then crawl back and get the hell out of there. But on
2 something like this or something like the one where they had the campfire or the one
3 where they were shooting off of the same mountain you let them get far enough away and
4 you call in the biggest shit around. If they're alive they can't hear, they're bleeding from
5 the nose and they're bumping into trees, I guarantee you that. You know what I mean?
6 So why jeopardize your mission? They don't know what hit them so you take off and
7 continue your mission. You see what I'm getting at?

8 RV: Yeah, oh yeah.

9 JW: And then if any of their friends come, they don't know what the hell
10 happened. We had intercepted a unit that had listeners and I don't know when it came
11 down, there's so many different details about it but eventually they started—now, this
12 could have been their way of propaganda, too, reverse psychology—that they were the
13 NVA and VC. Primarily NVA were trained LRRP hunter/killer teams. They didn't call
14 us—what did they call us? Recondo—that was the translation. Recondo teams were in
15 the area beyond the alert. Sometimes we would get a classified line that would be a
16 special line for any special instructions. And they might say in radio interception,
17 “Recondo team in the area.” That could mean that they have spotted you already and
18 they're just watching. And like I said, if you don't go after their water or their women
19 and you don't see anything that could compromise them, I know that they'll let you go
20 rather than jeopardize hitting these four or give guys who, with a couple calls could call
21 in the whole world and jeopardize their, maybe, who knows. That communication
22 bunker, which we never made it to, by the way, because they hit us in the morning, I
23 mean, they annihilated that. When they got down with that, you could drive Houston half
24 through it. I mean, that's how big it was. But since we had found it, let's say from the
25 trail markings and all, we felt that we were close and probably sitting on it. What they
26 did was—and my plan was—we will, instead of going up the saddle, we're going to go
27 around the whole mountain the hard way, but at least we'll have the cover. Go around
28 the side of the mountain and see if we can find anything because I don't think they're
29 going to have like a parking lot sign up top. But they spent the whole night just creeping
30 in and creeping in and then at first light, ugh. And we were on the side of the mountain
31 so that's when I called for a Medevac and they said he was refueling and I had to get the

1 guys—it killed the Team Leader and they just almost overran us. We got out with rope
2 ladders and McGuire rigs and stuff like that and then just called in everything that was
3 available and then they did a reaction. Part of what they'd do is they'd put a company in
4 the next day to see what happened and they said basically it was a collapsed huge tunnel.
5 You got to figure they'd been digging in for almost forty years since the French. I mean
6 they had underground tunnel systems that were elaborate. They had mountains that were
7 inside that were hospital operating rooms. But the way we felt, once you had a good
8 team, I would much rather be with five men any day than with fifty or a hundred and fifty
9 men that are gonna come slamming in on them helicopters, banging in and chopping their
10 way through that bush to go find Charlie because Charlie's been watching you since you
11 landed. So if you ever read—of course, some guy kept on calling me SALSA. He's a
12 good friend of mine. I said, "Rocky, that's not my name." SALSA, remember?

13 RV: Yeah.

14 JW: Stay Alert, Stay Alive. "Oh, okay, that's it, that's it. I was wondering why
15 you always say, 'SALSA' above your signature block." I said, "That's Stay Alert, Stay
16 Alive." Now, then we had—I know we're going to finish up—

17 RV: That's fine, go ahead, go ahead.

18 JW: Then when we started getting the shortage of personnel, that's when we
19 started putting in the Kit Carson scouts and being around—to me, let's take ESF. It
20 doesn't matter whether you like the people or not, you are the guest in their nation and
21 you are giving them and providing them with whatever you're supposed to be providing
22 them with.

23 RV: Joey, do you think that was hard for Americans to kind of figure that out and
24 live by?

25 JW: No. It was hard for the LRRPs because most of them came from common
26 grunt backgrounds. They LRRP with their brothers and now they've got these Chieu Hoi
27 guys that used to be in the NVA and the North Vietnamese Army and they didn't trust
28 them. To them, everybody was a gook. A gook is a gook is a gook, where the team that I
29 was supposed to go to on the third tour, they did cross-border operations. It might be
30 three Americans and five or six Montagnards and they lived, eat, breathe, spoke the
31 language, and ate the food and they were the most dependable indigenous personnel you

1 could find. So it was tough at first. These guys didn't want nothing to do with them.
2 They didn't trust them; they figured they'd lead them into ambushes, so it was a rough
3 transition. It was around right before I left and several of the guys who had worked with
4 ESF and with indigenous personnel before said, "These guys are definitely—you'll know
5 as soon as you get out there. You're going to think you're quiet. They're going to make
6 you look like an asshole, they move so good. They're walking up front." Number one, if
7 you ever, which we never did, but if you ever run into a friendly patrol, they'll get killed
8 first, accidentally. If you run into an enemy patrol, they're going to be upfront and
9 you're just going to have to work with them. We lost a couple of them and we got them
10 honored. We honored them, or I should say acknowledged them by putting them on our
11 wall of our KIAs in our units. And I mention them—every month I do a report. I started
12 it and I did it for a year. I wanted people to remember so at the end of the month, as the
13 new month begins, like November is coming, I would say something like, "Okay, this
14 month we're going to be celebrating Veteran's Day. Remember to support our troops
15 and remember our veterans. And we can never forget our warrior brothers who died in
16 the month of November." I do it by month, not by year, and then I say, "During the
17 month of November, Sergeant So and so, so and so, so and so, God bless our troops and
18 their families, and blah, blah, blah." So then I wrote and said I was going to stop doing it
19 because I had completed a year and I got a lot of people who said, "No, no, don't do it,"
20 because people that jump in this site occasionally and when they see the names then they
21 contact me and then that's what happened with the virtual wall, when I put a face with
22 every name up there when they had that program with Kinkos. It was like maybe 2001.
23 In the virtual wall, you know, the one up with the Vietnam Veteran's Wall, the Vietnam
24 Veterans Memorial Foundation. They had a program, *Put a Face With a Name*, and
25 Kinkos was supporting it so you could go in there and use their computer and they had
26 the format and all and I was in there over six hours just using their format just to get it set
27 up and it didn't cost me a dime and they're eighteen or twenty bucks an hour. And I
28 asked the lady when I was in there, I said, "How many people have been up here doing
29 it?" She said, "You're the first one." So then she said, "It's brand new so we're going to
30 have to work with it." And I thought it was a one-shot deal, once we got it locked in
31 we'd be good so I put the picture—and it had to be a disk for picture and a disk for text,

1 so I entered a picture in each one's profile and then I left a remembrance from us and it
2 automatically puts their picture from their profile down on the remembrance and I what I
3 wanted to do was put in the remembrance just a short bio of what our unit was all about
4 and it's done now. It took two or three years of research and doing it because what was
5 happening was, the next guy, they opened it up to everybody at the wall, Joe Blow would
6 come along and he would put in a remembrance and it would knock my photo out and
7 then we'd have our guy standing there with his arm around the guy, drinking a beer. So I
8 worked it out, I would be notified. I'd say, "I'd appreciate it if you would remove it. If
9 not, then this is the unit endeavor." Now if Mom sends the picture and she puts it up
10 there in her remembrance she'll usually say, "My beloved son," or whatever, then it
11 stays.

12 RV: It goes, yeah.

13 JW: It stays. So I eventually worked it out where the remembrance was from—
14 it's called Ranger Brother from E20 LRRP, C-75th Ranger. You click on that and it takes
15 the family or whoever to a real nice unit patch and then a short explanation of what their
16 son's unit was all about and it's come out, it's just awesome because they don't know
17 what he did or anything and it's basically what I told you our unit was about. Highly
18 motivated trained soldiers, only the best of the best, and the missions that we did and
19 stuff like that and it's got a really nice patch with the two scrolls over it and all. It took
20 me three years to get it right and it's right. Nobody's entered a picture except for a
21 couple of mothers and that picture only remains with their remembrance on the profile.
22 My remembrance stays the same. I got pretty good. What I did was I formally wrote to
23 these people, whoever they are, and I wrote them that on behalf of our unit, we want to
24 thank you for your dedication and professionalism of an un-sung, unheard of job that
25 nobody knows who you are or where you're at and I know that I have put you through
26 hell and I wrote them a really nice professional, with the cover letter and whole bit,
27 explaining that our unit appreciates and understands how hard your job is. A guy gets
28 that, your NCOIC (Non-commissioned Officer in Charge) or OIC (Officer in Charge).
29 "Hey, man, that's nice." This guy doesn't know us, they're sitting at some goddamn
30 computer think tank and they don't know nothing. I was getting—I would make twenty
31 changed a night and I sent that and I did it on my own. I cc'd the bosses and they'd say,

1 “Oh, good job, good job.” After that, my stuff was just clicking. And I didn’t do that for
2 that purpose but whenever I have a problem it is automatically fixed because I
3 specifically state what I want. I know if I was the NCOIC I would have framed that and
4 hung it up because I would say, “Look, we are important.” And this is a retired 1st
5 Sergeant. This isn’t some Joe Blow civilian. This guy knows how important your work
6 is and how hard we are working.

7 RV: Joey, how important is it for you now, looking back, to not only remember
8 and talk about your experiences but to remember those who served beside you and those
9 who didn’t come back with you?

10 JW: Well, that’s my goal, is the guys who didn’t make it. See, we’re dinosaurs.
11 We’re going to not be here so our website will dissolve. It was going to go to our parent
12 unit but we have decided to give it to you and I’m sure Roy and you have talked about
13 how that has to go about because we want a perpetual historical well—not, well put
14 together, but a professional site for people to go and forever see us. And the 75th has got
15 a pretty good site but they’re having a hard enough time managing it. They’re having to
16 manage every unit from Vietnam to the present so we have developed a format so for
17 every man I have their picture, their profile, which is all their personal information. Then
18 I have their Virtual Wall profile. I mean, then I have their full casualty report and then I
19 have their Virtual Wall profile, their Virtual Wall remembrance and then I have the
20 picture of the brick, our Ranger memorial, and then I have a pencil etching for every
21 man. So you can open it up and when you open up one—there’s three men in a packet.
22 When you open it up and pick out one man that’s what you’re going to see. His name,
23 his profile, all his pertinent information, his casualty status gives them all that and then
24 the Vietnam Wall and remembrance and also what I want to see happen—plus I’ve got
25 two or three dozen really great photos that coincide with our unit. And what I would like
26 to do is have them turn it into basically a slide show. Like you could go to a reunion and
27 someone who wanted to sit down and see what we’re doing, because they would do it for
28 us. And these people—not only that, the Rangers of today and the Rangers of the future
29 are going to always be looking at what we’ve done and I want them to see...I want
30 them...

31 RV: Take your time.

1 JW: I want them never to forget because if it wasn't for the guy on your left or to
2 your right you might not be here. So that's basically what I have done and all we're
3 missing now—and a remembrance goes with each one of them—is I want them to
4 build—this is my recommendation. I've given you everything. All you have to do is put
5 on a program so when you go to a reunion, you go to a meeting, the guys, their
6 families—see, we have Gold Star wives, we have Gold Star moms that come to our
7 reunions. I mean, they write me all the time when I do something or when I put them on
8 the Wall or whatever and I've never met them. But the thing is, if they see this—and you
9 can even add to it—you see a couple pictures of them and the unit patch and then you
10 have the memorial brick that they're laid in where they're all on one wall and then the
11 first man comes on and you see his picture and you read about him and the Virtual Wall,
12 the pencil etching, and things like that and then the next guy and a couple pictures, and
13 stuff like that. So it's portable and there is a program that can be put on the website
14 which does exactly that. Instead of having the Wall alphabetically, you click on it. You
15 can go to anywhere you want on it but you click on it and it just runs just like that and
16 you hold it as long as you want. And you can see the picture of the guy; you can read all
17 of his information, the remembrances of what his buddies wrote about him, what his job
18 was, where he got killed, how he got killed, and then his profile from the Virtual Wall,
19 his remembrance from the Virtual Wall, his brick at the Ranger Memorial, pencil
20 etchings. It's personal stuff that we just don't forget. And they would do it for us.
21 That's what I say and that's why I have challenged—I just wrote an article for the
22 newsletter that I've asked for remembrances since I started this. Now, I've been in the
23 Virtual Wall and I've seen plenty of remembrances left there so I've done a couple of
24 remembrances on some of them so I said, "All you have to do is look at it and you'll
25 see." It's not how long it is, it's how meaningful. And really there isn't that much space
26 for remembrance in the profile that we have. It's enough to say who he was, what kind of
27 guy he was, and how he helped the unit and what he was all about. So that's the only
28 thing we're lacking. I told them that we needed this because we would eventually
29 transfer everything over to the 75th. Well, when Dan told me, "You know we're not
30 going to do that." I said, "Well, can I be honest with them and tell them?" And he said,
31 "Yeah, damn right." I said, "Good." So I told him that we had been planning to get this

1 because the 75th sent over the format, we did the format and all of that, and I know I'm
2 way ahead of everybody because I put the damn stuff in, in March of this year and they
3 haven't posted any of it. So what I did is—now, they had a list of our KIAs which have
4 changed because we had a man on there that wasn't even in our unit but due to lack of
5 records because of classification, seven guys named the same and he got mixed up with
6 another guy who was killed but he was killed in a training accident. I went down and
7 found the guy's gravesite and we talked to members of his team who he got killed with
8 and all. Well, what I did was I went in and I didn't know I could do this, but I pulled up
9 our KIA list. Now this was three or four weeks ago. I said, "Damn, they haven't even
10 changed that." So I just tried to type one and boom. It gave it to me. Now I edited it and
11 I changed it all around and I put everything in there perfectly. I just didn't know how to
12 get it back into their web so what I did was I just saved it and closed it and their web
13 went back to the way it was supposed to be originally but then I had the changes so then I
14 sent it over to the boss and told him, "This is what we've got." So we sent it to the 75th
15 and it had everything. I just took the web page right off and I just rearranged the names
16 and everything and got it all right but I didn't have the knowledge of putting it back on or
17 maybe they have a set-up that you can't. You know how you can copy something but
18 you can't enter. But I edited it and so I saved it on a disk and then I sent it up to him.
19 That's when I told him, "We need to tell them because, no." And then of course you
20 guys walk on water whether you know it or not. My collection was sent up there as a test
21 and it was up there two years before we decided, "Yeah, we want to commit." Now they
22 just released two thousand documents. We need to go up there and get them and go
23 through all them. Then whatever's relevant will come to you and within the next several
24 years they'll release a couple thousand more and we want to get everything that pertains
25 to our unit that needs to be in there into your site. And of course that's between you and
26 Dan of how you do it legally and all that kind of stuff but we told him that we ain't giving
27 this shit to the 75th. 75th wrote me and told me to send them the information and I said, "I
28 am not sending no one information. I will do the research. We will do it as a unit so that
29 it will be done our way and this way we'll have unit cohesiveness and we will know what
30 the final product is." That's when we thought we were going to go there. So I finally
31 told them in the newsletter that now, even more so we need the remembrances because

1 eventually we're going to transfer and I gave them your website and basically the
2 directions of how to work it, which is really neat once you learn the little box. Scroll
3 down there, whatever you'd like, to put a click on the box. When you're all done, hit that
4 thing, "Display what I clicked," that is fantastic. That's what you've got to learn.

5 RV: That's attributed to Justin Saffell, the Webmaster who created the whole
6 thing.

7 JW: See, that's what you have to learn. I have a format written out, if anybody
8 wants to go, I can either email it to them or whatever and I makes it so much easier for
9 them to zip through it. Once I learned it I said, "Oh, okay, display search results."
10 Boom. Da, da, da, hit that, "Display selected items" or whatever and they line up and
11 boy, you can just go through them and it's nice. Because when you see seven hundred
12 and eight damn files facing you—and I told them "Don't expect to do it in a day. Take a
13 few pages or five pages at a time and click on the ones you want." So I have a format not
14 so they don't get lost or say, "Man, seven hundred and fifty freaking..." And it's going
15 to go up into the thousands, hopefully. That's my main thing but see I was in the
16 beginning. I'm membership number three. I was also on active duty and I had a part in
17 helping the Rangers, the regular Rangers, when you open their annual Ranger Red book,
18 the history of the Rangers, they would have seven, eight, nine pictures of World War II,
19 seven, eight, nine pictures of Korea, two pictures of Vietnam and then the beginning of
20 the 1st Battalion. Wait a minute. There's ten years of LRRP and then Rangers in there
21 and you use the 1st Battalion who took its heritage from my company. So I went down
22 there and I helped them integrate the Vietnam Rangers and LRRPs history into theirs
23 because we can't be part of their lineage because we were assigned to parent units. Now,
24 they can draw our lineage but we can be a part of their history and that's what we are. So
25 that's integrated in there so I helped do that. And whenever they were going to put the
26 KIA list in stone, which they did at the Ranger memorial and then down at the Special
27 Operations Command Memorial in MacDill Air Force Base they came to me. We went
28 back and forth, this guy Geoff. Well, come to find out that once we got to know each
29 other, he used to be the Special Forces Museum director years ago when I was in the
30 service and we had done some work together so we went back and forth, back and forth
31 and my list came out on top. I said, "When you put it in stone it's got to be exact. There

1 can not be a mistake.” And so it went back and forth and we put it in and it is beautiful.
2 They put it on one big, huge wall with thirty-one names. It’s beautiful. So that’s what I
3 really dedicated myself to. The history part is done, basically. It’s a matter of
4 confirming that and adding to it with actually after action reports and all. But we’re
5 going to have a hard time and I can tell them, “Don’t keep your hopes up because we’re
6 with the 173rd. When we sent it up to the G2 it goes into the 173rd’s report.” It’s real hard
7 for us to track down after action reports, specifically for any operation because unless
8 you know exactly what day, where you was at, and who you was with, and then if it’s a
9 division then you’re going to have to buy all the reports from that division to try to find
10 out if your after action report’s in there. I know a guy who worked in our unit in the
11 AAR (After Action Report) and the AARs were written a little bit different than the way
12 the teams were reported, due to classification and/or what the people wanted to hear and
13 read than what we really did. So we don’t know what’s up there. I talked to a guy who’s
14 doing a site and he said, “With four-man teams, two copying, two proof-reading all day,
15 you can actually reserve copiers. If you get a thousand documents you’re lucky, and
16 that’s from eight to five. We go back the next day and do it again.” And that’s with two
17 good proofreaders and two copy guys and that’s balls to the wall from eight to five. And
18 then he said, “You come across shit like daily inventories. You might go through three or
19 four hundred pages and go through five pages that—we don’t know.”

20 RV: Well, Joey, why don’t we take a break for today and we’ll pick up another
21 time, okay?

22 JW: Okay, all right.

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 6 of 10
November 28, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history
2 interview with Joey Welsh. Today is November 28, 2005, and we are continuing what
3 we began a few months back. Joey, let's talk today about some general topics. In
4 thinking about the whole American Army in general and then about your unit, how would
5 you gauge the morale of what you saw and what you experienced over there?

6 Joseph Welsh: It's funny that you ask that because we were discussing that last
7 night. In reference to—well, what we have is we've just put a little format chat site
8 together. It's private, it's only for the guys in the company to sign on and you do what
9 you want to do. It's for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) guys. And those of us
10 who came from a line grunt company to E Company, it's an entirely different war
11 because usually the highest ranked, if we had E4s or E5s that was it. They ran the team.
12 That's a lot of responsibility and not only that, you had to be a three-time volunteer,
13 really. You had to volunteer for Airborne, you had to volunteer for the unit and volunteer
14 for Vietnam. Basically you had to be in combat six months before you could even apply.
15 And some guys, like I was just telling you about, spend four or five years going from unit
16 to unit. And you ever seen me answer my little slogan down there? SALSA is one of
17 them. SALSA. Well, people thought that was my name and I had to tell them, "No, Stay
18 Alert, Stay Alive." Because you look at it like this. You're going into Charlie's country,
19 who's been there thirty years fighting. That's why we never infiltrated between eleven
20 and two because that's Charlie's pot time. He sits up on the mountains and he watches
21 these two hundred men companies coming in these twenty-two huge machines flying
22 them in. They watch where they land, they watch them get off, they watch where they
23 go. You see what I'm saying?

24 RV: Yes.

25 JW: Okay. Now, of course you know that but you're on a search and destroy,
26 where, in our case, we're going in maybe nine in the morning, maybe four in the
27 afternoon, one single ship just flying around. We're dipping and diving like he's just
28 doing his thing. We dip once, we don't get off, we dip the second time, we get off, he

1 dips a third time, he dips a fourth time. In the meantime, I'm sitting perfectly still for
2 fifteen or twenty minutes to get the smell, feel, and taste of what my surroundings are.
3 Everything's good, the C&C ship is way out there, I give the okay sign and that's it,
4 we're in field and then we slowly, never talking, start moving. I might move for ten
5 minutes, I might move for twenty and then I'm going to stop. There's no talking, it's
6 just—Americans don't have the patience to do that. (Laughs) They don't.

7 RV: Did the enemy kind of assume that or know that?

8 JW: No, no, no. It finally caught on that they put out LRRP hunter/killer teams,
9 same way with SOG. They had SOG-trained—you used dogs and everything to try to get
10 them because they're so dangerous. Our job at the beginning, primarily if you're doing a
11 recon job, you've got Intel from a very, very high level at our corps. So rather than send
12 in two hundred people and scare them off or waste sending somebody out and getting
13 them killed, let's go out and do a long-range reconnaissance since we're doing this long-
14 range plan and have them recon it and bring all the Intel back and then we'll be able to
15 react to it and know what ways to come in, how to come in and stuff like that. It's like a
16 pre-assault, a vanguard. But sometimes you don't get to land because you fly over it the
17 day before and you decide where you want to go in and if you get shot out of that one and
18 you're still flying you've got to go into another area, another place. But anyway, once
19 you're on the move and if you have a good team that works together, that knows, they
20 just feel everything, you're just more alive and alert than anything in the world. There's
21 nothing that can keep you like that. And we moved and we'd only been on radio four
22 times. Things could go really great or things could go really bad. When they went really
23 bad all the team would be out and that went from us who had four or five to SOG who
24 had eleven or fifteen. Just totally overrun, that's it, you're done. So you paid attention,
25 you did your homework. You've got to outsmart the guy even though you're in his
26 backyard.

27 RV: So you all were confident?

28 JW: Well, we were cocky. Confident? You had to be cocky. We were very, very
29 confident. Like in SOG, if you made it to twenty missions you better quit because you're
30 going to die. You've beaten the odds. Us, our ratio was like one to fifty-five. For every
31 one of us we got fifty-five of them and SOG was like a hundred and fifty to one but they

1 had a bigger target. But our morale and our esprit de corps was really, really high. We
2 wore tiger fatigues; we just wore tiger fatigues or camouflage fatigues. We didn't follow
3 nobody's rules. Everybody left us alone if they were smart. They didn't know who we
4 were with because the only people that did that were SOG, SF, and LRRPs. We had
5 jungle fatigues real nice and stuff sewed on just in case, or if you wanted to get prissed up
6 to go downtown, you'd get sweaty and dirty. You know, put on your scare badges and
7 turd tags, that's what I called them. Scare badges and turd tags.

8 RV: Why did you call them that?

9 JW: I don't know, it just came out of my mouth one day. I was teaching
10 somebody and I said, "What are you looking at?" And they said, "I'm looking at all the
11 patches you got." I said, "Oh, you mean these scare badges and turd tags?" I said, "That
12 doesn't make it. They had a sale on them at the PX (Post Exchange). I bought them.
13 You don't know what the hell you're talking about." They were like, "Uhh." I said, "It's
14 not what you did and what you're wearing, it's what you're doing now and how I am
15 going to train you now. I don't live off of what I done. I tried to keep you alive off of
16 what I lived through." That was my psychology and my philosophy when I came back
17 into the service. That's why I pushed my troops hard but I was fair and I tried to give
18 everything and learn everything and be the best at everything. I was very, very, very
19 obsessive with being on top and that's the way the majority of the guys in the company
20 were. They wanted to be better than the next guy. Nobody's to say who's the best. One
21 day you're on, one day you're off. (Laughs) It's that you learn from your mistakes and
22 you try not to lose anybody and you never leave anybody behind. Sometimes you have
23 to but I mean they'll stay there and fight till almost the death to get a dead guy out, where
24 now you're coming with a large company. You've got a hundred and fifty guys. They're
25 going in there and that's the reason why the statistics show that the average grunt that
26 served all World War II or all the Korean war only seen forty-four days of combat
27 compared to a one-year tour with a grunt that seen two hundred and thirty was because of
28 the air mobility of the chopper to get him from point A to point B so much. That's the
29 reason and that's the true statistic. The air mobility gave us the opportunity to jump out
30 of one place, get on the chopper, and move you to another spot where they know it's not.
31 And that's what they do with the grunts. They just move them from spot to spot chasing

1 the enemy until the enemy gets caught or says, "Wait a minute. We're going to catch
2 you." They know you're coming but in our case and a good way, a good thing we used
3 to do was called "stay-behind." Either a team would be getting out and we'd get off but
4 it's nice when a company will leave an area and as they're getting on, a team will get off
5 and will set up. And they'll set up because they know once the Americans are gone,
6 they're going to go down there and find out what they left behind because GI Joe left
7 everything. They'll come and go down and stay there four or five—say they're eight
8 hundred meters down there in the drop zone. Just let them build up and you just recon
9 them or slam them with air. It worked every time. There was just a lot of different things
10 that we did. And the thing was we were authorized seven six-man teams in four platoons.
11 We were the largest company because we were corps level. When they formed half the
12 guys had six months in combat and half were new. Now, after they finished training,
13 management should have understood that once they get down to thirty days, they're not
14 going—once you've got thirty days left in LRRPs you can't go on a mission. You're a
15 hazard to the team so they should have had guys coming in. Let's say they started an
16 operation. They formed in September, they started operations in December. They should
17 have had people coming in by February or March because the guys are getting ready to
18 leave in August and September if they wanted to all leave if they were still there. You
19 see what I'm getting at? So we had a lull there for a good six or eight months to where
20 we were running maybe four six-men teams or five five-man teams, which is not bad as
21 long as it's the same guys. It's when you start switching; of course it takes you a couple
22 times to get used to each other, that it was frustrating. And there's just nothing you could
23 do about it. You wanted to be with that team but you also didn't want your buddy to
24 have to go out with a bunch of new guys so you wanted to help out over there, too. Our
25 esprit de corps and morale was high. Nobody messed with us. None of the officers, none
26 of the NCOs, nobody ever harassed us or anything like that. You do your job, you come
27 back, you rest, you support that next team that's out there, and then you get ready to take
28 his place while the other guy's resting for a few days. It was like a cycle thing. You'd
29 isolate, do the mission, detox, support, isolate, do the mission, detox, support. It was just
30 nonstop and we were supposed to be formed that we would all move together but
31 eventually it was too good of a thing. They took a platoon and they put a platoon with

1 the South Vietnamese Army doing stuff for them or a platoon with the 4th Infantry
2 Division doing stuff for them. We're talking long-range patrol. We did some cross-
3 border operations when we were working with Omega.

4 RV: What is that?

5 JW: Well, you've heard of Project Delta?

6 RV: Yes.

7 JW: Okay, Delta, Sigma, Omega. All that was was you had—the SOG units were
8 CCN, which was Command and Control North. CCC, Command and Control Center,
9 and CCS, Command and Control South. Well, as soon as they crossed the border and
10 started doing operations they called that team Project Delta. It was really a code saying
11 that that's what they were doing and then Project Sigma and then Project Omega when
12 they started going across. And we were formed; the corps LRRPs, to relieve them from
13 the South Vietnam area and let them do that cross-border operations more. So we took
14 up their areas. The Special Forces was running the in-country recon at the time and we
15 took it over and then they started doing more cross-border operations and that's really
16 what Delta, Sigma, and Omega was. That's declassified now, of course, but that's what it
17 was. We were formed so that they could go into Omega, meaning that Command and
18 Control Central and let's just cut it in three sections, North, middle, and South. CCC
19 could go over and start going into Cambodia and Laos and then CCN was Laos and North
20 Vietnam and CCS was down in Cambodia and stuff like that. That's all the names meant.
21 They think it means that they did—no. Like, they were called SOG and they were really
22 a Studies and Observation Group. But there was a lot of things that a lot of people still
23 don't know and that's a shame in a way because—have you read that book, *SOG*?

24 RV: By John Plaster, yes.

25 JW: Okay, well Colonel Howard was mentioned in there many times. In fact, I
26 believe he was in that book. I know they talk about him in the book several times and
27 also Dick Meadows. I know Dick. Davinski, Davinski, whatever his name was. Well,
28 anyway, they were the most decorated unit in Vietnam. They had four Medal of Honor
29 recipients, their kill ratio and their statistics was beyond anything that ever happened in
30 any war in the ratio-wise. However, nobody knew about it. (Laughs) Nobody was
31 supposed to know about it.

1 RV: Well, this will be a great opportunity for you to kind of clear some of that
2 stuff up to make sure they do know about it.

3 JW: Well, and I was saying they've opened it up to a lot of people. Now when
4 John wrote his book, in fact he's good friends with Colonel Howard, he mentioned him in
5 there. He was the only man to ever be put in for the Medal of Honor three times within
6 thirteen months and his men all say he should have got it. He got nine Purple Hearts. I
7 think they had a hundred and ten percent wounded. I mean, everybody was hit and these
8 guys would get hit and just go heal up and go back out. In the bio, when you see his bio
9 you'll say—and then when you read his duty assignments, slowly as you get around
10 you'll see a Company C and a Company C right next to each other. That's us in the
11 middle because he went, like I said, from enlisted for twelve years to an officer's
12 position. But he was just a hard man. Dick Meadows was—they were all renowned for
13 something. Dick Meadows was the top prisoner snatcher. If you wanted a prisoner,
14 you'd send Dick. They also had—in 1995 they finally awarded a few guys combat jumps
15 for the halo jumps they were doing in '68. They finally recognized them as yes, they
16 were halo, and the only ones that were done in history were the United States Armed
17 Forces. 1995, they finally said, "Okay." See, they'd done a few of them and they
18 weren't doing too good. They had round chutes but as things got better they were pulling
19 them off. They were sliding in at fifteen thousand feet, they were seeing the enemy,
20 destroying them, and leaving without ever leaving a trace and they were surrounded by
21 maybe a regiment. It's the picture perfect thing, some of the things. Then again, some of
22 them went in and stuff went twisting and flying and they got lost. That's why I wanted to
23 stay. I wanted to go in to B Company 5th group, which was in the Central Highlands
24 where I was, in Pleiku and I would have been working with the Yards probably or on a
25 LRRP team. That's what they called them. There was the Yards and the Hungs. They
26 were of Chinese descent.

27 RV: Can you say that name again?

28 JW: H-u-n-g-s. Hung. I'm not saying it correctly. I speak Thai but not
29 Vietnamese. Montagnards were the mountain-dwelling people that evolved there. There
30 was a couple different races of them. The Hungs are the ones that the SF took for SAG,
31 them and deserters from the NVA Army and the VC.

1 RV: Why take this particular Montagnard group?

2 JW: Well because they were of Chinese descent and it's just like a Montagnard.

3 Why do you take a Montagnard? Well, because he's been walking up and down them
4 mountains his whole life in his bare feet. He's strong, he's quiet, he knows the land, he
5 knows if it's right or wrong, he knows how to live in the land, he moves like a panther.
6 He's stronger as an ox and he's proud of his village and his country. Of course his
7 country doesn't give a darn about him. Basically they almost pulled a genocide on him.
8 We had villages we helped established in the Special Forces as a whole. We had big
9 Montagnard villages in the States because they fought with them for fifteen years and
10 they were not going to leave them behind. They went back and got lots of them. They
11 went right after them. That's the first thing people hit when they cross the border. The
12 South Vietnamese ran. They ran. I mean, that's it, that's it. They dumped their stuff and
13 they were gone.

14 RV: Was that a common experience?

15 JW: No, I'm saying when we left. Oh yeah. Well, they didn't get far because you
16 never can tell which way the bullet's flying. They usually wind up getting killed if they
17 ran because they're exposing themselves to fire. You never know which way the bullets
18 are flying the jungle. You have to be careful who you piss off. (Laughs)

19 RV: Did you have some strange experiences where you didn't know who was
20 shooting at you?

21 JW: Well, I knew it wasn't my people shooting at me but I didn't know who the
22 hell it was and they were shooting all over the place. It's comical now but I've bumped
23 into guys, whoa, and it was the enemy trying to—wait a minute, we're jockeying for a
24 position. That's not good but it's not bad because it was sort of a simultaneous finding
25 each other and choose to put this on the draw. Now if he doesn't have a big
26 reinforcement we're going to win and he knows that so he'll run. But if he has big
27 reinforcements he'll back up and try to entice us into a trap but they know they've got to
28 do it fast because we've got everything coming. That's one thing we had is we had
29 everything coming. So I've suffered from that also because the Air Force was part of the
30 Thailand Blackbirds. Everything was painted black. They were supposed to support
31 them and we didn't have aviation support like one of our sister companies did. If you

1 have aviation support that lived, breathed and eat with you and take you to combat or
2 take you to work and pick you up, they fly harder and try harder, they work harder, they
3 love you harder. That's just the way it is. That's it and God bless them chopper pilots
4 because they didn't even know who we were and they had the tenacity and the balls to
5 hang out there and really try to take care of it.

6 RV: Would you all try to foster that relationship with these units?

7 JW: Oh, I do. That's why when I heard what was going on and my friend said,
8 "You think you could help us out and publicize this since you're going to San Antonio?"
9 I said, "Heck yeah, it'd be an honor." I mean every VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars)
10 and every organization I knew I alerted them to the fact and I helped publicize it with a
11 friend of mine works in the Veteran's Affairs Committee downtown so he pushed it
12 throughout the military system here. Well, here's another one for you. What happens is
13 you go to www.intheshadowoftheblade.com right now. As soon as it opens, it takes you
14 a while, but as soon as it opens it says, "Blog News," b-l-o-g-n-e-w-s. You click on that
15 because it's a new thing. Someone stole their guest book, some hacker, so when you
16 blog it it's going to take you over to New Braunfels, Texas, and everything's all out. You
17 can find all about the movie, the documentary on that site, but you can only just see
18 limited. You switch over to this blog site and you see where it's actually being held and
19 what the final results, the most recent results of it. And that's what they've been doing.
20 They've won so many awards and all. And them guys, they got it from here because they
21 refurbished it and it was in the Texas State Museum and they leased it. They leased that
22 chopper and got all the former pilots to fly it. And if you look at it real close, one side
23 says Marines on the tail end and on the other side it says US Army. People didn't
24 recognize that and that was just sort of combined, the Forces. And I said, "Where'd you
25 put the Air Force and Navy on that? On the skids or what?" But they didn't. But yeah,
26 he refurbished it. In fact, one of the guys who was there—I met the first guy through the
27 harmonica thing and then another guy who was putting it on, he lives up North. And
28 another fellow who was part of it, he's the only helicopter service in San Antonio. I just
29 found out about all of this and he does some fantastic, beautiful aero-photography. Not
30 just sightseeing but a lot of working in the air. My wife and I are going up on my
31 birthday on a birthday flight and take-off time will be at sunset and we'll catch the sunset

1 and the lights come out and all. It's about a thirty-minute ride and we would pick the
2 route where we would like to and he will take me and stop and take pictures and do
3 anything I want. He said, "You tell me what you want in thirty minutes or an hour or
4 whatever you want." It's just a three-seater and he has access to a five-seater, too. I was
5 fired up about it and I really wanted to go when I found that out. He's got a really good
6 business going. He's only got air since 1985. Yeah, oh, God bless the chopper pilots.
7 The comments I made was I congratulated Cliff, John, and J.J. and the rest of the crew
8 for making this happen. I appreciated the fact that I could help and I didn't take it as a
9 task. I took it as an honor to help.

10 RV: How often—

11 JW: Because if it wasn't for them I know that on several occasions I would either
12 be dead or missing. There is no doubt in my military mind if it wasn't for that chopper,
13 many, many, many LRRPs can tell you the same thing. If they weren't there I'd be dead
14 or missing at a minimum. There's just no way. You can't run forever. Well, you've
15 seen *BAT*21*, right? What did they do? They lost five choppers, sixteen or twenty
16 people killed to get one man out.

17 RV: And that's realistic. That is what those guys would do for you.

18 JW: Oh yeah. See, pilots are pilots. But see, he was a special pilot. He wasn't a
19 pilot. He was a navigator engineer who knew a real lot of information and that's why
20 they wanted his butt out of there so bad. He was very, very involved in the development
21 of a lot of things and you know how they got him out was running a golf course. He was
22 an older guy. He ain't never been on the ground but that's a true story. They lost a lot.
23 And that bird dog, man, it just feels good to talk to somebody.

24 RV: How often would you all be able to hang out with them in-country?

25 JW: Who?

26 RV: The chopper pilots. I mean, were you able to spend time with them?

27 JW: Yeah, some of them got attached to us for a little while but that's what was
28 wrong. When we were formed, two hundred and forty-three men, then we should have
29 had a squadron—I shouldn't say that. We should have had at least, at least two to four
30 Slicks per platoon and two guns per platoon. At a minimum that's what we should have
31 had and they stayed, lived, breathed, eat, and they were dedicated. That gives you one to

1 be down for maintenance or whatever. I mean, you needed that because we needed that
2 chopper to be sitting there waiting. And you've got three teams out there and you've got
3 two choppers, nah. You could have three teams out there and at least eight choppers or
4 more because out of them six, two of them ain't going to work or might be shot down so
5 you need machines for—you know what I'm saying? That's what they did wrong and
6 that was our first Commander's out-bound after-action report was his biggest point, that
7 we did not have the aviation assets that was required of us to meet our mission. For
8 success we had to depend on, "Okay, I'm going down and now I'm working with 4th
9 Infantry. Who is supporting them? The 155th Aviation. Who are they with? The 1st
10 Aviation. Were they at? Who knows?" I'm not saying that they weren't good. I'm
11 saying that in our job, we needed dedicated birds that no one had the authority to pull
12 them. I've had them pulled and that's not the way it goes. Sometimes you're out there
13 and you just can't get out and they say, "We've got to go back for fuel," and we'd have to
14 dig in and just lay low for the night because you don't want to come out at night. You
15 ain't getting out at night. And then try to shoot, move, and communicate and get out and
16 that's where that FAC came, in that fixed-wing, that little, old, slow-moving bird dog.
17 Boy, he'd be the one to find out and say, "Hey, there's an LZ eight hundred meters, two
18 hundred and eighty degrees. (Whistles) Go." Because you don't know. You're on the
19 run, man. You've lost where you're at and them damn maps are so old anyway. So at
20 times you hated it, you were scared, you've give anything for a fifteen-cent cheeseburger
21 at that time. But if I had it to do over again I'd have done it again and again and again.

22 RV: Why is that?

23 JW: I just didn't think there was no reason to be in the Army and not be there and
24 I just got caught in a quagmire catch-22. "You can't extend." "Why?" "You only have a
25 hundred and fifty days and in a hundred and seventy nine you can get out." "I don't want
26 out. Extend my ETS ninety days and I'm going to do another six months. They go up
27 there." "Oh, well, we can't extend you." "Why?" "You have orders to Fort Bragg."
28 "Well how can I have orders to Fort Bragg when I can get out in a hundred and seventy
29 nine days and I'm going to go home on a thirty or forty day leave? When I get there I'm
30 going to have a hundred days and ninety days is your ninety-day loss. That's not good
31 economics so I don't want to go. I want an early out." They said, "You can't get out." I

1 said, "You just said I could get out. That's why you wasn't going to extend me in the
2 first place." But that's the Army. I'm trying to stay in Vietnam, guys are trying to stay
3 out of Vietnam and I said, "I'm trying to stay in the Army and guys are trying to get out
4 of the Army and I get sent to the home of the jumping junkies." Jesus, my god, over
5 seventy percent of them have been to Vietnam at least twice. They were insane. They
6 were either totally lifers or just waiting to get the hell out. It was total insanity down
7 there and then of course you didn't want to go out and play in the woods. Now maybe if
8 you was an E6 or an E7 and an instructor in a professional unit but the people I got stuck
9 with, I had a guy in charge of me and he hadn't been nowhere or done nothing.
10 Depending on his personality and my personality we might get along great or we're going
11 to clash bad. You see what I'm getting at? So it was hard to return. Some guys came
12 back, returned, and then went back again. They just took whatever's coming to them.

13 RV: Joey?

14 JW: Yeah.

15 RV: Let me ask you this. You guys were so tight knit. What did you do with
16 someone who really was kind of a bad egg in the group, who really didn't have it?

17 JW: Well, you'd get peered out.

18 RV: Peered out?

19 JW: Okay, yeah. When you come in, you come in, you go through interviews,
20 then you go through a mini-school to see what you're made of. It was a week or two.
21 Well, they made it longer afterwards. And then by that time if they think you've got your
22 head on right you go out on the mission, and if you're doing okay then they'll keep you
23 and then like me, I had already been over there doing similar missions so I adapted a lot
24 easier. I just went over thirty days, came back, went to another unit and I went out on
25 two or three missions and they sent me to Recondo School. Once you go to the school,
26 the big R School, the best school in the world, the best school I have ever been to and just
27 about anybody who's been in the Army will tell you that, SF and Ranger. Once you
28 complete that school then you are physically and mentally ready. And you have to be in-
29 country six months to go to that school and be with LRRPs or Rangers. The South
30 Vietnamese could not gut it, they couldn't make it. It was only Americans, Australians,
31 Thais, and Koreans. Project Delta are the ones who were the instructors. As them guys

1 got burnt out, like my guy was in there thirty-eight months, they took them offline and he
2 became an instructor. So you were being taught by the best of the best and you either
3 pass the test or you pack your bags. There wasn't a bunch of yelling or nothing like that.
4 It was like they open the door and they say, "Okay, you've got a certain time and your
5 full equipment so you pound ruck or whatever. When we close the gate, if you're on the
6 other side, you're packing your bags and you're gone. If you get less than seventy
7 percent on any event, you're gone. You're just gone. We ain't got time for it." I went
8 with four guys and one of the guys had been in the country seven months, good shape and
9 all, he had a heart murmur on the third day and we never heard from him again. And
10 he'd been humping the hills for seven months. Another guy academically failed. He left
11 in the first week. And another guy, he was a little bit slow but he was worth the effort
12 where they recycled him. I was the only one that graduated in the twenty-one days out of
13 the four and then Max, he graduated in the next class so he was recycled because he was
14 worth salvaging. But one, he was a good friend of mine, he went on the run and he never
15 came back the third day. Well they start you off at one mile, then you go two, three, four,
16 five, seven, and you're running—you've got full ammunition everything and as it gets
17 longer your time gets shorter, it seems. And then when they close the doors, when you're
18 done, then you do the calisthenics. That's the way the Special Ops does it, a good warm-
19 up and a run or a ruck and then they get you in the pit and you go until muscle failure.
20 Then you go eat then you go to classes or training or whatever.

21 RV: So by the time you guys got into the field they were ready to go. They had
22 been through all of this stuff.

23 JW: No, no, no. You go to the unit first. That's like you don't go to Ranger
24 School before you go to the battalion. You come in, you go through basic training,
25 Infantry Jump School, then the Rangers pick you up and then they give you thirty days of
26 Ranger indoctrination program. If you complete that then you go to a Ranger battalion
27 and you stay with the Ranger battalion six to eight months before they'll send you to
28 Ranger School. Now when you go to Ranger School you still go on all the missions and
29 everything. When you go to Ranger School you excel because you're ready or else they
30 don't send you. There's no such thing as—now, there was at one time. They did for SF
31 and they stopped it real quick. But when you're in this for Infantry Airborne Rangers,

1 that's just what you'll do. You'll do infantry, Airborne, Rangers, and if you make it in
2 the Rangers six or eight months later—and that's even if you went to combat training or
3 anything, when you earned the right to go there and they feel that you know everything
4 and you're going to be one of the best, then when you come back, usually—like my
5 nephew, he was there eight months. When he came back, he not only graduated when he
6 came back he made Sergeant E5 because he had been there eight months and then he
7 went to school. And that's what the Black Beret's about. See, the Ranger's only eight
8 weeks of hell. A battalion can be three, four, or five years of hell. That Beret goes on
9 your head a hell of a long time before that tag ever does, you know what I mean? It's just
10 a symbol of excellence. I don't want to go into that or waste time on that. But yeah, we
11 did. Our morale got low when things went wrong and of course we blame it on our
12 officers and all that but most of them, they were having as hard of a time as we were,
13 trying to keep the support and that was one of our weaknesses. The only weakness that I
14 was really concerned about was would that chopper be there?

15 RV: And all times it was?

16 JW: Oh no. No. That's why I was worried. It's nice when you call up and you
17 say, "I'm in contact," and they say, "The birds are rolling." Man you know I just got to
18 hide and run and right for maybe ten or fifteen minutes. Well, when you hear, "Oh,
19 they're going back to refuel." "Well where the hell have they been? What? You don't
20 have a Medevac?" "He's on another mission." "Now I've got to take you out in a ladder,
21 a rope, or a McGuire rig?" When you have Special Operations, that's what Special
22 Operations was for. The entire Special Operations Command was formed because if
23 they're not—when they went in there, services could not communicate. Therefore a lot
24 of things happened that shouldn't have that people don't know about. So now the United
25 States Special Operations Command in MacDill is where everyone who is in Special Ops,
26 whether it's Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines, they leave their branch and they go
27 there and they are not told by their branch what to do. Just like when I went to Drill
28 Sergeant Duty, my records left the infantry branch and they went to the Drill Sergeant
29 branch and the infantry branch don't say nothing so it's time for me to go. When you go
30 to SF you're stuck as SF. You see what I'm saying? When you go to Special Ops the
31 Army doesn't tell you nothing because you fall under a joint command. Your General's

1 like a three-star Army General, then they have a Naval XO and then the Sergeant Majors
2 like in the Air Force and the 1st Sergeants like in the Army. It's all joint service and
3 that's what makes them tick. They work together and train together and it's competitive.
4 You're damn right it's competitive but it's good training and we've also finally
5 swallowed our egos and learned from each other. Learning from each other means we
6 can support each other. Supporting each other means we have multiple power. We can
7 multiply that force so much that it's really cool. And it's really cool. It's really cool to
8 go through boat training where they think it's really cool to jump out of a plane. So it's
9 really cool. They've finally done it and that's the way it should be. It wasn't done in
10 Vietnam that way but I'm saying the way it's done now—and I believe it's a three-star
11 position that runs the SOCOM. That's in MacDill, by the way, at MacDill Air Force
12 Base in Tampa. It's right next to the golf course. (Laughs) Well SOCC sends theirs too,
13 the Special Operations Central Command that did the Gulf War, the Special Ops. But
14 yeah, that's why I enjoyed it so much this time because they got around just seeing so
15 many different guys from different countries. You just got to know a lot of people and
16 you had a joint camaraderie. You have your little competitions but when you put us
17 against another force, God help you. I mean seriously, God better have your soul because
18 your ass is ours (laughs) no matter what we got to do. But we were young and dumb and
19 full of plum so everybody that was giving us shit was a lifer and everybody that wasn't
20 online was a rent. But it takes, including all the way back to the States, eleven people to
21 put one man on the ground. You learn that as you get older and wiser, that without that
22 truck driver, without that God darn cook, without that supply man, you wouldn't have
23 nothing. You wouldn't move without the chopper. And that's what I stressed when I
24 came back into the junior NCOs. Don't talk shit. When I set up my class I would
25 intermingle them. I'd have an engineer, an infantryman, transportation, and personnel,
26 because you've got to touch on everything in that school. All of you are going to help
27 each other when it comes to landing nav, you'll help when it comes to communications,
28 you'll help when it comes to effectively communicating. Like in counseling, this guy
29 will help and then you will become buddies and six, eight, or ten years from now when
30 you're a 1st Sergeant or whatever, when you need something he's there for you. And
31 that's where you have to get along in the Army but you don't realize that when you're

1 young. I think it's probably better that you don't realize any of that and you don't realize
2 the political. We didn't have the mass media that I had to deal with in '81 as a Drill
3 Sergeant and these kids thought they knew everything. I mean, they got to talk. When I
4 went through basic training you didn't say nothing. You just hoped that you survived and
5 you just went and did what you had to do. There was no question about it at all. That is
6 our weakness. Putting Black Berets makes no one a better soldier. When I was in the
7 Philippines I wore a little BDU (Battle Dress Uniform) cap and a nametag with US
8 Army. I wanted to look more like the Air Force than the Air Force. I didn't want to be
9 known. That Black Beret did nothing but embarrass a lot of people who wear it and ruin
10 the General's career for making an illegal contract out of the United States in a time of
11 emergency. They turned back six hundred and fifty thousand for bad workmanship. The
12 guy—I told you what happened when he showed up to Mark Anderson's funeral at
13 (Indiscernible at this time, Session 6.wav 53:07) right? His father came out to a staff
14 party and said, "You are not welcome at my son's funeral." Mr. Anderson is a pretty big
15 dude and this guy's a three-star General and he just turned around and got back in there.
16 When he went around the corner it was good but Mr. Anderson—and I'm calling him Mr.
17 Anderson because I respect the fact that he knew—and his son was a Green Beret that
18 had been with the Rangers. To him it was Green Berets out there and there were Black
19 Berets out there and he knew that they were the same and they worked together. And the
20 Sergeant of the Army, too. He'd been nowhere, done nothing. See, they were both
21 tankers and in the old days the Army used to wear Black Berets simply because they
22 could look in the telescope better or whatever it's called and their hands are always dirty
23 so they wore black berets. They never wore them in their class As or nothing like that. It
24 was like a work hat. So they wanted to—every General wants to leave something. Well,
25 he left it. Then the guy walks twelve hundred miles and then he won't even sit down and
26 talk to him? Twelve hundred miles carrying a beret in his hand that a friend of his died
27 for and then a, "Get out of here." Some Major Lieutenant Colonel sat down with him and
28 boy he told him. He slammed that thing down and he said, "I'll tell you what."
29 Something to the effect of, "I hope he doesn't wander into the wrong AO." And he said,
30 "Are you threatening the General?" He leaned across the table and he said, "Sir, Rangers
31 don't fucking threaten. They fucking promise." (Laughs) And that was it. He was

1 insinuating, and it's true. I know that if somebody had the opportunity, they would.
2 They might not kill him but they damn sure would make him suffer. They had the
3 opportunity because what was he thinking? What was he thinking to put a bunch of—the
4 whole Army and take away a tradition that had been going on for thirty-five, forty years,
5 fifty years? He had it set up his ass. I have no respect for the man, I'd spit on his grave
6 and his mother's grave. He was nothing and the Sergeant Major in the Army was lower
7 than the lowest private to even contemplate something like that. They did that in the 82nd
8 Airborne in the seventies. Takabera, I think it was. There would be no more maroon
9 beret. Within forty-eight hours everybody just said, "Okay, well we quit. We don't want
10 to jump no more." You can quit anytime. This is volunteer. They can't make you jump
11 out of an airplane. They can't make you go to LRRPs. They can't make you go to SF for
12 Rangers. You're a volunteer. You can quit. So after about sixty percent in the division
13 said, "We're going to quit," he gave them back the beret. That's just what they did while
14 the senior NCOs sort of told them how to do it. They said, "You want the beret? Quit.
15 Tell them you ain't going to jump no more. Without the 82nd Airborne they're done." So
16 everybody went up and turned in their 4187 request to terminate jump status. You don't
17 have to give a reply why. It is a law. That was it.

18 RV: So it made you mad more than it hurt your morale.

19 JW: What was he thinking? "Oh, they interviewed him behind his back porch,"
20 and all this kind of stuff and in his backyard laying down. He just was trying to prove a
21 point about something and I got to cut it short. I got to quit for the day.

22 RV: Okay.

23 JW: When we had our jungle fatigues on it was usually because we came out of
24 the field, we'd been dirty for so long and all and they had everything sewed on, they were
25 starched and you looked real nice and we went downtown and we partied. But when we
26 went on a mission it was either the Tigers stuff or the jungle stuff but we could walk
27 around like that anytime and people know. They just know that you're something. I had
28 guy that used to tell me, "Tuck your pants in." I said, "Who are you talking to?" He
29 said, "What?" I said, "You don't know who I am. Look." And I opened and I had about
30 eight big oozing leech holes. I said, "You see that?" He almost threw up. I said, "I've
31 got a profile and I don't have to blouse my boots and you don't know who you're talking

1 to.” And I walked away. He didn’t know who I was. I was an E4 (laughs) but that’s the
2 way we were. “Fuck you. I mean, who the fuck are you who have been sleeping in air
3 conditioned fucking barracks and wearing a new clean uniform every day questioning
4 me?” And that’s the way we were but I had a reason about the way you approach me and
5 it was around the PX with a lot of people around and a couple guys said, “Hey soldier,
6 you need to blouse them boots.” I said, “Who are you talking to?” “I’m talking to you.
7 Who do you think you’re talking to?” I said, “I’ll show you who I’m talking to. Look.
8 You see that?” I had a big hole. I had scars for about four years from them. We were
9 just on a run and I couldn’t get them off and we were on a run and I got ripped up pretty
10 bad but that’s just the way it was. You just stay out of my space and inside our company
11 I never had no problems with the Company Commander, the 1st Sergeant, the Platoon
12 Sergeant, nobody. You did your job, you did it hard, you did your best and that’s it.
13 There was no harassment.

14 RV: All right, you want to wrap it up for today, Joey?

15 JW: Yeah, I need to.

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 7 of 10
November 29, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history
2 interview with Joey Welsh. Today is November 29th, 2005. Joey, we were talking just a
3 bit off the record about some of your experiences here at home working with Gold Star
4 mothers but we led into how tough the mothers of the MIA and POWs are and you talked
5 about how you felt like there were still people there or there are still people alive. Could
6 you comment on that and tell me why you think that?

7 Joseph Welsh: Well, I'm saying that in 1973 when the plane lands and Jeremy
8 Dalton, who was the man who got off and said his little spiel, they knew, number one,
9 that there were still guys there and there was a special secret site that was set up through
10 special heat imagery. They were following movement of our POWs. And of course this
11 was all classified and run mostly like CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) stuff. Like I
12 said they had very well trained indigenous personnel that were dug in there, too. This site
13 was really, really well concealed. I imagine it must be maybe fifteen years after the fact
14 of them coming back in '73, I don't know if it got through to their conscience or what but
15 a couple E6 and E7 Air Force guys that were doing this work finally said, "The hell with
16 it. I'm telling."

17 RV: And who was this exactly?

18 JW: They were two Air Force techs. There were Air Force people that were
19 monitoring these systems. See, we did that. We put out sensory things but they had
20 high-speed satellite imagery and heat imagery and all. They know who they were
21 following and it was just very, very, very secret and in '73 when they all got off and said
22 there's no more, one, there was never any POWs or MIAs in Laos. That was the first
23 thing they lied about and, "We have all of our men accounted for." Well, that was untrue
24 because they held on and the Russians released the records to us that yes, they did wind
25 up with some POWs. And why is it beyond anyone's imagination when that guy walked
26 out of Papua New Guinea from the Second World War after forty-seven years? "Hey
27 you!" I mean, he was still fighting the war for the forty-seven years he was living there.
28 So the idea is, and that's one thing when I went through SERE (Survival, Evasion,

1 Resistance, & Escape) Instructor course and we all get into a lot of that means Colonel
2 Rowe, Nick Rowe, who was assassinated in the Philippines in '89. You know who
3 Colonel Rowe was?

4 RV: Why don't you tell the people listening to this report?

5 JW: Okay. Colonel Nick Rowe was a Lieutenant in the Special Forces and he
6 was with the Montagnard company and he had two other advisors with him and they
7 trained the Montagnards and led the Montagnards at that time, which was in the early
8 sixties, '64 or '65, and they went into a hell of a battle. Rocky Versace—I'm not saying
9 it right but it's V-e-r-s-c-a-e—him and another guy were the Americans. Well, they just
10 totally overran them and captured all of them. Well, Rocky, from the very start said,
11 "No, screw you. No, no, no," and they were beating him and everything and he would
12 not sit down and he would not do nothing. He would not cooperate. Most guys, after
13 they get whacked a few times they say—because you're best chance of escape is when
14 you're first caught and when everything is in disarray.

15 RV: Before they get everything set up and all the security set up.

16 JW: Right, and I think that was Rocky's thing is to keep these guys... "If I can
17 keep enough of these guys busy maybe somebody can..." But Colonel Rowe, well, he
18 was a Lieutenant then, him and the other guy were already hog-tied and beat up and they
19 couldn't do anything. But they could see him at first and then they moved him and he
20 kept on just saying, "No, no." He would not and this went on for hours and hours until
21 they beat him to death. He was not going to cooperate. "I'm not going; I'm not giving
22 you nothing. Stick it up your ass. You know you got me. Kill me because I ain't." And
23 this went on and on and they even tried to tell him, "No, not me." So he was down in
24 South Vietnam and moved all through southern Vietnam from place to place in a bamboo
25 cage for over five years. He escaped once and they caught him. The next time he heard a
26 helicopter. Well, they would hear helicopters and bombs. They'd get bombs because
27 they were down there. He just had that opportunity and he grabbed the weapon and
28 killed the two guards and ran out and he almost got killed by running out because they
29 had him in black pajamas but one of the guys said, "Wait a minute, he's got a beard."
30 And they went down and they picked him up. It was that fast, just like that. For over
31 five years—it's called *Five Years to Freedom*, his book.

1 RV: Yes, I'm aware of it.

2 JW: Okay. Now, he put Rocky in for the Medal of Honor when he came back.

3 He didn't care about himself. He put Rocky in for the Medal of Honor because of what
4 he was really trying to do was disrupt them and hopefully somebody would get away and
5 would not—he wasn't going to POW camp. He wasn't going nowhere. He was going to
6 escape or die but it went on for hours, the beating, and he never whimpered or nothing.
7 He was just like totally, "Screw you." So they killed him. He put him in for the Medal
8 of Honor. He got it the year before last.

9 RV: That's great.

10 JW: I think he escaped in 1968 or '69 but that's the way things are. He only got a
11 Bronze Star for valor. I mean, Jesus, and a Purple Heart or two but he escaped once and
12 he had Beriberi and everything and he got it and made it to the stream and he just
13 collapsed and they caught him. But they were close to him. He could hear choppers and
14 stuff like that and he just gave it a shot but they get lax when they're in their own
15 backyard. He was very fluent and he was very smart. He learned the language. He was
16 very fluent but he wouldn't let them know that, of course. So just at that time when they
17 let their guard down, he grabbed a weapon, killed both of them quite brutally and ran out
18 in the field and that's the cover of him putting his hand up and the chopper coming down.
19 They grabbed him and fifteen minutes later he was free.

20 RV: Wow.

21 JW: He actually left the Army and the Army recalled him. Special Operations
22 recalled him and asked him to develop the SERE program for Special Forces. I went
23 through the instructor course when he was there and this is before they built the POW
24 camp. I don't think they actually had the POW camp. We're talking four by four cages
25 on down to the hanging you out there. It's really good. In fact, he had the model. He
26 was showing us the model, the model they had built and he was explaining it. It would
27 be built right on the river and all that. So that's why I got to know Colonel Rowe because
28 we were doing extraction and during Vietnam we had the McGuire rig, which, Master
29 Sergeant McGuire was the guy who invented it and then they went to the stable rig.
30 Well, when we were in SEREs Instructor Course—

31 RV: Did you say, "Stable raid?"

1 JW: The McGuire rig.
2 RV: The McGuire rig?
3 JW: Rig, yeah. M-c-g-u-i-r-e rig. What it was, was three hundred foot nylon
4 felling ropes and what they did was they took this wide A-7 cargo straps and they
5 interlocked them and then they put a half-loop stitch in it where you could put your hand
6 in and pull down on it. And what you had to do was slide your buttocks under the one
7 little strap and when you lift off you grab hold and you interlock your legs and arms and
8 your wrist is locked in by a little loop lock above you. And I've seen guys fall out of
9 them straps because there's only one strap and you had no special gear or anything. You
10 just hooked in there and you ran with it and everybody tried to push this strap underneath.
11 As soon as you release from the ground you would interlock your arms to the guy in the
12 center and wrap your legs and your one arm would be locked above you. That was a
13 McGuire rig. Then a stable rig, now the stable rig had a special harness that you wore
14 and it had clips so you would just come down, clip it on, and it could pull a lot more out,
15 too. The Marines invented a really neat one. It looked like a bungee cord. It was called
16 a SPIES, which is Special Patrol Infiltration and Exfiltration System. (Special Patrol
17 Insertion/Extraction System) What was really cool about this was it hung straight down
18 from the belly, one line and what happened is you would have your team set up in a
19 linear formation like in a line, left to right, left to right for security, and as the guy came
20 down and started laying down, the Team Leader would go along, sort of get back and
21 hook a man in, hook a man in, hook a man in and they were helping each other. Then, by
22 the time he got to his position he hooked in and I think it held nine at that time. It was all
23 hanging straight down. Your head was about as level as to the guy's hips so you could
24 still use your weapon. You didn't need no...your hands weren't encumbered at all so you
25 had...it was nice because when they laid it down everybody could get rigged. You could
26 run right down your line, hook up your guys, and then off you'd go, plus you could still
27 be shooting. So we got introduced to that and we did all three of them. Colonel Rowe,
28 who vaguely knew me but then after I became a student he knew, he realized that I was
29 the only guy in the class who had ever ridden all three of them because I had been in
30 Vietnam with the McGuire rig and then the stable rig came later. So he asked me to do
31 an evaluation on all three of them and all that kind of stuff. Pros and cons. We'd say,

1 “Colonel Rowe, there’s got to be somebody over there.” He said, “Maybe they don’t
2 want to come back.” Let’s face it. Some guys did go AWOL (Absent Without Leave)
3 and were never heard from again. They might have went to Thailand, they might have
4 went to Hong Kong, they might have stayed in Vietnam. But these technicians I was
5 telling you about, they finally went in front of the Senate sub-committee and all that stuff
6 and this is after Beau Gritz and them were trying to prove that they were at the border and
7 trying to prove that they had pictures of these guys and all this. This is like ’90 or ’91,
8 whatever. And this was around Curry’s famous time when he led the board and that’s
9 what really aggravated us the most, was that after all that research and all it’s
10 impossible—it really gave the families a lot of hope. It’s practically impossible for
11 anybody to have survived and we have no—let’s say we have no information confirming
12 that anyone is alive. However, they were, because these technicians came out and said,
13 “Listen, they were alive when you made the deal in ’73.” And you know the Marine;
14 everybody knows the Marine that everybody says was a collaborator and all of that. He
15 was over there fourteen years and he basically was working up in Hanoi and he was
16 going around fixing trucks for the military. He attempted to slip a note to one guy and it
17 didn’t work. Finally he slipped the note. He had to be careful there because—but he
18 took a chance and he slipped the note to a French correspondent. To make a long story
19 short they got him out of there. Well, of course everybody wanted him to be court-
20 martialled and all of that. Hey, you know, yeah, they had him carry a weapon. Was it
21 loaded? No. What they did was they took the young private who was a jeep driver and
22 tried to make it look—to really kill the morale of the soldiers he was getting better
23 treatment and all that kind of stuff and pretty soon he winded up being taken up north and
24 then he wounded up staying there and when he came back you know he was fully
25 pardoned. But he was also another one that had seen Caucasian people, men, while he
26 was there.

27 RV: Not a Russian?

28 JW: No, he met a white Caucasian American. I mean, they’re straggly and got
29 beards and all and working in fields. God knows what else he said but a lot of people say
30 he should be hung. I say, “Hung? What, are you crazy? The kid’s a private, he’s sitting
31 in a jeep and he gets captured. He’s never had a survival class in his life. He’s just a jeep

1 driver.” What they do is they’d put you through your process of converting you. This
2 kid is what? Nineteen? They figure, “If we really want to piss these people off and make
3 it even more discouraging, we’re going to let this guy do everything. We’ll give him
4 more food and we’re going to take him out with us,” and eventually they actually made
5 him. “Here, you will carry this.” So over the years of course the POWs and MIAs
6 figured that he went to the other side. He never went to the other side. He was just trying
7 to stay alive and he wasn’t a trained pilot that had been in for ten years and had an idea.
8 He had never been through SEREs School but he had sightings. There were some other
9 people who did border operations that had sightings and these technicians were really,
10 really the ones. I remember watching them testify and the way they were asking their
11 questions, the committee, was really a diversion or a tactic. I mean, I’m saying, “What
12 kind of question is that?” But these guys stuck by their guns. Of course that was all put
13 in Curry’s report but as far as I’m concerned, Curry and McCain—McCain’s a little bit
14 better they’re after number one. But Curry, his Commander—and I’ve seen what the
15 interview was and what happened with this Commander and the reports and everything;
16 he said, “Curry was there almost four months. He went on one or two twenty-four hour
17 missions. I questioned the day that they supposedly got in this engagement. And every
18 single crew member said, “We weren’t receiving any fire, sir.” He was firing M-79s and
19 all that and the stuff blew back and hit him in the hands.” Well, he ran down to the clinic
20 and said, “I just came off of this mission.” I guess being in the rank he’s in, he knows
21 what he’s doing and who he’s talking to. Anyway, he was there and then his Commander
22 said, “All of the sudden he was gone and I heard he got a Purple Heart. It never went
23 through my desk. And then I hear he gets a Silver Star. It never went through my desk.
24 And he winded up with a couple Silver Stars and Purple Hearts and all that stuff.”
25 Basically he said, “I specifically remember because there was a lot of shooting and
26 yelling and hollering.” Basically he was shooting in and some stuff blew back so he got a
27 couple of nicks in his hand and he went. The Marine Corps policy then was three Purple
28 Hearts, you go home. I believe that’s what he got was two or three Purple Hearts and he
29 was gone with the Silver Star and the Bronze Star and all this stuff and he wasn’t. He
30 was only out on a couple missions. The Commander said, “I very rarely seen him. I
31 know he went out on a couple missions. I questioned that one mission and one day he

1 was gone and orders went down for a Bronze Star and a Silver Star. I knew that nothing
2 happened on that day. I also knew what happened on that one day where he went to
3 TMC (Troop Medical Clinic)." I just can't see that—because nobody trusts nobody on
4 whatever party you're on, Democrat or Republican, the bottom line is nobody believes
5 that this stuff was going on. They figured that he was a warrior and stuff like that.
6 You've read the book *Stolen Valor*, I'm sure.

7 RV: I wanted to ask you about that. What do you think about that book and about
8 the claims about the fraudulent vets?

9 JW: Well, that was written quite awhile back. That's pretty old. And since then
10 they actually have a website and you go into that website and they have a POC for the
11 Army, Special Forces, the Marines, etc. SEALS. It's called a search engine thing. You
12 go in there and say, "Hey." They do it to me. I just had a guy who works in Detroit with
13 this other guy. Now, the guy who contacted the unit said, "Listen. I'm a member of the
14 75th Ranger Regiment Association, a lifetime member and I've got a guy here named
15 Jones that claims he was with your company." He looked at the website and he claims to
16 have been with 1st Platoon, Satan Playboys from Hell We Rise, but we couldn't really
17 pinpoint anybody. "If anybody knows him or served with him or was there in his platoon
18 with him, contact me." So I let it go the first time and then I read it again and I said, "I'm
19 going to contact him." So I contacted him and I told him exactly what we had and things
20 like that. Well, come to find out, he was in our company. A guy did confirm that. We
21 had active members and we know where they live active and we know where they live
22 and their phone numbers. We have the KIAs and we have the deceased list, which we try
23 to keep up with, and then we have missing—no, we have non-member last known
24 location and non-member location unknown. I pulled up the roster and we're working on
25 right now. We accounted for eleven hundred and forty-five guys in one way or another.
26 When we started this twenty years ago we had no orders on anything because we had no
27 records. They were all classified. So we couldn't verify anything. Everybody sent in a
28 copy of their orders and we took names off of there. Jeez, we made up a KIA list. I
29 looked at it then and I look at it now and I say, "Jeez." It was just so hard for people to
30 try—unless they had orders in their hand like awarding them a Purple Heart or CIB or an
31 Army Commendation medal, then they could say, "Okay, let's go over here and find this

1 guy and yes, he is there.” We had David Allen Parker and he was KIA’d around March
2 of ’68. What happened was this guy contacted us and said, “Hey, this is what we’ve got
3 on this guy,” and he was never with us. I don’t know why they do it. A Supreme Court
4 judge was caught, Brian Dennehy, the big, rough—he claimed he was a Vietnam vet with
5 Silver Stars and stuff.

6 RV: That’s right.

7 JW: And the list goes on and on and on. So what happens is now I confirmed, I
8 said, “I don’t know what your motives are.” I looked him up. I knew he was good and in
9 the 75th. “But I can tell you that yes, he was assigned to that platoon during that time but
10 I have no address, no phone number or anything. I can tell you this”—and he was a
11 retired Sergeant Major—“Sergeant Major, I can tell you that yes, he did serve in our
12 unit.” So he thanked me and he appreciated it. Then we had another guy who was
13 looking for a friend, a good friend, and it just seems, I don’t know why, I guess because
14 they’re getting old, but the last couple months I’ve seen more guys than ever who are
15 coming forward now and saying, “Well, here’s some pictures. Let me check it out.”
16 What happened was we were formed in September ’67 because they had—you read
17 Colonel Howard’s *Tribute to the SOG* book? If you remember in there, they had CCN,
18 that’s Command and Control North, CCC, Command and Control Central, and CCS,
19 Command and Control South. Well, if you remember Project Omega—well, let’s put it
20 this way. Everybody remembers Project Delta. Well, all that was, was a code saying
21 they are now doing cross-border operations. That’s all it meant. They didn’t have
22 enough recon people to do the II Corps area and the rest of Vietnam so what they did was
23 in the II Corps area, they formed us in September ’67, half from the LRRPs in the 101st
24 and the other guys were recruited from replacement detachment. They trained for about
25 three months then started their operations. In III Corps, which is right below us, and that
26 was CCC southern area, what they did is they formed us to relieve the Special Forces
27 from staying in Vietnam looking for them. We can do that and then that’s when they
28 started Project Omega, which was a transition of them, even though some of them had
29 already been over there. They wanted a nice cover name and so everybody will talk
30 about, “Who was you with?” “I was with Project Delta.” “What did you do?” “I did this
31 and this.” “You’re lying. I know what the hell you did.” And in the meantime, during

1 this transition there was a team B-36 who nobody mentions or talks about but they
2 actually, while we were doing the training, were setting up there to take care of CCC, or I
3 should say, to Central Highlands. Cut it in half, we spent more on the western side, on
4 the border side. When the documents came down we were actually supporting Project
5 Omega, the transition of CCC is going to do cross-border operations. You're going to do
6 the entire sector of that corridor. And who is taking up all of our slack while we were
7 being trained and all this transition going on was B-52 or Project Delta, who had begun
8 their cross-border operations. So it was Alpha, Omega, and Sigma and that was just
9 saying that CCS, CCN, and CCC were now doing cross-border operations pretty
10 extensively. They unit itself, which was originally run by a sing log, they had a hatchet
11 force. A hatchet force was your reactionary force and they were Hungs.

12 RV: They were what?

13 JW: Hungs. H-u-n-g.

14 RV: Oh, right, you talked about those yesterday.

15 JW: Yeah, yeah. They were of Chinese descent, very warrior oriented though
16 Montagnards were good.

17 RV: What was the role of the hatchet force? What would they actually do?

18 JW: Well, the hatchet force was—basically they had a company and what they
19 would do is—and boy, they did some marvelous things. They went up and right before
20 Tet they were really bringing stuff down. You know how you could blow it up at night
21 and it would be repaired in the morning, that didn't stop them. They just kept on going
22 and going and going. So what they did is they got up on this hilltop and really dug in and
23 dug everything. They waited until the first convoy came and they knocked out the first
24 truck and then the Air Force and artillery, primarily Air Force took over for like two or
25 three days because nobody could turn around. They just stopped the re-supply. See,
26 that's what they should have been doing in the first place. They gave them a ten-
27 kilometer ratio. That's as far in as you can go. They should have been behind that. They
28 should have been disrupting the supply line. You disrupt the supply lines, the soldier has
29 nothing to fight with and we weren't doing that well enough at Ho Chi Minh trail, no
30 matter if we dropped B-52s all night long. The next day if they had to use donkey,
31 motorcycles, or walk, they'd do it. But the hatchet force was for that. Reactionary force,

1 if a team got in trouble, the hatchet force would come in and they were very, very loyal to
2 the Americans. We had some NVA and some VC under the Chieu Hoi up in arms
3 program and boy, I'll tell you, they came to our unit and we just started working with
4 them. Everybody was skeptical. "What a minute. This is not going to work." But the
5 idea was—he knew the terrain and he basically what was going on in the operations.
6 And also he was leading the pack. That gave us the split second or two for that side that
7 he bumps into if he does accidentally bump into someone—the guy that he bumps into
8 will have more attention to hold off before he shoots. The 101st LRRPs used to go out in
9 full black pajamas and Communist web gear with all their ammo. Some of them wore
10 little coolie caps and everything, just for the element of surprise. Because if you're
11 walking up and there's a trail watcher, he's going to hesitate but he doesn't know you're
12 not going to hesitate. I was going to tell you that SOG, that's what they called the entire
13 group, was the most decorated unit in American history.

14 RV: I didn't know that.

15 JW: Oh yeah. They had four Medal of Honor winners. That's a sore subject on
16 our side of the house.

17 RV: Why is that? Because you guys weren't recognized quite as much?

18 JW: No. See, because they had what they called a one-one, and one-zero, and a
19 one-two, one being the Team Leader, one being the Team Sergeant, one being the
20 radio/telephone operator. That's three Americans and we'd have nine to eleven Hungs.
21 And you worked your way up and if you survived, like I told you it was over a hundred
22 percent at one time had been wounded at least once. They stayed. They kept on staying.
23 I mean, I wanted to stay. I could have winded up going to Pleiku, I would have went
24 with a company of Montagnards, or I could have winded up on what they call LRRP
25 teams that they used, but it was for cross-border. This was '68. So the reason they
26 formed us was to relieve the Special Forces SOG to go start doing cross-border
27 operations and then we would do the Central Highlands and all II Corps, along with this
28 special little unit called B-36 that during that transition, they did all the recon. Basically
29 it was a lot of volunteers. "I'll go up, I'll go up, I'll go up." I have a good friend of mine
30 that was in B-36 because I mentioned it to him and he said, "You remember B-36?" I
31 said, "Yeah, I know about B-36 and Omega." "You know about Omega? What do you

1 know about Omega?" And then I told him and he said, "Damn, how'd you know that?" I
2 said, "In them days I didn't know that much." But back in '82 or '83 I got to work with
3 Colonel Bob Montel. Colonel Bob Montel was—when they were forming Delta Force it
4 was Beckwith against Montel. Montel wanted to stick with his blue lights and stuff like
5 that which meant that each SF unit would have a Delta-like trained company so they
6 could do counter-terrorism. It was blue light or bright light or whatever. Anyway,
7 Charlie won over. Charlie Beckwith, he won over and he started Delta Force and nobody
8 really heard about them so they went and tried to get the hostages and then during the
9 refueling process out in the middle of the desert, they'd already lost a couple choppers in
10 turnaround so they was even trying to figure out how they could put everybody on.
11 Because what they did was the guys who were going on it, they took them their certain
12 area and they built everything exactly the same by guys who were there. They had the
13 Intel everything. As you would imagine, trying to pull an actual C-130 and drop the
14 hose—now this is on the ground that people were loading into it because that's the way
15 you do it in combat. Now, if you wasn't in combat, passengers could get out and go on a
16 ninety degree angle and be told to sit down while they refueled. But with today's high-
17 speed technology they're refueling out of the C-130 and basically they clip each other
18 and I think they lost eight or nine guys. And that of course put them too short. But what
19 could he do? He didn't want to go in and—he wanted to go in and he wanted to try to
20 limp in there really and then save these guys and then hopefully the troops could come.
21 But they weren't going to come because they couldn't tell nobody about it. The Son Tay
22 Raids, that's what that is. They found out later that there was a mole within SOG up
23 where they were and one down in Saigon. Of course you call in an Arc Light or a B-52
24 strike, of course it's top secret and specially coded. You don't advertise where you're
25 going to do it. Now, what happened was one of these guys, an E5 or E6, whatever, who
26 was fighting the nasty war in Thailand during Vietnam, he went downtown to see his girl
27 and when he came back he didn't have his documents. Well, what happened, he said
28 somebody just came running by him in traffic and grabbed him and went. Now, I could
29 see a camera, money, or a wallet or something like that, but they were interested in one
30 thing and one thing only and that was just—I don't know who was caring or if anyone
31 was caring but I just know that what happened from that mission was that they were on

1 the way, everything's good except the refueling point. And a lot of countries did not
2 cooperate for air space, too. Our guys were in Vietnam and we'd come over to Thailand
3 to stage out of there mostly because they had better flight facilities and it was easier to do
4 it that way. So they'd go over there for a week or two, go in isolation, study their area
5 and what they were concentrating on in what area and how they were going to do it and
6 all. When you sit back and explain to the Colonel and his RTO (Radio Telephone
7 Operator) sitting next to him and his XO is behind him, you get to see how they play this
8 game. "Here you go. Here's a picture." "So what? It's a picture." It don't say Kodak
9 1968 or nothing. We're just disgusted that when I got my retroactive award in '99 it was
10 triple most of the year. Some of these guys had been in four to six months. I got my
11 hundred percent finalized in the end of January and they gave me a hundred percent,
12 which adds up to maybe seventeen hundred dollars a month, but it's better than not
13 having your retirement pay.

14 RV: Why so?

15 JW: Well, in 1891 they cut the law that at that time no federal employee could do
16 both. The budget wasn't there. In other words, say I was in the Army for twenty years
17 and I retired and I got sick and all and they gave me fifty percent disability, they couldn't
18 afford to give me a hundred percent retirement and fifty percent disability so they just
19 took the fifty percent retirement and they'd give you fifty retirement and fifty VA. Dollar
20 for dollar you swapped out. Basically if you was a Colonel or a bug you was paying for
21 your own disability. In 1944 I believe it was they refurbished it a little bit and that's
22 when they started using females more. There are females in Delta. They spend a long
23 time training. Not as intense or subject matter-wise as SOG but they will put on halo
24 gear but they get mobile training teams. In other words they grab a couple aircraft and
25 the team goes out to their location and does an onsite training program for them so there's
26 no interruptions, they get it done, and they're priority on the list. I didn't know about it
27 until I went over to the Warrant Officer Company because this guy who was 1st Sergeant,
28 he had already served in Berlin up at the Bear Mountain, which was another one of our
29 areas where we had hidden. What tipped them off was Tet '68, when they were putting
30 out all this stuff about, "Hey they were doing this and they were doing that." That thing
31 came up missing. He was running with a female. Now whether somebody—I never seen

1 him pick him up and grab a box unless there was food in there. They got a little bit more
2 sense than that. The government just sold them out or you could look at it this way.
3 They didn't buy their way out because that was whole deal. "You give me x amount of
4 money and I give you a hundred percent POWs." "Well, we ain't going to—you're
5 admitting now that you have POWs so why should we pay you?" I seen the actual clack
6 and all that of the guys who they believe—they last time they seen them they were alive
7 with the enemy and so they put them in POW/MIA.

8 RV: Hey Joey, let me ask you a couple of questions kind of related to this.

9 JW: Okay.

10 RV: The term sheep dipping, basically taking someone out of the military
11 service—

12 JW: What?

13 RV: Sheep dipping. S-h-e-e-p then d-i-p-p-i-n-g, slang basically that I've heard
14 from other veterans about taking an individual out of the military service, kind of
15 unofficially.

16 JW: On paper.

17 RV: Yeah, and then creating another identity for them to continue a more
18 clandestine life in service, wherever this is in the world, but in Vietnam I've heard that
19 this happened. Do you know anything about this kind of taking someone out on paper
20 and assigning them Black Ops or your type of operations?

21 JW: Yeah, Black Ops, I don't know why they ever use that word. Well, let's put
22 it this way. The whole time that SOG was in Laos, they weren't there.

23 RV: Right.

24 JW: Now, the problem that we had with SOG was because of the flight going in
25 you had to go in with stealth so they used the black birds. But they were flown by the Air
26 Force. They were a beefed up thing that had a little bit of long-range capacity and they'd
27 put them in and then they'd go back to whatever camp they were coming out of and
28 they'd be there to get them out. It started getting reports that, "Okay, we're going to do
29 an Arc Light. Now an Arc Light, maybe three people will know about it and one of them
30 goes up and briefs the President of South Vietnam so maybe four people know about it.
31 But when these Arc Lights were going down they'd go in and do a Bomb Damage

1 Assessment and they had just seen a regiment there maybe x amount of hours or the day
2 before and they're gone and there's nobody dead. So there was a mole in the system.
3 There was somebody or more. Now at first they caught a mole inside of SOG but they he
4 was doing minor stuff. There was only certain people who had access to Arc Lights. The
5 other thing was power trip. It's very easy for aviation especially to say, "I need twenty-
6 two ships," and they say, "We've only got nineteen flying." What do you say? What are
7 you going to do, go down there and check? They could rig it not to fly and that was one
8 of their biggest frustrations just like ours was that we didn't know whether he was sitting
9 there or not. We just hoped to God that when we say, "We're in contact. We need this or
10 we need that," they say, "All right, they're inbound." It might taken them fifteen or
11 twenty minutes but they are coming for you and that's the Slicks and the guns and a
12 Medevac maybe. And the guns, when they had to they would leave the formation and
13 run ahead because the FAC guy would say, "Hey, I need the guns up here now!" So they
14 would take off and they would just start scratching the area and then the chopper would
15 tell them—they would tell the chopper, "Are they firing? Are they firing?" And he'd
16 say, "Well, hell yeah, they're firing. Why do you think I want to get the hell out of
17 here?" "Well, we can't go in, then." "What do you mean you can't go in? You expect
18 me to raise a white flag? That's what all this air support is going to do." All these mini-
19 guns from the airships and all, the gun ships, they would be tracing and these things can
20 put a round in every square inch in one run of a football field. And they would be
21 running them up and down and they'd say, "It's close," and they'd say, "Drop the damn
22 stuff and let's go, let's go." That's the only way because if Charlie gets on the inside of
23 the ring, six hundred meters is, "Danger close," and say six hundred meters is the closest
24 I'll shoot and you're six hundred meters away, Charlie knows—if he thinks he's got the
25 power, if the rounds are hitting behind him he doesn't run away from them. He runs
26 towards you because he knows the closer he gets to you, the less likely a chance that
27 you're going to call it in. However, SOG has called it right in on them and Captain
28 Carpenter—I knew the Sergeant Major real well—who was the 1st Sergeant then
29 Szablewski, he was one of the guys that got a Medal of Honor that just said, "Fire for
30 effect." And they said, "What?" He said, "I said fire for effect," and he called in. But he
31 brought people back. If he didn't do that it all died. It would have been totally overrun.

1 Now on the reverse end of that, something that really stuck with me and is still with me,
2 we were scouts security platoon so ninety nine percent of the time we would live along
3 the edge of the Medevac for better security because it's a prime target and also to help
4 out. Well, we had a—I don't even know about the unit, but a company was under a
5 heavy attack and an LT called in. Now what I do is I call in and I say, "Give me a
6 smoker." A smoke round. And if you're good enough and you should be, you see a
7 smoke round and you say, "Up two hundred, left fifty, fire for effect. Over." You make
8 you adjustment and here comes your HE, your High Explosives. Well, this Lieutenant
9 called for fire effect and a battery fired and I think it was twelve rounds within—anyway,
10 within twelve seconds fifty-two men were dead.

11 RV: Oh my gosh.

12 JW: From friendly fire. But he didn't want to call in on them. He gave them—
13 and being nervous and all you have to have the coordinates that you want and get your
14 distance. He called in his coordinates and I know I was there and that's the first time that
15 we tied M-60 machine guns onto the Medevac and we were even switching out when
16 them. The Medics were just so exhausted and sick and we stacked fifty-two of them guys
17 in a refigured refer. By this time another company had gotten in and secured the area
18 but—

19 RV: Joey, what do you do with that kind of incident? How do you handle that
20 emotionally?

21 JW: Well, it depends on my rank. Now, see this is why I said I don't know if I
22 would get in this program because the way I thought then and the way I think now is
23 different. I was calling it in. I was an E4. We didn't have officers. That's why we
24 didn't get Medals of Honor. The highest we've ever gotten was a DFC. I had one guy
25 put in for a Medal of Honor. He jumped on a grenade. He saw a grenade, he jumped on
26 it, he picked it up, he threw it back, it didn't go off. There were two trail watchers, which
27 he was walking point, and they simultaneously seen each other. As he fired, they threw
28 and there was six of them, our guys. He jumped on the grenade and that fast he got up
29 and picked it up. This guy was huge. He was one of my best friends, Jimmy B. Kessler.
30 He had a scholarship to the University of Alabama to play football and he picked that
31 grenade up and he threw it about then yards. Luckily it didn't go off. He said it weighed

1 about three hundred pounds. (Laughs) But all this happened so fast. The guys hit him,
2 they fired him up and when he jumped down he landed on a grenade. He picked it up and
3 he threw it and of course they were joking and we're kind of sick in our jokes when we
4 get back and everybody's okay. We said, "Jesus Christ, Kessler, a big guy like you could
5 only throw it ten yards." He said, "Man, I picked that up. Let me tell you, that think
6 weighed about two hundred pounds." It was a kind of slow motion, whoa, whoa, whoa,
7 whoa. So now Jimmy's pissed. "Let's go get them." Well, they get up there and they
8 see a blood trail and all. Well, trail watchers usually indicate that they're watching the
9 trail for another unit and that's what it was. It was at least a company or two that came
10 down to get them. The FAC was up there by then and said, "Okay, head this way and get
11 to the LZ." And when they were on the LZ Jimmy was pounding them. That's why I got
12 hit. Jimmy was just calling it right in. In other words, you're supposed to start and then
13 walk it out but you want to start at six hundred meters and walk it out. That shit was
14 coming through the trees over top of us but he said, "Fuck it. Fuck it. I'm going to kill
15 these mother fuckers." And also, what that did was it definitely held them back and then
16 when the artillery stopped and as soon as that chopper goes, here comes them gun ships
17 and them gun ships, boy, God bless them. They come down there and boy, they're just
18 ripping. You can hear that stuff ripping ten yards from you.

19 RV: It's precise.

20 JW: Well, most of the time. If it's not hitting me and it's building a wall of lead,
21 it gives me the maybe six minutes that I need to get out there, get my guys on there and
22 get out. That's all I need and that's what they'd do. They'd come in low and screaming.
23 They'll tell you, "Here I come." We'll say, "Okay, look. Fly east to west at fifty
24 meters." And they say, "Keep your heads down." I've had artillery guys say, "No, it's
25 danger close and all." Because here's another thing. We don't talk for days so when we
26 make contact we have a tendency to scream. We don't have much tact or bearing or
27 communication ethics. We tell you like it is. "The sons of bitches are coming. I said,
28 'Dump it.'" And here comes a guy that was coming in and he's saying, "I'm receiving
29 fire. Are you receiving fire?" "Of course we're receiving fire. That's why you're
30 coming to get us." But they're supposed to know that that fire is going to be suppressed
31 at a certain time. The gun ship can't be running back and forth and then you come in

1 because now he's just wasted ammo. So it's all timed so just as you're—because they
2 want to get that chopper. They'll wait. They'll sit there and wait for that chopper to start
3 to flare and then they'll all stand up and shoot at that chopper. That's what the gun ship
4 does is he tries to time it so when they get down to that area at that time they start really
5 laying in the lead. Now if they want to stand up, let them stand up. But they lay down a
6 wall of lead and that gives you hopefully enough time to get your guys on those Slicks.
7 We've had guys say, "No, we can't do it and by the way, we're low on gas." "Yeah,
8 you're low on gas and we're low on sun." We've had contact and these guys scream the
9 contact and their coordinates and all that kind of stuff and running gun ship. Okay, he's
10 running, running, running, and I've also had them say, "We don't have any." And I'm
11 like, "What do you mean, sir, you don't have any choppers? We have two designated
12 choppers to this mission." "Well, they're refueling." "They're refueling?" Well, I'm not
13 going to tell you what you say.

14 RV: No, you can go ahead.

15 JW: Oh. "You dumb motherfucker. I'm out here and I ain't got no way out now.
16 They're supposed to be coming to me, okay? I've got gooks all around me, I've got gun
17 ships here but I can't get out. I can't ride out in the goddamn gun ship. I'll kill you, you
18 son of bitch if I get the hell out of here." That's the bottom line. That's the way you put
19 it to him. Fuck him. He's a pin-pushing motherfucker that ain't been out there and he
20 told me to go run and hide. I said, "What did you say? Say again, over. Run and hide?
21 How do you hide in somebody's backyard when he's already turned on the lights?" I
22 swear on my children that happened to me, "Run and hide." Now, we have a support
23 team. I told you about our teams. Our teams are in the field. We have commo x-ray that
24 way out there because we cannot make commo back. Now, those that come in need to be
25 detoxed. They need a few days off to themselves and let them get themselves cleaned up,
26 get their head back on straight, maybe go down town, and then they go into a support
27 mode, pushing the teams out and then a few days later they're going out. Now, whatever
28 the system is, when you get off of that aircraft, that support team is there to meet you.
29 Now we had a run-in and we had nowhere to go and they said, "Where are you going?"
30 We had a huge naval gun ship, sixteen inches. I said, "Right there." "Where?" I said,
31 "To that goddamn boat. Let me tell you something, bro, they've got to have some kind of

1 boat on there to come and get us," because there was nothing on our maps and that's what
2 FAC does. FAC says, "Wait a minute. Two hundred and seventy degrees, three hundred
3 meters, you've got a little opening. We might be able to get in there." Well, as soon as
4 we try to get in there, somebody's got to stand up and panel. I'm standing up, I'm
5 paneling, and as soon as they get low enough I get in and I go across and I help the door
6 gunner lay down suppressive fire. Well, I'm hanging on the skid, ready to swing my leg
7 up and I feel him pulling pitch and my feet are leaving the ground. I look up at the door
8 gunner and he's pointing back and I see that there's a small tree there. So of course I
9 look up and there's Charlie standing up shooting and I just dropped down and we laid
10 down fire and now the guy had a better idea to get and then we just called in them gun
11 ships. We were in a corner, they had seen us and they knew exactly where we were.
12 That's close as I had gun ships on me but I'd tell them because these guys had chased us
13 until we got to this little corner and they waited. They got in a little L-thing and they
14 waited and waited. They knew it was coming and here I am hanging. I'm not a foot off
15 the ground when he started pulling pitch and I realized it. I looked down and I looked up
16 at him and then I heard, "Pull," and I see these three or four gooks standing up shooting
17 at us and I seen a couple of them fall down, too, because our guys laid into them. The
18 machine gunner laid into them and I dropped down. So then the gun ships just—man,
19 they made about five or six runs. Now this guy when he came in, boy, he brought that
20 sucker in there and you keep the panel in your pocket until it's time to bring it out and
21 then you've got to stand up. It's just an orange panel square and you just open it and
22 close it, open it and close it. He knew where we were then. And then he came in there,
23 boy, and he set that sucker right—he didn't have to set it down. He just had to get it
24 enough to where I could get my leg on there. So then I ran up and as soon as I was on it
25 they got another guy who was behind me and I helped and then I moved over to support
26 that side machine gunner because we all were loading on one side. Only a couple of
27 them ever stood up again and then they were down because of them gun ships. Yeah,
28 they'd chase us. But that one time I came off I had a guy hit and luckily it was a ricochet.
29 I told him, I said, "I'll kill you, you son of a bitch. When I get back I swear I'll kill you."
30

RV: What did you do when you got back?

1 JW: Well, as soon as I come off the aircraft, the support team smothers you.
2 That's their mission. "Hey, Joey, how are you doing? How are you doing?" They get
3 your weapon. "Come on, man, come on. Come on man, come on. We got some beer.
4 We got this. We're going to party." "No, I'm going to briefing," and they take you away
5 and they take you to a secluded area where there's showers, beer, food, and in other
6 words I was not going to—the ATL and the TL receive the briefing and they give the
7 debriefing. I wasn't allowed to come to the debriefing.

8 RV: Because of your...

9 JW: Yeah. There was no charges pressed against me. I just wasn't invited to the
10 debriefing without a weapon because I would have struck—as soon as I seen that man I
11 would have attacked him because we couldn't understand how our officers could do that
12 to us. I mean, you know you've got teams out there and we have to have the helicopters
13 static and then they've got to be in the air because it might take them thirty minutes to get
14 to us. And three minutes is hell. And when they you that they're refueling you just—that
15 was our biggest frustration. I told you our Company Commander—and I read it because
16 I'm the historian—in his report he wrote, and he was a damn good man. He started us, he
17 formed us, and he told them what was wrong. We need aviation support 24/7 assigned.
18 We've got to live, eat, and breathe together. And then I was doing cross-border
19 operations and it was the first couple times out. Now I had been with SOG units and all
20 that on their base camps. We learned a lot from them. I was with twenty-four year old
21 E7s that had been over there five years. They thought we were kind of crazy and envied
22 some of the things we did. I knew that if the chopper didn't make it there and you was
23 over there that they might turn around or they might not show up at all or you'll never
24 know because you're overrun. That's when I found out about the Black Birds and the
25 first time I seen the Black Birds. I got on the camp and I knew right away where I was
26 but them Black Birds were static. They were waiting. In the later years there became a
27 conflict of power.

28 RV: What do you mean?

29 JW: Okay, the guy who is in charge of the squadron had to be approving authority
30 to release certain assets. Well, I don't have time for that. I need this now. Well, he was
31 going to prove his point and it's really hard to argue against him when he says, "What

1 can I do? You want eight choppers and I've only got three running." How do we know?
2 See, it's so easy for them to pull a maintenance whack on you. General Abrams was in
3 this briefing and this stuff went down and we almost lost some guys. Well, we did lose
4 one guy out of it. He was a SOG. And boy, he yelled at him.

5 RV: To Abrams or Abrams was yelling?

6 JW: General Abrams. He said, "When the hell or you going to learn that I told
7 you, you will, you will provide this support? And I'm not going to have this Captain
8 running around looking for your ass for approval. When we say we want, we get. Do
9 you understand that? Do you understand what these men are doing or do I have to send
10 you out on the ground?" That sort of settled things down. After that they had pretty
11 good support. But they could always hit you with that maintenance. Being in that
12 situation, yeah, okay, one or two birds, but he wanted to have the upper hand. He did not
13 like the fact that an Army officer was controlling his aircraft. But the damn pilots were
14 great. I mean they were great pilots and the guys that flew the Black Birds, they were Air
15 Force. They'd come. They'd come in a heartbeat. Anywhere, any time, any place, they
16 would come because they grew up with SOG. But then this one Squadron Commander or
17 something, he wanted to play, "These are my aircraft." He was told, "Oh, no, they're not
18 your aircraft." In fact, basically he told him, "You won't have the rank to have aircraft."
19 He really ripped into this guy in front of everybody and he wasn't nobody to mess with.
20 He was the main man.

21 RV: Did it change things?

22 JW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. There was still the animosity and once in a while you
23 might not get six but—when a man does that, this is the way I live. They would hear me
24 arguing with the CO, and I argued with my CO when I was a 1st Sergeant, that, "You are
25 wrong. I've been training troops before you had even thought about the Army. You're
26 wrong about this, sir. It has to be like this because of this and this and this." If the
27 soldiers feel and see and hear and know that you're fighting for their health, morale, and
28 welfare, even if you lose they're going to respect you. And that's the way I was brought
29 up, is you are responsible for the overall health, morale, and welfare of that entire unit.
30 That's the 1st Sergeant's job. He runs the company. He takes care of the enlisted men.
31 He gets the training and the job done. "Sir, you sign the papers and keep the people off

1 my back." And that's what this guy promised me in our interview. I told the Sergeant
2 Major, I said, "Listen, this is kind of weird. January 5th, 1994, and we're having a change
3 of command and we're both pulling in at the same time and I need to talk to this man." I
4 said, "Sergeant Major, I've got to let him know where I'm coming from and you know
5 where I'm coming from." He said, "I know, that's why I hired you all right, but have
6 your sit down." Well this guy, "Yeah, okay, no problem. I'll take care of civilians. You
7 run it, yeah. You're the Drill Sergeant." Shit. He was the worst officer that I could have
8 asked for in the job that I worked my whole for to get and I had superior NCOs and I was
9 teaching. There was only four Drill Sergeants on Fort Bragg. Nobody knew about them,
10 even the Central Issue Facility that controls every piece of property. I called them up and
11 said, "Yes, ma'am, my name is 1st Sergeant Welsh and I need some Drill Sergeant hats."
12 She said, "There ain't no Drill Sergeants at Fort Bragg, 1st Sergeant." I said, "Well,
13 ma'am, I beg to differ with you but I got four of them sitting in my office." She said,
14 "Oh, come on, 1st Sergeant. I've been here fifteen years." I said, "Well, I've been here
15 about fifteen days and I need Drill Sergeant hats. What do I have to do to get them?"
16 She said, "Well, wait a minute, you need to talk to Henry." Well, to make a long story
17 short, I went down to Fort Jackson where the school was and I made a deal with a Supply
18 Sergeant down there so they could swap one for one until they actually did order them in
19 Fort Bragg because nobody knew. And the guy before me, he didn't give a shit. But see,
20 I was the 1st Sergeant/Senior Drill Sergeant. In other words we had two committees: a
21 Psychological Operations Committee that taught the PSYOPS, and there were PSYOPS
22 guys; and then we had the Civil Affairs Committee which were SFs that taught civil
23 affairs. And we had a male and female Drill Sergeant for each section. And before I got
24 there they were assigned to that section leader. When I came in I said, "Oh no, you're
25 not in charge of no Drill Sergeants. You shouldn't even be in this company area.
26 Whoever formed this company because you should be up on the hill drinking beer. I
27 don't want you around. You live and sleep and eat around my students. That's bad
28 enough. I got enough problems." See, in the regular military the Drill Sergeants have
29 total control of where they live, eat, breathe, and sleep. Then they move them to each
30 training area and then they return them at home. They never see them training guys
31 again. Well, when they formed this company they formed the trainers and instructors in

1 with the company so there was just too much time being spent. It's bad enough that I got
2 to worry about four Drill Sergeants and maybe three or four guys in Headquarters
3 Company trying to screw somebody. But when you've got eight or ten—I had about
4 eighteen—instructors that stay with them all day in a classroom and then was there at
5 night it was just—I had to relieve the Drill Sergeant. My best Drill Sergeant had six
6 weeks left. Six weeks left because he was honest. He could have got away with it and
7 said, "I didn't date the girl until afterwards and that was three months ago and now she's
8 coming to live with me." I would have said, "Okay, that's all I know." Once he told
9 me—it was eating him up so bad that it was affecting his relationship with his partner and
10 she knew and so he broke the code. The code of a Drill Sergeant is not to fraternize.
11 After they graduate, that's different. And I honestly believe what he told me was true.
12 The girl called him. They had been falling in love with their eyes for eight or ten weeks
13 and she got a pass and was half drunk. It was three or four in the morning and she was
14 about three blocks from the barracks and she said, "Come pick me up." He knows now
15 that he should have said no and called the guys on duty to go and get her or he should
16 have went and got her and taken her to the barracks but he didn't. He took her home.
17 They had breakfast, they fell asleep, he did not screw her and I believe that. They never
18 seen each other again until afterwards and then she started dating and one thing led to
19 another. Well, the CO knows all this and I don't know anything about it. But the Drill
20 Sergeants, they know everything. And finally the Drill Sergeant came down and said, "I
21 can't take it anymore. I can't hold it in. Drill Sergeant So-and-So was with a student." I
22 said, "Whoa, whoa, now wait a minute. Wait a minute now. This is on the record kind of
23 stuff here. I got to know." She said, "Yeah, 1st Sergeant is bringing her down here to
24 live." I said, "Now, look, what's the situation? Because if we go any further, I'm
25 bringing out statements." She said, "I'll make a statement." Well, that night he called
26 me up and then he came over. He didn't want to get the whole company involved so he
27 just confessed. I said, "Listen, Drill Sergeant, if you say any more I'm going to have to
28 take you down as a statement." He said, "That's what I want you to do. I got to do the
29 right thing. This is tearing me up and I don't want to have a 1506." That means
30 everything gets investigated and all that. He said, "I'm just going to admit to what I
31 done." I said, "Okay, hold on." I got the paperwork and then he admitted it. He

1 admitted it because he was honest but also because they knew. She knew. She knew that
2 something had happened and it just pissed her off that he broke the code. And he only
3 had six weeks left.

4 RV: Why do you think he did this?

5 JW: Pardon me?

6 RV: Why do you think he did this? I mean, if your code is so tight?

7 JW: In the spur of the moment, something like that, you've got a girl that you feel
8 like you're falling in love with and she's off so nobody's looking for her, you just think
9 with the wrong head. You're only human. Basically, he felt that, "Okay, I did it but I
10 didn't do anything and I got her back and nobody's going to find out." These men, these
11 trainees talk and they go to the Drill Sergeant and it goes around and around and around
12 and around and around and they sit them down and they talk with them and then finally
13 somebody's going to say, "She left here and she went with Drill Sergeant So-and-So and
14 I seen them," and then they get statements. That's how it comes down. He said, "Look,
15 I'm just going to..." So he was a superior soldier. Superior. In fact, when we gave him
16 his efficiency report he had several "excellents," because where he screwed up in was
17 judgment. His judgment and stuff like that. Even the CO didn't think of him that bad.
18 But it was enough to where we were going to have to let him go. Now when we went up
19 to see the Colonel the Colonel was pretty stern but he knew that it took a lot for the guy
20 to come up. He admitted it so he didn't drag it out and he respected him for that. But he
21 just couldn't understand why. Of course who can? Then the Drill Sergeant said—he
22 said, "Do you have anything else?" He said, "I'd like to request if I could keep my
23 badge." The Sergeant Major makes the decision. The Sergeant Major and me make the
24 decision whether the guy keeps his badge or not. And the Sergeant Major said to me,
25 "What do you think?" I said, "He's keeping the badge. I don't give a shit. He's keeping
26 the badge. I believe everything he said. He didn't touch her. Love sucks but he did two
27 hard years. I want him to keep the badge." He said, "Well, the Colonel might..." I said,
28 "The Colonel doesn't have nothing to do with this, Sergeant Major. This is NCO
29 business and I say he keeps the badge. If the Colonel says no then I want to see the
30 Colonel." He said, "All right, Joey, take it easy." (Laughs) That's what he told me. I
31 said, "Well, it's our business because what did he say? When he asked the Colonel the

1 Colonel said the Sergeant Major will take care of that. We're taking care of it. You
2 asked me and I'm telling you. The man made a mistake. He admitted it, he's paying his
3 dues, he's going to get out of the service. He's keeping the badge." He kept his badge.
4 Of course the other Drill Sergeants were talking. I said, "Get over here, Drill Sergeant."
5 I'd get in their face. I said, "Don't you ever contradict my decision. I was a Drill
6 Sergeant when you were getting off the goddamn school bus. You understand me?"
7 "Yes, 1st Sergeant." "Get out of my area." That's the way you have to be.

8 RV: Joey, tell me about the loyalty and the code within your LRRP unit.

9 JW: Well, I'll tell you, it's still there today. I had a little incident. I can't
10 remember when it was. I had a rough night and I was sick for Monday, Tuesday,
11 Wednesday, Thursday and it was my lower right lung and I thought, "This is it. My shit
12 is shot now. This is it. I'm going down." So I isolated, got really depressed, didn't go
13 nowhere, and then I blew up and we've got a little forum chat web that we put together
14 for the unit. You go in there privately to sign in and it's been going pretty good. It only
15 just started with about six or eight of us. From going there every day I just went in and I
16 said, "I've had it." Plus, one of the guys in our motorcycle club was murdered. I mean
17 murdered. Hit from behind the head. They haven't even investigated it or anything.
18 They look at him and, "Hey, he's a dead biker." All this stuff is building up and I was
19 sick, depressed, and I freaked out. So from habit I guess, I just went and I vented onto
20 the PTSD site and then got on my motorcycle and off I went. Well, one of my brothers
21 got a hold of me on my motorcycle and yanked me by the head and we spent the whole
22 day together and I calmed down. In the meantime them guys called everybody put it in
23 code on the web. They shouldn't have done this and I told them not ever to do it and the
24 boss told them not to do it but they still did it. They called the Sheriff's office. And I
25 don't know what they said but what are they going to say? "There's a Vietnam veteran
26 that's crazed out and we think he might kill himself or somebody." And I'm trying to sit
27 up here and hide from the world and I was here when they came. But my labs kept them
28 at bay. I could hear them out there. "It's the Sheriff, it's the Sheriff." I just slowly
29 closed that computer door and they were here for almost an hour. They tried to get near
30 the fence. I got a six-foot high fence and I had a lab out back. The labs are just going
31 back and forth. Then when you come up to my covered deck you have the door and next

1 to the window is every sticker you can imagine—the American flag, Special Forces, “I
2 support the local fire department,” ambulance, Ranger, all that kind of stuff. And I
3 apologized for everything. I went in when I got back the next morning. My wife stayed
4 out of the way. She didn’t say nothing. She knew where I was at. She just let me go.
5 She got in the car and left and I was supposed to get on the bike and take off. But before
6 I could the Sheriff came knocking on the door. But the neighbor down there, he told me
7 the next day, “Man, the sheriff was up there. He couldn’t get nowhere with the dogs and
8 all. The car was up there and I told them you might be out on your bike.” I said, “Yeah,
9 I was gone already.” He said, “Yeah, what happened?” I said, “Oh, it was a false alarm.
10 They thought that my wife had had an accident.” I gave him some bullshit story. To my
11 boss I said, “This is great. Now there’s a report that at 122 County Road they had a call.”
12 I didn’t know it but I told them when I apologized, I put in capital letters, “WHO
13 CALLED THE COPS?” I said, “Come on, guys, I appreciate the help but if you read it, I
14 was leaving. I was going on the road and I was going to do somebody because they was
15 murdering my brother and they weren’t doing shit about it and I was venting on
16 everything. What when through your head to call the cops? By the time they got here I
17 was gone.” I would have been gone if I didn’t get tied up. And when the boss seen that
18 he wrote me back and said, “I told them, ‘Do not call the cops. That’s not the way we do
19 things.’ You’re right. You’re never going to get you.” If a guy calls up and says—and
20 I’ve seen a guy do this—he locked himself in the bathroom with a shotgun so here come
21 the cops and all that and I pulled up one morning in the clubs over there and they were
22 talking about it and they told me what happened and then they said, “It slipped out of his
23 mouth and the round went through the wall and almost hit his wife and a patrol lady.” I
24 said, “Oh, that son of bitch is trying for PTSD and he almost killed his wife.” And one of
25 my brothers said, “No, Brasso, he’s going postal.” I said, “Oh, he works at the post
26 office?” He said, “Yeah.” I said, “What happened?” He said, “He’s gone, one hundred
27 percent.” And that’s what he did. He stayed in there and you build this big scenario up
28 and then the dumb ass fired the weapon and his wife and the patrolman were standing at
29 the wall next to him. It was lucky he didn’t kill them. He said it slipped out of his
30 mouth. Let’s put it this way. Over the years I can depend on these guys. They showed
31 me that yesterday. They did get a little bit too carried away and it came from their heart.

1 But most of the guys that were smart called and said, "Listen, Brasso, wherever you're at,
2 call me. Whatever time, call me, brother. We've got to talk. I know we can talk this
3 out." Something like that. Don't call the cops. Because what are you going to say?
4 What's the problem? "Well, he's in our unit and he left a message that he was going to
5 do this or that." I mean, they had to tell them that I was doing something because that
6 Sheriff was out there almost an hour but I never answered the door. I told them, "I
7 appreciate it but don't call the cops. I live in a town that has martial law and now they
8 know where I live." I was going to go out there but I said, "No." I had already waited
9 and then I just said, "To hell with it." I'll just sit it out because I don't want to discuss
10 my personal things with them and my dogs are doing well anyway. Now, if they were
11 twenty miles away they would have all been here or they would have searched the town
12 for me, especially since we're all heavy PTSD. We really try to help each other. And it's
13 good because you can vent when you get pissed off and you can laugh. You can say
14 anything you want and nobody knows about it.

15 RV: How does your wife react to that kind of relationship?

16 JW: Well, I've taken her through counseling and all and she put the animals,
17 except for the dogs, away and then she got in the car and left. She knew that I needed to
18 have my space.

19 RV: And she's okay with the tight relationship you have with your brother vets?

20 JW: Oh, she wants that. Oh yeah, she said, "Well, I'm going away this weekend,
21 this coming weekend." She has a real good friend that's a veterinarian also in Houston. I
22 said, "Oh, just leaving me like that? Well, I'm going away the next weekend." She said,
23 "Where?" I said, "Up to Dallas to the Christmas party." I usually take her every year but
24 I wasn't planning on taking her this year because after two days up there and all that kind
25 of stuff she gets tired and all of that. She said, "Okay, great, great, just where you need to
26 be. You'll take care of the place?" I got the best. They don't come no better. We've
27 been through hell together and back. I came in yesterday and I sat down and I said,
28 "Now, you understand that you have nothing to do with that?" She said, "I understand
29 but it just hurts me to see you go through this because you try so hard to do everything
30 good and it just builds stress because you deal with a lot of idiots." So she was cool with
31 it. We always sit down and talk. So everything's good now.

1 RV: Well, that's good.

2 JW: In fact, she was over there. Do you know what time it is? She thought it was
3 one o'clock you was going to call me so I was busting them. "Yeah, I got a few minutes,
4 I got a few minutes," but I got to write this guy and I got to write him back again. He's
5 the one I was telling you about, "No, it's [www.thevirtualwall](http://www.thevirtualwall.com)." So he's putting this guy's
6 star up there and then he says to check it out. So I do. I check it out and what's he got?
7 He's got the wrong unit name. And I said, "Okay, that's it. Let me tell me tell you
8 something here, Richard, I told you from the beginning. I know there's another Virtual
9 Wall. I've been dealing with this Virtual Wall and if you go in there it says the Virtual
10 Wall. They're much more professional and they get the job done. I have a very good
11 working relationship with them." I've sent them a very nice letter of appreciation which
12 I'm probably the only one hanging on the wall probably that ever thanked them for all
13 that they have done for our unit and everybody else because I know it's a thankless job to
14 sit there and get a thousand a day for each man's remembrances. "Change this, change
15 that, no, I want this, I want that." He started telling me, "Well, did you tell him?" I said,
16 "I'm not talking to him. I don't want nothing to do with them. That's why I told you in
17 the first place. They can't even get the guy's unit right. I don't know if you turned in the
18 name." "Yeah, you turned it in." "We were not L-R-R-P in 1968. In September of '67
19 everybody went from L-R-R-P to L-R-P and then in '69 everybody went from L-R-P to
20 R-G-R, Ranger." I was typing that up when she was telling me, "Come on, come on." I
21 said, "Don't worry, I've got a few more minutes." She's real good. She just knows that
22 it's frustrating because I've been such a self-achiever and I'm a workaholic in the club.
23 When I came out of the service I just worked with the club and I've always worked with
24 the unit behind the scenes because I helped form it. But I've never held office and I was
25 never in the political part of it. I've always stayed in my arena where I felt I belonged
26 and that's as historian. But when all that just added up sometimes she says, "Well, you
27 expect everybody to do things the right way all the time and that's just the way you are."
28 I'm anal. (Laughs) "Basically you never left the military," and that's what the guys say
29 too. "You're still in the military." I said, "Bullshit. This is a motorcycle club. A
30 motorcycle club is an organization. You have officers and you have soldiers and that's
31 how you survive. You don't bitch and whine and shit like that. If you do that why not go

1 join the goddamn hog club. That's what that's for. You've got to work together. This is
2 supposed to be a brotherhood. If I tell you a week ahead of time that we have to go
3 somewhere and support this run and there's supposed to be thirty of us and ten show up,
4 the other twenty have fucked me. You're not my brother." So she's put up with a lot.
5 That's what I'm doing now. I'm going back online because I got pissed off and I said,
6 "Let me tell you something. I'm trying to be patient with you, Richard, but I told you at
7 the beginning. I know every damn Wall there is and every damn monument and
8 memorial and everything else on this site. I have been with the VVMF (Vietnam
9 Veteran's Memorial Foundation) since the beginning. They have always treated me
10 professionally. We have worked out everything and I told them that as a unit, we gave
11 them a certificate of appreciation, just a real nice thank you for a job well done." "We
12 understand that you have a thankless job but you put up a lot of stuff with us and you
13 professionally handled us. You always work with us." I gave the Sergeant Major a call
14 and he said, "You know what, it's the only thing hanging up out there. I want to thank
15 you." It's true. I said, "You guys are probably sitting there." He said, "You're right."
16 "You're in cubicles in front of a cubicle all day and each man has six thousand requests.
17 And I know I've put you through a lot of hell." He said, "Yes, 1st Sergeant, but you've
18 always explained yourself and you've always thanked us and this means a lot." I said,
19 "Well, I know what it's like to be on the thankless end." Since then I just write them and
20 I'd say I put in a remembrance and I tell them what I want done and I sign it, "The
21 Historian," and then they do it. I mean, I've got a good rapport with them. And this
22 guy's got this fly-by-night scene and to make corrections you've got to do this. It's just
23 not as professional. And I tried to tell the kid nice but see the man I think...see Sergeant
24 Lee is like Sergeant Rock. He never thought he'd get killed and he died real quick. A
25 sniper, boom, and he was done just like that. Wait a minute. The Rock don't die. So
26 now he wants to—he said, "I know you don't want to put up all their awards and all." I
27 said, "Wait a minute. We've buried men that have DFCs and all of our KIAs are heroes
28 whether they have a DFC or a Bronze Star. It doesn't matter. They're all heroes. That is
29 not an indicator of who is better they're all equal. They all get the same treatment and
30 they all get the best treatment that I can find and I find my best treatment at VVMF."
31 That's it. I'm not going to get involved with that Virtual Wall and start another three-

1 year process that it took me to get where I am now and I can guarantee you that if you go
2 and check all my KIAs against anybody else's KIAs, we have a very nice set-up. Our
3 remembrances is got the unit patch in there and it describes what their son's unit did.
4 You know what I mean?

5 RV: Yeah.

6 JW: It's like a biographical thing on what their unit did and it pumps up your
7 chest just reading it. You're saying, "Damn, these are some bad dudes." Well, we were.
8 I mean, we were. We were the best.

9 RV: How do you all keep up with the number of KIAs? Did you do a count every
10 time or do you just have it in your memory?

11 JW: No, these are the KIAs that were killed in Vietnam.

12 RV: Okay, okay. Not personal or unit KIAs.

13 JW: No, these are—

14 RV: Not your unit or your personal recollection but this is for the overall war?

15 JW: No. I take care of my unit's KIAs.

16 RV: Okay.

17 JW: I mean I can tell you where they went to high school (laughs) and I am
18 dedicated to them getting nothing but the best. They would do it for us. They will have
19 the best. Whatever we can get. We've got them on the SOCOM (Special Operations
20 Command) Wall down at MacDill, a whole slab just for them and we've got them on the
21 Ranger wall. We brought them. We're going to put them—the 1st Battalion who took
22 over our heritage when they were formed, that has to tell you something. When they
23 formed the 1st Battalion, who did they choose? They chose Charlie Company. Out of all
24 the thirteen to nineteen Ranger companies, they were assigned the heritage of Charlie
25 Company and we of course have the heritage from Merrill's Marauders. We've got that
26 whole teal ground thing and all. So I told them that. I said, "You need to read Shelby
27 Stanton, go to page this, page this, and page that." So he's getting under my skin. Then
28 he's sending me, "I need a copy of the guy's Silver Star." I said, "Listen, we know what
29 Sergeant Lee's awards were when he got to the unit. This is what happened in November
30 of '67. Then he came to Echo Company. We're well aware of his great service record
31 but we don't put down in our remembrance the medals. We don't say, 'He won this and

1 he won that,’ but a lot of his friends or family or somebody else might say that.” There’s
2 one guy that slips in out of nowhere. He’s a historian type. I’ll have to write it down for
3 you. One of our guys who got the DFC, he just puts, “Awarded DFC” so you’re
4 interested. You click on it, you read it and I think that might be his assignment from
5 somebody because he’s done it on a couple of our guys. Clay Morton, I think his name is
6 or something. That’s what he does. So if my guy’s got a DFC, I don’t have to worry
7 about it because he’s already got it in there. That’s not what it’s about. I think reading
8 about what we did and what type of unit your son was with—on man, the unit patch came
9 out beautiful. Have you checked it out yet?

10 RV: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

11 JW: Recently.

12 RV: No, not in the last week or so.

13 JW: Oh, okay. I worry because I go in there like once a month or so and every
14 once in a while I’ll lose a picture here or a picture there.

15 RV: I’ll be sure to check on it. So you really enjoy this work now? I mean this
16 sounds like sort of a cathartic healing process.

17 JW: Well, I started it at the beginning. I’m number three, the third member so I
18 was a cofounder. But what happened was, once we got the wheels rolling we had no
19 orders. Everything was classified. I mean, we were putting together rosters by names
20 and KIAs. We had a guy on there up until last year that wasn’t even in our unit.

21 RV: Wow.

22 JW: But see, we had eight Parkers assigned and we know a Parker was dead. See,
23 we got two thousand documents sitting up at NARA right now and we don’t know what
24 they are but they released two thousand. And we’ve still got thousands more that we
25 don’t know if they’ll ever release. And we were with so many units that I might be
26 working with the 4th Infantry Division and their Intelligence Officer gets the after action
27 report. Now, does he send it to my unit? We never know. He probably doesn’t send it.
28 He makes it up to read the way he wants it to and they do that and then he files it because
29 we’re attached to them. That was my struggle during PTSD. I have the letter and I’ll
30 send it to you. It says that no records exist for that company in 1968. Now that’s telling
31 you something.

1 RV: Oh yeah. So this idea of sheep dipping, it's a reality?

2 JW: Exactly. We did not exist. They said, "We have some entries from
3 September to December of 1967 but no records exist for that company in 1968." So we
4 were top-secret stuff so you wasn't going to get nothing.

5 RV: And you still can't today really get as much as—you can't get the complete
6 record today, is that right?

7 JW: We'll never get them. We'll never get them and we'll never find them
8 because we were a Corps asset. We worked with the South Vietnamese, the Koreans, and
9 every American unit that was inside the II Corps area. So after we came off a mission,
10 like I said, the unit who's using us, their S2 or Intel are the ones who do the after action
11 report from our briefing. Unless you got a really on the ball—and we might be up there
12 with a platoon so you've got a 1st Lieutenant—what should take place is that they would
13 forward a copy of that after action report to our headquarters. Did it happen? Not no, but
14 hell no. So would have to buy—do you know how many units we worked with? We
15 would have to pinpoint what time frame, what was the name of your operation and what
16 unit you was with and they say, "Okay, we got we four hundred and eighty seven pages
17 or we've got four thousand eight hundred and seventy pages and it will cost you a
18 hundred and seventy-two dollars." That's to find out if you even got it. So, no. But
19 when we started we had nothing. We didn't find out until last year an SF guy called one
20 of the guys and said, "Look, I happened to catch your web and you've got David Alan
21 Parker. David Alan Parker died on my SF team." I said, "Whoa." So we backed up and
22 we re-tracked and we retraced and everything. Come to find out, where's he buried?
23 Fort Sam Houston. I go over, I look him up and damned if he didn't. He died with SF.
24 He was a grunt in the Cav and until November of '67 he went with SF. We figure he
25 went home on leave and then went with SF and three months later he was dead. For
26 some reason when they said "Parker," it's our Parker that got killed, in fact wasn't killed
27 in combat. He was killed in boat training and the body wasn't recovered. But we've put
28 him down on the KIA list but we put him, "Died as result of training accident," and then
29 they put, "Body recovered—no." He went under, man, and we were doing boat infils. I
30 wasn't. I've done them before. And whoops, that was it, and he was gone. So we still
31 put him in memory of him but it was just crazy that it was a Parker. We had, I think,

1 eight Parkers in the four years in existence so it was just crazy that he was a Parker. We
2 had, I think eight Parkers, in the four years in existence. [Audio cuts off to end Session 7]

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 8 of 10
December 14, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Doctor Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral
2 history interview with Joey Welsh. Today is December 14, 2005 and I am again in
3 Lubbock and Joey is in Castroville. It is approximately 2:21pm, Central Standard Time.
4 Joey, we were talking just a minute before we began recording and you had some news
5 about your Ranger Tab. Can you tell me about that?

6 Joseph Welsh: Well, due to what we considered a historical oversight,
7 qualifications for the Ranger Tab is the Commandant of the U.S. Army Infantry School
8 may award the Ranger tab to any person who successfully completed a Ranger course
9 conducted by that school. However, the Commander of the total Army Personnel
10 Command and the Commander of the total Army Reserve may award the Ranger Tab to
11 any person who was award the Combat Infantryman Badge while serving during World
12 War II as a member of a Ranger battalion, 1st Battalion through 6th Battalion inclusive, or
13 the 5307 Composite Unit Provisional which was Merrill's Marauders or to any person
14 who was awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge while serving during the Korean
15 Conflict with the 8th Army Ranger Company. That's 11 October 1950 to 27 March 1951,
16 or to any person who successfully completes the Ranger course. Now, there wasn't even
17 a Ranger School then. What they did was they took all of the World War II Rangers and
18 when they made a tab, authorized them to wear it and they did the same with Merrill's
19 Marauders, who we took our lineage from and then they did the same with the Korean
20 Conflict. Now, in our situation, I think we only had two Ranger-qualified guys in the
21 whole company. That was the 1st Sergeant and another NCO. In them days really you
22 had to be an NCO to even go to Ranger school. Now once we got over there it was all
23 volunteer and then you had to go through a selection process. They weren't going to
24 send us TDY (Temporary Duty) from Vietnam to go to Ranger School and the infantry
25 was getting very short of NCOs so they started a Shake and Bake program, meaning the
26 good trooper who goes through basic training, infantry, and Jump School, who is really
27 good, they put him through like two weeks of NCO School and then they send him to
28 Ranger School for eight weeks and then they send him to Vietnam as a Sergeant E5 and

1 expect him to lead a team or an infantry squad. We got some of them that left. They
2 went out on one mission and said, "The heck with this," because they weren't trained for
3 that. And when they got through infantry units, I've seen many times there'd be an E5
4 and he'd say, "You just pay attention to what this Spec 4 tells you because he's been
5 there seven months in country and you can forget your little eight week sand table school.
6 This is the real shit." Okay, so on 1 February '69 they took all the LRRPs units and
7 designated them letter Ranger companies from the Regimental Combat Arms System and
8 they took the heritage and lineage from Merrill's Marauders, which was the 75th Airborne
9 Ranger Infantry. What they did one day was we woke up and they said, "Okay,
10 everybody puts on this patch and a black beret. The job's the same." But see, it was
11 unauthorized. It was authorized to do on paper but we didn't have a regimental
12 headquarters. We were still assigned to our parent unit even though we wore the scroll
13 and A and B Company were over here and they started with my company, C, and we
14 went all the way through to P Company without a J. It was like thirteen or fourteen
15 LRRP units went right down the line. C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, and they
16 gave them scrolls and all that kind of stuff. We spent ten years there LRRPing and
17 Rangering and when we returned there was no Ranger units formed yet. In fact, they
18 formed them—they deactivated my company, Charlie Rangers, in October of '71. Then
19 sometime in late '72 they reactivated it in Fort Benning, Georgia under 197 and they had
20 A Company and B Company. We didn't even realize this but Colonel Howard, I talked
21 about him many times, he eventually took command of that company. We had heard that
22 it had been done and it was just a paper drill. So we got some orders from guys assigning
23 them there. It was Company C, Airborne Ranger, 75th Infantry, 1st of the 29th Infantry,
24 197th Infantry Brigade. So I wrote to Colonel Howard because it was on his resume as
25 being one of his assignments. He said, "I'll be damned if they weren't real. They fired
26 the son of a bitch and I took his place." Colonel Howard, that's the way he was. That's
27 why we loved him. He said, "They were the post Honor Guard, they were the Ranger
28 School Aggressors, and I wrote up the whole TDA to deploy them to war." And then in
29 October or November of 1974 they formed their 1st and 2nd Ranger Battalion that we
30 know of today. So he was only there ten months and he got orders and went to be
31 Company Commander at C Company 2nd Battalion and the rest of the guys were

1 dispersed between the 1st and 2nd Battalion. The 1st Battalion formed took our lineage, C
2 Company 75th as theirs. Out of all thirteen companies, we were chosen, which we feel
3 honored, and we had gotten ours through Merrill's Marauders, but ours is more of a paper
4 drill. Because when we come back we couldn't wear the scroll. We did but it was,
5 "Take that off." But as long as you could find a Major or Colonel or somebody that's
6 still wearing his, you'd say, "I'll take it off when Colonel So-and-So does." So it was
7 never an authorized scroll and they never gave us a Ranger Tab even thought they gave
8 the World War II guys Ranger Tabs and the Koreans and they never went through school.
9 And we know the average time that an infantryman in all of World War II or all of Korea
10 had forty-four days combat time, where infantrymen in Vietnam in a one-year tour had
11 about two hundred and thirty-one days of combat, due to the air mobility capabilities of
12 that helicopter. "Pick them up, take them over there. Pick them up, take them over
13 there." And that's really why it worked out that way. But after your year was up there
14 was no Ranger units in existence. There was a LRRP unit still in Germany but then they
15 came back over and they were A and B. That's where the LRRPs started in Europe, in V
16 Corps and VII Corps, the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol in the late fifties. One of
17 my good friends was in it. They were the pioneers of that and they used the Long Range
18 Reconnaissance Patrol, which we started in '65 and '66. Then they came up with, "No,
19 instead of being the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol
20 you're going to be now F Company 51st Long Range Patrol." "Okay." That happened in
21 '67. At the same time they needed to move SOG, CCC, the II Corps area out of Vietnam.
22 They needed them to start doing cross-border operations. So that's why they formed our
23 company, which was a Corps-level company of two hundred and thirty men, the largest
24 company in the unit, I mean in Vietnam was so that we could release the—this is
25 declassified—so that they could release the CCC, which is Command and Control
26 Central or MACV SOG. You had Command and Control North, Command and Control
27 Central, and Command and Control South. And then they went and did their cross-
28 border operations and they took half of our company from the—they did this is the I
29 Corps and II Corps, which was 1st Field Forces Vietnam and 2nd Field Forces Vietnam. I
30 was in 1st Field Forces. They took half of the company in September of '67 from the
31 101st LRRPs and just raped them and then half new guy volunteers and they formed them

1 at Phan Rang where the 101st was until they got the people they needed. Then they went
2 up to the Central Highlands in Pleiku in the northwest and they set up there and they
3 rotated them through the MACV Recondo Special Forces training and all that kind of
4 stuff. In the meantime, below us in the II Corps area which ran from Saigon straight
5 across to Cambodia, they formed the 2nd Field Force LRRPs and they got them from the
6 173rd LRRPs. However, the best thing about them was they also assigned them a
7 squadron of helicopters so they had total air support wherever they went. They ate, lived,
8 breathed, fought, and died with their helicopter pilots which was a heck of a lot easier
9 than what we had to do because we winded up—I'm sure you've read Shelby Stanton's
10 book. You've probably got it sitting right next to you.

11 RV: I've got at my desk, actually, in my office, absolutely.

12 JW: Okay, right down a couple page numbers for me.

13 RV: Okay.

14 JW: He's probably done the most research on every single company and how it
15 was formed and the whole thing. And at the end, at the last page, he'll give the results.
16 He gives his overall thoughts of what that company was and how they did. So when they
17 did us, they called us Typhoon Patrollers or something. As a 1st Field Force Ranger I was
18 in II Corps, Tactical Zone but the 1st Field Force Rangers, which was organized—
19 basically they were doing what we called—you heard of Project Delta and Project
20 Sigma? Well that was Project Omega. And they had the Montagnards and all. They
21 needed to be released so they needed to get them across the border. They couldn't do
22 South Vietnam so they formed us. On page—it's got some pictures and all that but let
23 me see.

24 RV: Are you talking about order of battle?

25 JW: Huh?

26 RV: Is it order of battle?

27 JW: No.

28 RV: Summons of the trumpet?

29 JW: No, I'll give it to you. Anyway, what they did was they released them once
30 we got settled in. Oh, page 2-2-7. 227 will give you—that's the last page of him writing
31 about us.

1 RV: What's the title of the book?

2 JW: *Combat Recon in Vietnam: Ranger's of War*, Shelby L. Stanton.

3 RV: Yup, got it.

4 JW: Okay, yeah. You can read—I read the whole book but that's where I picked
5 up on it. And then on page 3-1-2 it will explain how the Ranger battalions of today were
6 formed and how they took the heritage of our company and assigned it to the 1st
7 Battalion. It's a great book. He did a lot of research. I read every one of them and trying
8 to be an even kind of guy but I read it three or four times and I'll tell you what, it
9 definitely tells you right there that, "The Typhoon Patrollers and Charlie Rangers
10 performed admirably during the Vietnam Conflict. The 1st Field Force Rangers probably
11 confronted and identified more enemy units, conducted a wider range of Ranger-type
12 combat and training functions using both conventional and special warfare techniques
13 and served in more jurisdictions than any other Ranger component. Company C
14 saturated fourteen provinces in II Corps' Tactical Zone with Ranger patrols performing
15 crucial reconnaissance for the US Army, South Vietnamese and South Korean Forces.
16 Most importantly, the remarkable wartime record of Ranger Company C vividly
17 demonstrated the high degree of flexible success achieved by a Corps level Ranger
18 endeavor." End of conversation.

19 RV: So what page are you reading from?

20 JW: 227.

21 RV: Okay.

22 JW: That's his overall—and we came basically out on top because I mean, jeez.
23 We had no air support. We'd go down and we had one platoon, the 173rd, one was the
24 101st, one with 4th Infantry Division, one with the Koreans, and whatever they had for air
25 support, we'd have to use it and boy, that's critical. When you call up and say you're in
26 contact and they said, "Well, there's no choppers." "What do you mean there's no
27 choppers?" "They're refueling." Well, in our sister company those choppers would
28 move like they're not supposed to. They're designated for that special mission and when
29 you went further into the CCC they had the Black Bird which were basically all black and
30 they were flown by Air Force guys and they lived, eat, breathed, and slept with them.

1 You have to have that. I told you that I was going to see that—I don't know if talked
2 since I seen *In the Shadow of the Blade*.

3 RV: Yeah, we talked about it last time.

4 JW: I'll tell you what. I don't believe there's any other units like us who
5 appreciated them more because when you've got four men or five men and there are no
6 friendlies, when you get at that level it's not like you're going out in front of your
7 battalion five klicks. We would go where intelligence was given that something was
8 going on, something big. So don't go sending in a company where they bring in all the
9 helicopters and everybody knows. You go in there and you sneak and peak around in this
10 guy's backyard and let us know what's going on. And if anything happens we'll come
11 and get you. But I know if it wasn't for their tenacity and their balls the size of an
12 elephant I would be here right now. I'd be either dead or an MIA (Missing In Action) on
13 several occasions and that goes for just about any team that had that. In fact we did lose
14 entire teams and SOG also.

15 RV: Let me ask you something that you very much have demonstrated that you
16 have a tremendous knowledge of the history of your unit. In my experience it's almost
17 unparalleled with veterans and their knowledge of the unit in which they served from the
18 very small squad level all the way up to division. Your personal research into this over
19 these years, can you tell me a little bit about that and why you've done it and what it
20 means to you?

21 JW: You won't believe it but I had a good mentor. And what happened was, in
22 1993, what I'm doing right now, requesting a Ranger Tab, Colonel Green, whose father
23 was a very famous General, General Grange, Colonel Grange, who was the 7th
24 Regimental Commander and was a Ranger Platoon Leader in Vietnam when his dad was
25 Colonel in Vietnam—well, when he finally got to that position of being Regimental
26 Commander he knew that we deserved to be recognized. In 1993 I just returned from
27 language school and I was working in USASOC (United States Army Special Operations
28 Command) Headquarters—Army Special Operations Command Headquarters—waiting
29 for a 1st Sergeant job, he sent down that, "Due to a historical oversight, I believe that like
30 the Rangers before us, World War II, Merrill's Marauders, Korean Rangers, that all
31 LRRPs, L-R-R-P, LRP, L-R-P, Rangers, and BDQ," BDQ is the Ranger advisors that

1 work with the Vietnamese, "were overlooked. And I believe that we should try to honor
2 them in some way." So we sit down and now this of course is a full bird Colonel. It's
3 dated June ninth. He's changing command in July. It was dated like May but this was
4 going to be I guess his big hoo-ha on the way out but they gave it to me because I was the
5 only guy in the entire unit who was in one them units. So they said, "Oh well, you're the
6 man." So I had to ask them, "What do you want? You're not getting this scroll." I had
7 already been through the archives and it's a question of lineage and history. We were not
8 part of the Ranger lineage because we were all under parent units. Even though they
9 made it up that we were under 75th Rangers we were really under 1st Field Force or your
10 parent unit was the 101st. So we could be part of their history at the time but not their
11 lineage so we're never going to get the scroll. The scroll was never even authorized. So
12 what are you going to do? So they said, "What do you recommend?" I said, "Well, you
13 know they just put out the Special Forces Tab." Now, when we came back from
14 Vietnam, if you was Special Forces and you weren't qualified, they'd tell you, you had to
15 go through the class. And the guys would say, "Excuse me?" They'd say, "Yeah, you've
16 got to go through the II course." He said, "I just spent five years in Vietnam with Special
17 Forces. Screw you." So they started leaving. And then they realized, "Wait a minute.
18 These guys should be teaching this course." So they made them automatically Special
19 Forces qualified. Then when they made the MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)
20 change, because it used to just be an S on the end of an infantry, S for Special Forces, P
21 for Paratrooper. Well, the General was real smart. He seen that if I put them under an
22 MOS people or persuasions or sex cannot get in. Because when we went to formation
23 when I was with Special Forces, everyone had to wear the same headgear. So you could
24 have fat, pregnant Green Berets running around or cooks wearing green berets. So it lost
25 its significance. So what he did is he changed the entire MOS system so that once you
26 completed the Special Forces course you was awarded a Special Forces MOS and in so
27 doing that you was also awarded the Special Forces Tab so no one could wear the Green
28 Beret unless they had been through that course, had that job, and was awarded the tab.
29 Now, if you left the unit you could always wear your tab. If you went to another unit for
30 a special assignment but you didn't wear your green beret, this is like the Ranger Tab.
31 They said, "Well, what are you going to do about the guys in Vietnam who didn't go

1 through their course?" And they said, "Okay, anyone who served a hundred and twenty
2 consecutive days on an A detachment or a LRRP team and was awarded the CIB, Combat
3 Infantryman Badge or Combat Medical Badge in Vietnam is authorized to wear the
4 Special Forces Tab." How did they look at that? Well, they look at the school's a year—
5 this is my analogy—the school's a year and you spend four months and you live through
6 it in Vietnam on an A team or a LRRP team you've definitely been through more than the
7 course could ever give you. So when the Ranger guys came to me I explained that to
8 them. I explained to them, "Look, everybody got the Ranger Tab but the Vietnam
9 Rangers." They said, "Why is that?" I said, "I don't know. The Colonel is trying to tell
10 you that." They said, "Well, that's what we want." I said, "What do you want?" "We
11 want anybody who served in the LRRP, LRP, Ranger, BDQ from a certain time." Let me
12 tell you, now you're talking about making a retroactive award and changing the entire
13 regulation. Nine months.

14 RV: Who is pushing this again, Joey?

15 JW: Pardon me?

16 RV: Who is pushing this again?

17 JW: At the time it was the Regimental Commander, which was May and June '93.
18 In July '93 he changed command and left and I'm still busting butt. Plus I was sent down
19 to Ft. Benning because the Rangers have this nice little yearbook kind of thing that gives
20 their history all the way from back in the frontier days. They get to World War II and
21 they've got about seven or eight pages, Korea, seven or eight pages, Vietnam, they had
22 two pages and then they went into their existence so they wanted me to—I got a hold of
23 all the companies and sent out a format so that we could introduce that ten years of
24 LRRPing and Rangering into the 75th history. We're allowed to be maintained at their
25 history, we're allowed to be at the regimental level and we're allowed to be maintained at
26 Carlisle Barracks where the War College is. Now, to do that it took us nine months of
27 research because we had to first of all give a description, give a reason, and then list
28 every single unit. Now remember they changed names twice so there was three so from
29 this period we would have all the L-R-R-Ps and when they were formed, when they were
30 turned over to be L-R-Ps and then when they were turned over to be Rangers. A friend of
31 mine that helped me, he's one of the best I've ever met. Unfortunately his son who is a

1 twenty-plus year Marine Gunny Sergeant got killed about two weeks ago in Iraq with a
2 boatman. He was over there for the 173rd LRRPs, then the 54th Detachment and they
3 became N-75th Ranger and he lost his leg from the knee down and he was the guy I told
4 you about that when he came home the doctor was going to discharge him and he called
5 up 5th Group Commander and the Command Sergeant Major came over and said, "Hey,
6 you ain't discharging him. He's going to Halo Committee," and he spent twenty years.
7 From him and just when we formed the company twenty years ago we had nothing to go
8 on because everything was classified. We didn't even know who our KIAs were. We
9 had guys that were killed that weren't killed and we had guys that were killed in
10 September and really it was November. So it took a long time for us to come as far as
11 we've come.

12 RV: That must have been very difficult for you and for the others.

13 JW: Right. And our parent unit, which is the 75th Ranger Regiment Association,
14 they're the parent unit for all—here we go again—LRRPs, LRPs, Rangers, BDU, BDQ,
15 the new Rangers, and LRSUs—Long Range Surveillance Units—from Vietnam until
16 present.

17 RV: Is that a problem?

18 JW: No, it's not a problem for us because we're not turning our—everything they
19 want to have—we're going to die. We're dinosaurs so who's going to take care of our
20 website?

21 RV: Right.

22 JW: So they want us to turn it over to them. Well, who did we turn it over to?
23 You and them. But we know that because we're very particular about how we run things
24 and when they said that they wanted the information, they wanted to do it. I told the
25 boss, I said, "No, we will give them the information so that it has unit cohesion and it will
26 be done the way we want it to be done." Now when we die we don't know what the heck
27 will happen so that's why we sought out you. Did you get that article?

28 RV: Yes.

29 JW: You know, you're number one in the nation. And of course we did a test on
30 you through my little stuff. (Laughs)

31 RV: (Laughs) I figured you probably did. I actually passed—

1 JW: That's what it was. It was a test and I'm throwing all this stuff together and
2 throwing all these magazines. I didn't know what to do. I got the worst one in there. I
3 thing six pages is all classified because they said, "Just put anything in there. We just
4 want to see how it works." And really that's what it was.

5 RV: Well, I passed that article along to a lot of people and it made a lot of folks
6 happy and a lot of folks proud about our reach and about people realizing what the
7 Vietnam Archive is.

8 JW: Oh, well you're definitely on ours and you are also on the *In the Shadow of*
9 *the Blade*. You're a main link under there.

10 RV: Yeah, we've worked with them.

11 JW: Yeah, they're great. They just put the Rangers on there. They said, "Jeez,
12 you're right, Joey. What would a high school kid do if he wanted to know what a LRRP
13 was? Where would he go, Joey?" I said, "Well, he'd go to 75th Ranger Regiment
14 Association." She said, "Oh, okay, great." So now she's put them on as the main link
15 and for me, helping her out and helping them out, they're going to put in my web and I'm
16 supposed to even get some flicks and all. I'm trying to get us fifteen minutes of fame but
17 god, I don't know if I'm going to make it. (Laughs) This could take a long time. I'm
18 adding up all these minutes here. My wife's always laughing. I said, "Man, that's got to
19 be worth thirty seconds," and she laughs. Now this guy—we had this little group that we
20 formed. This guy built a private forum for PTSD Rangers. You sign in and right now
21 it's just guys in our unit and it's just there to just say anything and do anything you want
22 and just get everything off your system. Well, one of the guys, JP, says, "Well, you got
23 yours as a Congressional." Let me back up. What happened was we got this big packet
24 together. It was unbelievable. Perfect. Now, it went to the United States Army Special
25 Operations Command, General Scott, my Commander. He approved it. It went to the
26 United States Special Operations Commander in MacDill who is the Commander of all
27 branches and he approved it, General Downy. But this was after it was turned down by
28 the regiment because the new Regimental Commander would not endorse it. I was the 1st
29 Sergeant and it was January '94 and they said, "You need to be over at the General's
30 conference to talk to the 75th Ranger Regiment Commander," and I said, "Okay, fine."
31 And a friend of mine that worked along with me a little bit, he sat there and it was

1 Colonel Jackson. He said, “1st Sergeant Welsh, I’d like you to explain this to me.” I
2 said, “Well what do you need to be explained, sir? Read it. They gave it to the Rangers
3 in Korea,” and I went on and on and on. He said, “Yeah, but you could have went.” I
4 said, “No, sir, we couldn’t. There was no TDY in return and no one below the rank of E5
5 or E6 went to Ranger School.” So he said, “How’d you come up with thirty days?” I
6 said, “Well, sir,” and I told him about he Special Forces came up with four months.
7 What is that? A third of their time they would spend in school. “Excuse me sir, you’re
8 little Ranger School is eight weeks long. We figured if you come to our company and
9 you survive past thirty days and you get a CIB or a Combat Medical Badge then you’ve
10 done more than fifty percent of the school in combat. That’s where the last hard class
11 was.” He kind of glared at me and my buddy who was a good friend of mine, he was a
12 Captain, and he was there to take notes because I was gone. I had just left a month ago.
13 And that guy, boy, he asked me every question. “What about my guys that jumped out
14 and got killed?” I said, “What about them, sir? God bless them, they’re Rangers, but
15 yours is a different era. Your people have a regiment. You go to the regiment first and
16 then after six or eight months then you’re sent to Ranger School. We didn’t have a
17 choice. There wasn’t even the option of going to Ranger School. It was OJT and MACV
18 Recondo School.”

19 RV: Why did they have a hard time understanding this? It seems like it’s factual,
20 it’s there, it’s on the record.

21 JW: Well, if you—I’ll just put it this way. Just about every officer I met that was
22 in a Ranger or a LRRP unit was all for it, even though they went through the school, too,
23 but you see, when an infantry officer graduates infantry officer basic course he
24 automatically—he’s already been through Jump School so he automatically goes through
25 Ranger School and Pathfinder School or minimum Ranger School and he takes his test
26 for his Expert Infantryman Badge and so when he shows up as a 2nd Lieutenant in an
27 infantry unit he’s got his Ranger Tab and his Expert Infantryman Badge and his little
28 bald-headed wings because he’s got to show that he’s been somewhere. Where’s he
29 been? He’s been to school. You’ve got an E6 that’s been in the service twelve or fifteen
30 years and that’s who he has to compete with, an E6 or E7 Platoon Sergeant. So some of
31 these guys and when they’re going through college, after their junior year they’ll send

1 them to Ranger School or Jump School. So they prime them. They have their ladder to
2 climb and then another thing was, I'm talking about, "Well, I'm going to Ranger Tab us
3 when I see it. I didn't get the DFC; I didn't get the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, the
4 Purple Heart, or the Air Medal." When they put me in for the DFC, the Medal of Honor
5 guy here, I figured they'd downgrade to Silver Star and they downgraded to a Bronze
6 Star because they don't understand and there were no officers present to witness it.

7 RV: And that has to rub you all wrong.

8 JW: Well, the guys would rather have the scroll than the Ranger Tab and so
9 would I.

10 RV: Sure. So where are you in this process? What's going on with you now?

11 JW: Where am I?

12 RV: Yeah, with your Ranger Tab.

13 JW: Well, I don't believe what this guy did. You know what he did?

14 RV: What?

15 JW: He pulled up a little thing out of the Quartermaster Museum and it tells you
16 what I just read you and he said he put in a couple sets of orders and he went to his
17 congressman and said, "Hey, look. They did it for them. I should have gotten mine.
18 Look what I did." And about two months later he got his Ranger Tab. I said, "JP, I'll kill
19 you. I spent nine months." What happened was, Colonel Jackson, the new Regimental
20 Commander after this hour of drilling me, which I drilled right back and the Captain who
21 was with me, when we were done he said, "Man, he couldn't get you." I said, "You're
22 darn right he can't get me. How's he going to get me? It's just because he has not been
23 in combat." Gary looked at me and he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Look, he's
24 got his Ranger Tab. It's like a ring knocker from West Point. They hang together. But
25 he doesn't have combat. Maybe if he was in combat like Colonel Grange and was with a
26 Ranger company like Colonel Grange he would understand that the men deserve it. They
27 didn't have the opportunity. You couldn't even be a jump master when I came in unless
28 you was an officer and they made a hundred and ten dollars and we made fifty-five." I
29 would have much rather got the scroll but it wasn't authorized. That's the first thing I
30 went for. There was a lady up there, Miss Thomas, who had been running the national
31 archives for the 75th and she said when she first met me, "Oh, Sergeant Welsh, here we

1 go again." I said, "What's that, ma'am?" She said, "You know, I've been here twenty
2 years and this is about the sixth time this has been tried. I don't know why you're going
3 through it. You're not getting the scroll, you know that." I said, "I know, ma'am." She
4 said, "Why?" I said, "Because we had no regimental affiliation and we can't be a part of
5 their lineage but we can be part of their history." And she went, "Well, Sergeant Welsh,
6 you must be doing your homework." Nine months later when I turned it in she called me
7 up and she said, "I'm going to tell you something, Sergeant Welsh. I never thought I'd
8 say this but if anything makes sense and should be approved, it's this packet. And I
9 never thought I'd say that to anyone but you definitely, definitely did a good job because
10 you definitely related it to what exactly happened." The Special Forces were getting their
11 tabs. We weren't getting nothing. And they gave World War II Ranger Tabs before
12 there was even a Ranger School and they backdated it. So I've just been doing it for so
13 long because when we started, that's why I'm very adamant about—well, I haven't even
14 got into your stuff yet. (Laughs) We have so much coming at you that we're going to go
15 in there and sit down with you and make it really, really professional. Right now we're
16 just loading you up. We've got two thousand documents sitting at NARA (National
17 Archives and Records Administration).

18 RV: Oh wow, that's excellent.

19 JW: Declassified.

20 RV: People need to know about what you all did.

21 JW: And there's several thousands more but we got two thousand but we don't
22 know what they are. So what we do is we've got to call up, we've got to reserve a couple
23 copiers, we've got to take a few proofreaders and a couple copiers and if you're really
24 good—I know a guy who did the SF web, he said, "Joey, if you're really good, really
25 good readers and you go there from eight to five you're lucky if you get eight hundred
26 documents. You'll be lucky. Hopefully you've got the documents you need because
27 you're going to run into weekly inventory. You're going to run into so many documents
28 that are non-relevant and it's going to be harder for you than anybody because Special
29 Forces was always under Special Forces. You was under every unit." That's another
30 reason. I'd be attached to the 173rd and say a team would go out and a guy would do
31 something good, we would write it up on notebook paper and sign it. They would put it

1 in the thing. Now, the S2 that we debriefed might have been the 4th Infantry Division.
2 Now, his debriefing goes of course to his higher headquarters but we don't know if a
3 copy of that debriefing ever went to our unit or if it went the saying the same thing.
4 Because when I was going through PTSD counseling, in order to verify missions I was on
5 we—and I got it in black and white—we wrote to NARA twice and it specifically states,
6 "We have some records from September '67 to December '67." That's when they
7 formed. "No records for this company exist in 1968." They didn't exist. In other words
8 they were blacklisted. And when we formed the company we didn't have anything.
9 Everybody just sent in orders and we started putting it together and slowly but surely—I
10 mean I had a KIA on there until a year ago that wasn't even in our unit but we had like
11 seven Parkers and somebody said, "Yeah, it was him." Well, what happened was they
12 went into the Virtual Wall. He was on SF. He was a scout and then he went SF but he
13 didn't make it too well. In a couple of months he was dead. And he seen our
14 remembrance and he contacted us and said, "Wait a minute guys, you got the wrong guy.
15 That guy was on my team." So we backtracked it, I did, and it just so happens, where is
16 he buried? Fort Sam Houston. I go up there and sure enough, there he is, David Alan
17 Parker, killed with the Special Forces group two months after he got there. Our guy who
18 died was David Wayne Parker and he was killed in a training accident when we were
19 doing small boat infiltration and basically he was MIA. His body never got recovered.
20 So he got pushed off as a deceased guy instead of a KIA because he wasn't KIA. But up
21 until last year we just corrected that. How were we to know? We just knew that
22 somebody said, "Parker?" "Yeah, Parker." But now I'll tell you, it's very, very hard
23 because when you're putting somebody's name in stone, everything's got to be right.

24 RV: Of course.

25 JW: I'm getting my fourth stone. I've got the Ranger Memorial; I have the Army
26 Special Operations Museum Foundation in Fort Bragg. The one downtown, the big
27 multimillion dollar one, I've got a brick there. And then I have, down at MacDill at
28 USASOCOM, I have a brick there and they gave us a whole side of the wall for all of our
29 KIAs to be listed next to November KIAs which was the 173rd. It's kind of ironic. We
30 started with the 101st when we were formed and we were attached to the 173rd when we
31 were deactivated. In my opinion they were the two best units over there anyway. We

1 went from one unit over to the other so they put us next to it and November Company
2 wanted it too. So all of ours are one. So the guys down there, me and him, back and
3 forth. "No, it's spelled this way. It's spelled that way." And his name rang a bell and I
4 said, "Jeff, how long you been down there?" "Oh, about four years." "Where'd you
5 work?" He said, "I was up at Bragg." I said, "Up at the SF museum?" He said, "Yeah."
6 I said, "Around '88 or '89?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I worked with you before." He
7 said, "You did?" I said, "When he was in the Special Forces and I came back." "Oh
8 yeah, okay, okay, okay," which made our relationship go a little bit smoother because he
9 was adamant that, "This is the list you've got." I said, "No, my list is the correct list."
10 Now you have three Walls. You have what we call the Virtual Wall. Really that's the
11 Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Foundation's Virtual Wall. And then there is a real one,
12 The Virtual Wall and it's not as organized and all that but they have one and then you
13 have another one that's called View the Wall. This is where you can get casualty status.
14 Everybody runs it different but the most professional one that we felt is the one we're on,
15 although I have taken things from the other walls that we didn't have like casualty status
16 reports. They don't show you all that. At the beginning they did but they got real—they
17 changed their format just so where does the guy live—that's why they added a name with
18 a face because it was nothing. Then the remembrances came along. So to end this, what
19 happened was, Colonel Jackson said, "Well, here's my recommendation for a Sergeant.
20 I'm going to recommend that it be turned over to the civilian 75th Ranger Regiment
21 Association and that they can take it and they can submit it because I can't support it." I
22 said, "No problem, sir, I understand your position. Have a nice day."

23 RV: That was it.

24 JW: That was it. And then what they did wrong, I told them, I said, "Look, we
25 have a pretty large organization and they started getting retired Generals and all that and
26 then it was all of the sudden that everybody did this packet." I'm sitting back there with
27 Roy and Roy was the secretary and this was '94. It started in '93 and it was '94 that I
28 was 1st Sergeant. He said, "I need you to come down there and square these guys away."
29 I said, "No, I ain't going down there. Roy, you go to Congressional. You have a large
30 organization. You have all the ammo. All you need to do is to go to every man. Every
31 single man, give them a copy of the packet and submit it to his congressman and I'll bet

1 you that you get it. You can't be playing around with retired Generals and all trying to
2 play politics." He said, "Well, come down there and tell them that." I said, "You can tell
3 them that, Roy, because more people are taking credit for that thing that you and I spent
4 nine months to a year doing. Hell, no. It's very simple. Go to every man and take the
5 packet to his congressman." When you've got five or six hundred former Vietnam
6 Rangers or LRRPs banging at your door, you're going to make a difference. You don't
7 have a little committee. You've got five, six, seven hundred men. What am I doing
8 today? I'm sending them—it's taking me twenty minutes to build the packet.

9 RV: That's incredible.

10 JW: I know. I don't believe it works but I got the guy who is in my unit, right in
11 front of me he gave me three pieces of paper and he got the Ranger Tab. But his
12 congressman was a veteran. That is very, very, very important. That's what happened to
13 me on my last one because mine wasn't a veteran and he did not understand the system
14 and I had a Medal of Honor recipient who recommended the award and did everything
15 and he felt—he said, "You're going to go up there and you're going to put on your class
16 As and all." I said, "Look, if it comes back a Silver Star I'll do it." I think that's what he
17 figured, that they'd downgrade it one. Well, when they downgraded it to two they didn't
18 have a military person present when they did the presentation and they did the
19 presentation when he was out of town. He wanted to appeal it. I said, "No way, I don't
20 want to go through this." The Medal of Honor recipient—don't ever say winner—the
21 Medal of Honor recipient, we probably have more in this city up until the last few years
22 than any city in the United States. I told you about that.

23 RV: You're talking about San Antonio?

24 JW: Right.

25 RV: Yeah.

26 JW: I've got pictures of like eleven of them. And how we have Colonel Howard
27 who I've gotten to know because he was our guest speaker and now we found out that—
28 he wrote me back and said, "Brasso, I'll be damned if that was a goddamn paper
29 company. I ran that company." So his web guy called me up and said, "Oh, by the way,
30 Brasso, I put your website on Colonel Howard's links." I'm like, "What? There's not
31 even a place to ask for this. You're talking the big hitters." He said, "Yeah, no

1 problem." I said, "Well, I appreciate it." So them I went back to him and we were going
2 to give him a lifetime membership and he's going to be our guest speaker next year in
3 Branson. I said, "We'd like to put his web on ours." Do you know how many counts this
4 is? This guy started Colonel Howard's web by himself. Colonel Howard knew nothing
5 about it. He just went over ninety six thousand hits on that computer.

6 RV: Wow.

7 JW: Ninety six thousand hits plus he built the B-52 and another one but he said,
8 "No, you don't have to ask permission. Put him on there. You're right. He was your
9 Company Commander." I said we were going to make him an honorary lifetime member
10 and he's going to be the most decorated soldier in the history of Vietnam who gets
11 nothing. That's what made this guy mad. He's watching TV and this guy, he heard so
12 much stuff. He had three times as much as Audie Murphy and he changed the channel
13 and nobody covered it. So he got the yes and he did all the research and he spent over
14 two years building that web and all of the sudden Colonel Howard starting getting a lot
15 more calls and they said, "Yeah, we've seen your web." He said, "What web? What web
16 are you talking about?" This guy did it on his own. And then once they met, for Project
17 Delta they asked him to do it.

18 RV: So that was your mentor, that was your example?

19 JW: No, my mentor was Roy Boatman. He was my mentor when it came to
20 anything to do with the LRRP, LRP, Ranger, BDU, BDQ from the first day because he
21 was with the 173rd, the first Army unit until the end. He could tell you anything,
22 anything. He could tell you, "Okay, H Company went or the 1st Brigade 101st Airborne
23 LRRPs became F Company 58th Infantry Alert Airborne then they became LIMA." And
24 he can tell you the dates, the times. Then we had a National Guard unit come in for a
25 year. Nobody knows about that. They were a LRRP unit. They spent a year. I think
26 they lost three guys, got about two hundred awards and left. I think they were one of the
27 highest decorated, most decorated units with SOG. They had more Medal of Honor
28 recipients, they had more Purple Hearts and they had a kill ratio of—I believe theirs was
29 a hundred and forty-to to one. Ours was like fifty-two to one. These guys were
30 phenomenal. When I was over there with them on base camps a lot and stuff a lot and I'd
31 be hanging out with this guy and all of the sudden somebody would say, "Hey, Sergeant

1 1st Class.” I said, “How old are you?” He said, “Twenty four.” I said, “What?” He said,
2 “Yeah, but I’ve been here five years.” So since he came in to Nam he might have started
3 with the Infantry then LRRPs and then Rangers, then SF. But he’s an E7 at twenty-four
4 years old.

5 RV: Wow. That says a lot.

6 JW: And they say—they call them a different symbol for the Team Leader,
7 Assistant Team Leader and RTO but once you reach twenty missions you’re pushing it.
8 If you make it to twenty missions you know you’re going to die sooner or later. But this
9 is interesting. Of course I’m not going to do it exactly the way they’re going to do it.
10 I’m going to get, if I can, I’m going to get—I kept two copies of that entire packet. I
11 didn’t work hard for nothing. And I sent one to the 75th, which they don’t know where it
12 is, and I sent on to my company so I know he knows where it is. But the actual request is
13 maybe four pages. It’s very condensed but I’m going to try to get that and put it in. This
14 guy just said, “Send this, send this.” No. My stuff’s going to read. What I did was I
15 wrote them that letter of introduction about, “I don’t know what you know or what
16 you’ve ever heard or if you even know what a LRRP unit was. No disrespect intended
17 but this was a long time ago.” I explained it to him. We’ve been using this for a lot of
18 guys are going to counseling for PTSD and all and it basically just tell them, “Realizing
19 the importance of your time in such matters as this, I humbly ask for a few minutes of
20 their time to lay a foundation for what I’m going to convey for your consideration of my
21 request. I know not how much is known by you concerning your organization and
22 missions assigned to Long Range Patrol Rangers. Thus, I feel I need to give a brief
23 introduction which will help understand the danger to life and the awesome stress it
24 causes one, especially if they are spending twelve months with the 1st in Vietnam in the
25 101st Airborne Division as a mounted scout prior to extending for LRRPs.” And then I
26 go on and I explain to them that they were brought into existence and you had to be
27 volunteer. The Army did not assign anyone directly. The unit members would be asked
28 to go beyond and you could quite any time. You could be thrown out by your peers.
29 And later on after the war Vietnamese officers interviewed stated that they feared the
30 LRRPs and Rangers more than any force in Vietnam. Just like they did with SOG, they
31 actually had special tracker teams to try to hunt us down. And because our lineage goes

1 back to Merrill's Marauders we are the sons of the Marauders. The LRRP Rangers
2 pulled some of the most dangerous missions in the history of the United States Army.
3 And so this way a guy would say, "Well, what the hell is a LRRP?" Seriously.

4 RV: That's bad. I mean, I guess it's understandable to a point but it's a problem.

5 JW: We put this together for them. We put this together for the guys going for
6 PTSD years ago because these guys sitting down there evaluating them would say, "What
7 the hell is a LRRP?" So it was sort of a lead-in. They would start reading about it and
8 say, "Man." We had rewards up for our heads from anywhere from a thousand to twenty-
9 five hundred dollars a head. It's just something that—he said, "You don't need that." I
10 said, "It's going in. My stuff is going to go right down the line so that they see." Also
11 I'm on several—I've got yours in there, even. I even got a picture of my stuff with yours.
12 I'm in the Army Special Operation Museum, the Salvation Hall of Fame; I'm in the VFW
13 Members Hall of Fame. All that's going in there because this guy's got—to me, I've got
14 to prove to him plus I've got proof of being a Recondo instructor and a pre-Ranger
15 School instructor. I'm not taking it as lightly as he. He had a Vietnam veteran; I believe
16 he was a Captain or something like that in the infantry. He knew his ropes. So they are
17 all assigned a General and a guy who's been around and has been in the service can relate
18 to that General a lot more than some congressman who's never been there. That General
19 just does what he has to do and that congressman don't know the difference. But if
20 you've got somebody that's hot on the stick. It works well for you and it makes the
21 General's job a lot easier, too, because he can say, "Hey, sir, we can do this and we can
22 do that. Let's do this." That's the way these veterans are. That's the way soldiers are.
23 "Hey, that guy deserves it. Let's give it to him. Let's go." But he ain't going to talk to
24 that civilian congressman like that.

25 RV: Joey, let's switch gears.

26 JW: All right.

27 RV: I want you to tell me about leaving Vietnam in September of '68 and what
28 that was like for you—how you felt, how you felt towards your men, and what happened.

29 JW: Well of course I tried over and over not to leave. They said, "Well, you can't
30 stay." I asked why and they said, "Well, you have a hundred and fifty days left and if
31 you have less than a hundred and seventy-nine days left you get out." I said, "I don't

1 want to get out so extend me ninety days and send me over to Special Forces.” They
2 said, “Okay.” A couple days later they came back and they said, “You can’t extend.” I
3 said, “Why?” They said, “You’ve got orders to Fort Bragg.” I said, “Well, I don’t want
4 to go. I want to get out of the Army.” They said, “Well, you can’t.” I said, “Well wait a
5 minute. Two days ago you said I had to get out because I had less than a hundred and
6 fifty days. Then I said to extend my ETS ninety days so I have enough time in the
7 country to go stay here. If I wanted to stay and you said you could get out. I told you if I
8 wanted to get out of the Army I wouldn’t be extending. If you think that I’m going to go
9 back to Fort Bragg with a hundred and fifty days, by the time I get there I’ll have a
10 hundred and twenty, maybe a hundred and ten, and at ninety days you become a ninety
11 day loss and basically you’re ash and trash, you’re crazy. Now let me out of the Army.”
12 “Nope, you’re coming back. You’ve got orders.” I said, “But I’m less than a hundred
13 and seventy-nine days.” They said, “Well, I’m sorry, Sarg, the orders are cut.” And I
14 had no records. Not one piece of record. Nothing. I had orders reassigned to me from
15 the LRRPs to thirty-day leave to Fort Bragg.

16 RV: Did the people at Bragg know what you had been doing?

17 JW: No. What happened was I went to the personnel center and I tried not to go.
18 I told them, “I don’t want to go. I wanted to go California and re-enlist to be a Drill
19 Sergeant.” “No.” Well, my mother had just recently had a hysterectomy and I had been
20 gone for a couple years. “I want a medical hardship to Fort Dix.” If I was going to stay
21 in I figured I would stay in and be a Drill Sergeant. They gave me fifteen days extended
22 leave while the medical board met and they said no because I had a critical MOS. Once I
23 graduated Recondo School and made E5 your whole world changes because you leave
24 the 11 Bravo and you become 11 F, 11 F4P which was Infantry Operations and
25 Intelligence Sergeant. If you put a P on the end you’re a Parachutist. If you put an S on
26 the end you’re SF. So having that 11 F series and having been in the units I was in, I was
27 a critical MOS and was not to be released to anybody. I didn’t want to go. I wanted to
28 stay. I had the job; I was going over to B Company 5th Group. I probably would have
29 been working with the Yards or a LRRP team and they welcomed us because we worked
30 with them so much. They said, “No, you can’t go.” And that’s the Army. One day they
31 tell me, “You can’t stay because you need to get out of the Army.” I said, “Okay, extend

1 me and I'll stay." "No, we can't because you've got to go back to Bragg." "But I don't
2 have enough time. I want to get out. I don't want to go back. I've got less than a
3 hundred and seventy-nine days. I'm authorized to be released from the Army." They
4 said, "Oh, no you're not."

5 RV: That's interesting. Did they give you the medical leave?

6 JW: What?

7 RV: Did they give you the medical hardship leave?

8 JW: Nope. My mother, she was upset. The first time I came back she said, "Oh
9 god, you're back. Where are you going now?" "Back to Vietnam." "Oh no." Back to
10 back was hard for her. She had seen that I was a mess and my doctor had said—I talked
11 to him about it and he said that he would write a note saying that, "I'm a mess because
12 you're making me a mess." So the Department of the Army extended me fifteen days but
13 they didn't tell Fort Bragg. So on the day I was supposed to leave I was already fifteen
14 days late. I didn't go. I turned myself into the MPs at Fort Dix and said, "I'm not going.
15 I'm not going." Then they locked me up. I was in class As and I sat in a cage all night
16 and a little E4 paratrooper let me out the next morning and he called down there and that
17 1st Sergeant was yelling and screaming. He said, "Oh, no, no, no, 1st Sergeant. This is an
18 excellent NCO. He had authorization. There was an administrative error. He was
19 waiting on a medical thing. No, you don't have to send two guards." And then he hung
20 up and he said, "Sergeant Welsh, you've got to get on that plane now." So October
21 sixteenth I wound up getting there and I had about a hundred and twenty-two days.

22 RV: And when the hundred and twenty-two days ended, what happened?

23 JW: Oh, it was about the fourth day and what happened was I met an old Sergeant
24 Major from Special Forces. "What are you doing, Welsh?" I said, "I'm trying to get the
25 hell out of here." He said, "Want to be a Drill Sergeant?" I said, "Oh yeah." So he
26 reassigns me to Tray Dock. So I leave 82nd and I go down there and I'm there two weeks
27 in processing and he calls me and he says, "Joey, I'm sorry. I can't keep you." "What do
28 you mean?" "You am are, you the man. I can't put you on access." I said, "What are
29 you going to do?" He said, "You're going to have to go back to the 82nd Replacement."
30 I said, "Back to the 82nd Replacement? I only got like two months." He said, "Well, go
31 back there and see if you can re-enlist." Boy, I walked in there on a Friday with no

1 orders and they said, "What do you want?" I said, "I was sent here from Tray Dock to
2 report in." He said, "Do you have orders, sir?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, we don't
3 want you." So it was Friday afternoon. I left and I went home. Monday morning I came
4 and they charged me four days AWOL because my orders showed up at four-thirty in the
5 afternoon and, "You are a no-good, sorry ass, son of a bitch, rah, rah, rah." I said, "Wait,
6 wait." And that clerk wouldn't stand up. I said, "That clerk down there, do you know
7 him?" "No." So I talked to him and he said, "Well, show me." I had nothing to show
8 him. I said, "I spent thirty-three months. I am a good soldier. I did a tour in Germany; I
9 was on my third tour in Vietnam." They said, "Bullshit, we ain't got nothing on you.
10 What did you do, throw your records away to hide something?" I said, "Oh my god." So
11 I talked and talked. "Wait outside." So I think the guy said, "I'm not going to give in."
12 To me, getting an article 15—if I was smart I just should have said, "Nope, I'll take
13 court-martial." But I walked in there and he said, "I find you guilty of Absent Without
14 Leave and I fine you at fifteen dollars a month for a period of one month." So as I bent
15 over and I signed that and I stood back up and I saluted and I turned around and did a 180
16 and the 1st Sergeant said, "Welsh, report to me in the morning." "Right, 1st Sergeant."
17 That was it. My entire attitude went 180. And you know job he gave me?

18 RV: What?

19 JW: Prison chaser. I wore class As with a loaded .45 and I flew around the
20 country picking up prisoners for two months. And then they offered my—well, I lived
21 there then at the Replacement, I moved downtown. My buddy was re-enlisting and he
22 said, "Joey, I got to check you out before you leave. I'll give you a Special Forces Medic
23 Course. Upon completion guaranteed Staff Sergeant and three thousand dollars. What
24 do you say about that?" I said, "Sign the goddamn papers." He said, "Joey, man, you've
25 got to go." I said, "Sign the papers, I'm out of here. FTA, Fuck the Army." It was
26 crazy.

27 RV: Having to prove yourself after all that time must be.

28 JW: Well he just said that over seventy percent of the 82nd Airborne had been to
29 Vietnam at least once or twice. They were insane. When you came in, every guy that
30 you processed through, they have these little cages for finance. They're inside a cage so
31 you can't get at them. They're inside a cage and the CQ I worked at for a while; it had

1 like a stable door cut in half and you know a breaker bar that they use to switch tracks on
2 the railroad? Did you ever see in the old days they used them?

3 RV: Yes.

4 JW: Okay. Well, right below it was a stable door cut in half and the guy was in
5 the hallway so he only had about four or three feet behind him and he'd say, "Okay, you
6 need to sign it." "Oh fuck you, man; I don't give a shit about it." Wham! He just pulled
7 out that damn stick and slammed him about two or three times and he'd just collapsed
8 and that'd be it. "Now, get your ass up here, sign this shit and get up in your goddamn
9 room or I'll call the MP." That's what they had, a railroad switch breaker bar cut down
10 and you couldn't see it. They'd pulled it right out and you couldn't get away. He'd lean
11 over and he'd just whack him and try to hit him in the shoulders or arm or something.
12 They had me doing that for a while. I did it. I didn't have any problems. I would have
13 ripped their heads off with it but the guys that they had in there, the 1st Sergeant was
14 about as big as a wall locker and he hired some guys that were short like me and put them
15 there and they'd have all twenty-four on and forty-eight off and that was their job until
16 they got out of the Army. And they're all like six-two, six-three, two hundred and twenty
17 pounds. Fucking they got an attitude, too. We had some people come through there that
18 were crazy, man. Jumping junkies. They'd eat LSD and go jump out of airplanes and
19 shit. They were crazy.

20 RV: How did you like this kind of job?

21 JW: What job?

22 RV: The prison chaser?

23 JW: Well, it was pretty neat because I was with this old-timer E5. Him and his
24 brother had three whorehouses and two car dealers down there so I was hooked up pretty
25 good with him and he had gotten shot in the foot and he was just hanging out. So he was
26 from New York and I was from Philly so I don't know about him. Anyway, we were
27 authorized to wear the weapon on the plane. We would go right to the front, the pilot
28 would come out and give us a briefing and we would go on there. We were like air
29 marshals to them. But I seen a lot of stuff I didn't like. A kid was told to go home from
30 Jump School and their orders wouldn't arrive and he'd wait two or three weeks and they
31 wouldn't arrive and then not knowing any better the closest thing was a Marine Air

1 Station so he'd sign in there and what would they do? Throw him in jail. Man, I've seen
2 some—there wasn't any—well the guy I was with, the big white guy, I took his place.
3 He told the guy, "Look, I'm going to take the handcuffs off you, man. I'm not going to
4 walk through basic but don't run on me. Well, they were eating dinner and he took off
5 and man, I grabbed my weapon." He said, "Then I thought. But I was going to shoot
6 him." Then he just tackled him and really cranked him up. Then from that time on that
7 guy, his arms were—but most of the guys that I had were in that situation. The other
8 hard thing was, "Okay, you need to escort a prisoner from the stockade to court and then
9 bring him back." And what they were doing to these guys for—I mean, I don't condone
10 drugs but I mean, I've seen a guy who had two years and Vietnam and he had two joints
11 and the civilians caught him. They turn him over to MPs and he got—I'll never forget
12 this one black kid. He had two little; skinny joints and they gave him dishonorable
13 discharge and three years hard labor at Leavenworth. I was like, "Whoa, dude.
14 Whatever happened to treatment?" This was him getting off the plane to go to Fort
15 Bragg. We did some crazy stuff. I'd call him up. Like I was going to Fort Devens.
16 They were real well known for their treachery.

17 RV: When was this, Joey?

18 JW: 1969.

19 RV: '69, okay.

20 JW: Yeah, because they were ASA and they thought they were high-spy guys. I
21 call up Tuesday and I say, "This is Sergeant Welsh from 82nd Airborne Division. I'm
22 here to pick up Private Shithead." "Okay, Sergeant, when do you want him ready?" I
23 said, "Nine thirty. At zero nine thirty Friday I will be there." Click. And then we'd go
24 in the bathroom. We'd take off our weapons, we'd put them in a little AWOL bag and
25 we put them in one of them quarter lockers and he'd jump on a plane or train and I'd
26 jump on a plane or train and we'd go home for three or four days. Then we'd come back
27 hoping that our guns were still there (laughs) and we'd strap them on and then we'd go
28 pick up the kid. We picked up this one kid and we had this three quarter ton and this guy
29 was a real fat MP. When he came up the guy went to put his hands on the bars and he
30 slapped his hands. And I didn't say nothing. The black guy was watching me. I didn't
31 say nothing because I got to sign for him. Man, this kid looked like he was fifteen. He

1 was one of the kids who was sent home and he stayed home and then winded up there.
2 He came across, the guy grabbed his bags and when I signed for him then this fat guy
3 was got—I pulled out my gun and I stuck it in his face and my buddy's saying, "Come on
4 now, come on now, Joey." I said, "I'll tell you what, you son of a bitch. I'm from the
5 82nd Airborne Division and if I ever come back here again, rah, rah, rah. I'll kill you." I
6 had it sticking and squeezing in his eye and he was down underneath the desk by then.
7 He said, "Now, now, we've got to go." (Laughs) All I had to do was squeeze the trigger.
8 That's how close I was. Man, I was just so pissed off. The guy's holding onto the bars
9 man and he hits him with blackjack. And that kid—now I'm with this big guy. It was a
10 big black guy. We ate a cheeseburger. That guy ate three double cheeseburgers in about
11 five minutes. They hadn't fed him or nothing. He had no mattress, no blanket. I told
12 him, I said, "You son of a bitch. I'm from the 82nd Airborne Division. If I ever come
13 back here again I'll kill you." And he was crawling underneath the table and shit because
14 I had already disarmed him and I popped his clip into it. I threw it into—I said, "Hey
15 guys," and I threw the gun into the damn jail and ran (laughs) and we took a roundabout
16 way and we missed our plane. We had to borrow money from the kid, the prisoner to get
17 out because we missed it.

18 RV: It sounds like some crazy times.

19 JW: No, you don't mess with an Airborne trooper and I could see the kid was a
20 kid.

21 RV: He got the message, though.

22 JW: Oh yeah. I had it in his eye. The guy, he knew I was getting—he was the big
23 black guy that stood behind me but I was the dangerous one really (laughs) and he said,
24 "Joey, Joey." "No problem." And as soon as I lean over and I sign, that's when I did it.
25 I grabbed him by the throat and I put that sucker in his eye. He had a black eye and I
26 said, "How about I shoot out your eye?" There was nobody around but the prisoners are
27 seeing it right there. He said, "Joey, we gotta go, we gotta go." And I whacked him and
28 I threw the gun into the prisoners and I took off so I think that kept him busy. He stayed
29 under that damn thing because they got a hold of that gun so that gave us our getaway
30 time.

31 RV: So what did you do after this duty, after the prisoner thing?

1 JW: That was it.

2 RV: That was it. You got out.

3 JW: Yeah, because once I wanted to become a Drill—I was in recon for a week or
4 two weeks and then they sent me up to be a Drill Sergeant. That took a few weeks and
5 when I came back—in fact when they gave me my Article 15 it was on my twenty-first
6 birthday. At that time it was December eighteenth. I had January, February. I had nine
7 weeks left in the Army. They can't reassign you.

8 RV: That's right.

9 JW: So the 1st Sergeant said, "You work for me, Welsh." And then after a while
10 he sees—he put me on the CQ, figuring he would see if I could handle it. Shit, I knocked
11 the shit out it. After a couple of days of getting to know the big guys then he put me out
12 on chaser duty. But see in them days it wasn't no big thing to have an Article 15. You
13 wasn't a good soldier if you didn't have an Article 15 but I didn't see it that way because
14 I didn't deserve that one. (Laughs)

15 RV: So what did you do after this? What was life like out of the Army? How did
16 you make that transition?

17 JW: My first time or second time? The first time I stayed in my room for eight
18 days and finally my mother called my friends and they got me out. The second time I
19 really don't remember. Oh, my father met me—now I remember—at the train station. I
20 went home, took off my uniform, put it in there and I never mentioned it to nobody. My
21 family was very supportive. They never asked me anything and eventually I got hooked
22 up with the guys that I had known and I grew up with that were in the Army. Basically
23 seven or eight of us hung out together and all. I really went into music, totally blended
24 in, grew my hair, but I did have several really bad incidents. I got thrown in jail several
25 times. A cop pulled a gun on me and I charged him and he jumped in and I jumped on
26 top of his car and kicked out all the lights and then when I came down there was like
27 eight cops surrounding me. They weren't real happy about that.

28 RV: I can imagine. When was that? Was this after the first time or the second
29 time?

30 JW: Oh this is after I was out. I was out. I was tending bar and I went out to have
31 a smoke break and there was an argument inside I imagine and the cop comes up and

1 starts yelling in my face and you know, "Fuck you, man, who are you talking to? Who
2 the fuck to you think you are?" He started backing up and he put his hand on his weapon.
3 I lost it. I went after him so he jumped in the car. I would have jumped in the car. I
4 don't know what would have happened to me. I jumped on top of his car and kicked out
5 all of his lights. I was jumping up and down and I would have just shot. Then when I
6 came down off of there, there was about five or six cops and I said, "Let's go. Come on,
7 come on." Then one cop—my father years ago was in politics and got him the job—his
8 name was Joe Walsh. He said, "Joey?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, Joe." I was still with him,
9 you know? He said, "Get in my car, will you?" "Okay, Joe." He knew I was going to go
10 down fighting but he said, "Joey, go get in my car." "Okay, Joe." So they got me with
11 malicious damage and all that and it cost me a thousand dollars and on the way out I said,
12 "Hey, Chief." He said, "What, Joey?" I said, "That blue light belongs to me. I just spent
13 a thousand dollars. I'd like to have it." The cops were all back there, man. I said,
14 "That's mine." He walked back and got it and gave it to me and oh god, that didn't go
15 over well. So I didn't look for trouble. I just really—then in '72 I went to the psych
16 hospital. Finally I signed myself in.

17 RV: You did that yourself?

18 JW: Yeah. Well, I was with a counselor and they had diagnosed me with
19 asthmatic bronchitis and it was really acute anxiety. I went up there and they locked me
20 up for a week on the floor with the cuckoo's nest and never even seen a Vietnam vet
21 before. After the second week they let me out and I had music therapy once a day and
22 that was where I would go down to this big music room by myself and bang on all the
23 drums and all.

24 RV: When was this? '72?

25 JW: Yeah. And now to this day, that's one of the best centers around. Let me tell
26 you, it was right out of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I was in total lock-up. There
27 was one Vietnam veteran that was a heroin addict and he just used to come in there to
28 clean up and get his methadone. And they had never seen anything like what I was
29 telling him. There was this—it seemed like a long table with all these people and I'd say,
30 "I can't take no more of this," and they'd say, "Why?" I'd say, "Because I'm
31 hallucinating." They said, "You're what?" "Well, things are starting to move on the

1 wall. I'm just getting too stressed." To make a long story short, the agreement with my
2 brother-in-law was, "I'm going in and when I want out you come get me." So I sat down
3 with them in the morning and they said, "Yes, you are misdiagnosed. You do have acute
4 anxiety due to combat stress and all of that." I said, "Okay, fine, thank you." I called my
5 mother, talked to my brother-in-law and the next day they pulled up and he brought about
6 six guys with him. Me and him and my mother went in and talked to the director. He
7 said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm leaving." He said, "What do you mean you're
8 leaving?" I said, "Look, I see you once a week, a group of a bunch of people. You
9 already said I have acute anxiety. Every day I go down to the music room and pound on
10 drums. I've got my medication, I've been told what I have, and I'm leaving. What are
11 you going to do with me for the next two weeks?" He said, "If you stay thirty days you
12 get a hundred percent." I said, "I'm not worried about that. I just wanted to get my
13 diagnosis right. You just told my mother and my brother-in-law that I have acute
14 anxiety." So when we walked out there was two or three big, huge, black guys and at the
15 same time about six of my buddies walked in and just did a semi-circle. They looked me
16 and they looked over at them and they just put their heads down and shook their heads
17 and off we left. They turned me down. They turned me down. I was collecting ten
18 percent for asthmatic bronchitis. They turned me down for thirty percent acute anxiety
19 because I went against medical advice and left the hospital.

20 RV: And has that remained so or have you been increased since then?

21 JW: Oh no, I'm a full-tail poser now.

22 RV: (Laughs) Why do you say that about yourself? Tongue-in-cheek or are you
23 serious?

24 JW: No, I'm a hundred percent PTSD but I'm not collecting a hundred percent
25 PTSD. I collect a hundred percent disability and I collect a hundred percent Social
26 Security and collect a hundred percent Combat Related Stress Compensation for losing
27 my retirement. All tax-free, by the way.

28 RV: That's nice.

29 JW: Well, that's nice but I would much rather be normal and be in the back of an
30 ambulance screaming down the highway than sometimes what I got to go through. It
31 took a long time but they were just really hard. I went back in the Army and I couldn't

1 go and tell them that I picked up the TV and threw it out the window last night. I
2 couldn't do that. It would wreck my career. So what happened was when my wife and I
3 were in that really major motorcycle accident on July 9th, 1995, and she almost died, they
4 said as she progressed I regressed and the demons came back. I still feel guilty for that
5 and I feel guilty for being in Vietnam, I feel guilty because it was an accident but it
6 doesn't matter. I dropped the bike. My wife—the neurosurgeon said—she's a
7 veterinarian surgeon—she'll never operate again. Eight months later she was operating.

8 RV: Wow.

9 JW: It was a miracle but that's what happened. Her mother went out and stayed
10 out there with me for over ten weeks and she'd be there from nine in the morning until
11 five at night and I'd be there from five at night until nine in the morning and the Army
12 left me there. The Special Ops 1st Sergeant came over and he and I worked together and
13 then we both went for a job that I knew he was going to get but I didn't care. I wanted
14 this guy to know who I was because he was the big man. He always tried to intimidate
15 and I told him—anyway, I wound up getting a great job. It fit us both but when I went
16 down, boy, he was there and he said, "What do you need?" I said, "I need leave. I need
17 to stay here. I can't go nowhere." He said, "Okay." He pulled out this little skinny
18 phone. He said, "Okay, Welsh, locked in. He will not move. He will not go nowhere.
19 He's permanently assigned to Headquarters Army Special Operations Command. Do you
20 understand me? Give me a call back in ten minutes when it's on paper." Boom, that was
21 it. "How much leave you need?" "I don't know." He said, "Okay, well, don't worry
22 about it." I got forty-two days but I went through hell. But she don't remember any of it
23 because she was comatose. She was dead. I was doing CPR on her, doing the mouth to
24 mouth and they pulled me off. When she went into that OR her lasting skill I think was
25 three. That's dead. Fifteen's alert and oriented. They said I did good and all that. I said,
26 "No, I didn't do good. I'm sure she won't be laying here."

27 RV: But she pulled through?

28 JW: Oh yeah. She had a fractured skull, then she had brain—shit, three days later
29 or four days later they found out she had a lacerated liver. She had a fractured skull,
30 which turned into a hematoma and they had to go in and relieve the pressure and put a
31 drain in and check the pressure and she was totally comatose. Lacerated liver, punctured

1 lung, fractured ribs, broken hand, broken collarbone, and one little scrape on her face.
2 (Laughs) Of course I had somewhat of a medical background but I was devouring
3 everything. I had a great neurosurgeon there and he'd come every day at nine and I'd
4 say, "Well, how long do you think?" He said, "I don't know. I don't know when she'll
5 wake up or if she'll wake up. I don't know." I said, "She'll get up. She'll wake up." So
6 I went in there and I turned on Aerosmith and I played Aerosmith 24/7 and like I said I
7 lived in the waiting room. I'm come at five at night until nine in the morning and her
8 mother would come on from nine in the morning until five at night. About four or five
9 days later she started moving and all and then it was a long struggle uphill because of the
10 way they come out of it, depending upon what part of the brain it affects. If it's just your
11 sleep portion, some people wake up the same and they're fine. They can remember, they
12 can hear, they can remember people in the room and all that but they just couldn't wake
13 up. But she was really bad. She had to be on a life support system and everything like
14 that. But they say her age, her strength and her intelligence was what was for her. The
15 average nineteen-year-old kid with seventy percent of brain injuries—they're the ones
16 that get them—they usually wind up paraplegic because they explain it like this. "Your
17 wife has been so educated and she's in very good shape. She's young and she's very
18 educated so she knows how to get from here to Dallas in three different directions from
19 learning, whereas a nineteen-year-old kid has been slopping around. He knows how to
20 get there one way. Well, the brain, as it tries to stimulate and seek these paths, the
21 nineteen year old doesn't have a good shot and the majority of them wind up paraplegic
22 or vegetables, where your wife has three avenues and if it finds that avenue, it starts the
23 road to recovery." Oh yeah, they go through it. She started out, she finally got up and
24 she didn't know who I was. She was talking like some college professor. She was
25 talking words me and her mother didn't understand or anything and they went on and on
26 and on. Now, the whole time they had her on Dilantin. Now, what they do is they take
27 your score when you come in and then when you become aware again and they average
28 out that time. But what happened was, they had her on Dilantin because any brain
29 injuries can have seizures. So I guess she was in there a couple months. She was already
30 into the rehab and he said, "I'm going to start cutting back on the Dilantin." That was
31 Friday morning. I went home Saturday morning, I was home an hour and her mother

1 calls me and says, "Joey, get back over here." "What?" She said, "As soon as I walked
2 into the room, she knew me." "Hi, Mom, how are you doing? How have you been?"
3 We don't know how long that Dilantin held her down so they could never say what her
4 future would hold for her. Man, I grabbed our wedding album and she was just buried
5 with, "Who is this? Who is that?" And then we just worked and worked and worked and
6 worked and brought her back. I brought her home for a visit and she was like a POW.
7 She weighed about sixty-two pounds. No hair. I cut her hair. I said, "I need to cut her
8 hair." Her mother was in there and I said, "I'll take care of it," so I cut her hair all the
9 way off. I just left a little bit. The nurse came in and said, "Thanks, that's the best thing
10 you could do for her." She was bedridden and I knew from being in working hospitals
11 that the last you need is long hair. Her mother came in and said, "My god, what did you
12 do?" And that's when the nurse said, "Believe me, ma'am, that's the best thing for her
13 because of body bass and all that kind of stuff that you don't need." She's a toughie.
14 She's an Aggie. If it wasn't for her I probably wouldn't be here. She's just stuck by me
15 afterwards because she don't remember nothing. She said, "What are you doing?" I said,
16 "I'm putting an ad in the paper to sell the bike." She said, "Sell the bike?" I said, "Oh
17 yeah, the bike is gone, baby." I already told her, "No, I told you mother." "I don't care
18 what you told them. It was an accident. I've flipped over trucks before and destroyed
19 my Bronco and I've been thrown from horses. I want to ride." I said, "Not with me,
20 you're not." I didn't sell it. We rode but not as much and then once I got here it's a
21 different atmosphere. Once in a while I take her out but I've sold my bike since then.
22 I've got a loner now.

23 RV: Well, Joey, this might be a good time to stop our session today.

24 JW: Yeah, I'm tired.

25 RV: We'll pick up again next time.

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 9 of 10
December 16, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Doctor Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral
2 history interview with Joey Welsh. Today is December 16th, 2005 and we are still in the
3 same locations of Lubbock and Castroville. Joey, you get out of the service in '69 and
4 then you go back in, in June 1976. Tell me why you did that and what you were doing.

5 Joseph Welsh: Well, you know, the first few years I was really out of it. I
6 couldn't hold a job and there just wasn't anything there that interested me. Because, in
7 the first place I didn't want to get out of the Army but all that happened. So a friend of
8 mine, a couple years, I guess it was '71, no, '73, he asked me to come down and joined
9 the EMT. Well, in the day it was the Rescue Squad and the EMT Paramedic Program
10 was just coming in. I was hooked. Once I heard that siren going off and that adrenaline
11 rushing I was hooked. So I started going through the program and I started getting my
12 head back on right and found that I really liked it. I was working the emergency room
13 during the day and then I would volunteer. That's the only thing wrong. There wasn't
14 any money in it so I would volunteer a couple days a week on a paramedic team on my
15 volunteer squad in my hometown. Another friend of mine who was on active duty
16 training as a senior Drill Instructor for reserve drills—he was still on active duty but they
17 moved him over there to work with them. Anyway, to make a long story short he said,
18 "Come on back in and you'll be an automatic E5." I wasn't working and he said, "I'll get
19 you through the six or eight week course or whatever it is and you'll be in." So I said
20 okay. So I went in, in June of '76 and I went to Fort Dix and in the three days I was up
21 there I read the roll call. So the next month I went up there I went in and I was going
22 through the line these SF guys come in and they see my patch. So we started talking in
23 line and they said, "You want to have lunch with us?" I said yeah and we started talking
24 and they knew some of the guys. We went back and forth and they said, "What are you
25 doing?" I said, "Where are you guys from?" And they said, "Pedricktown," which is
26 northwest New Jersey. As you were. Southwest. Below me. I said, "Damn, I can't
27 believe I've been in Jersey for twenty years." He said, "Yeah, it's the best kept secret

1 going," and all these guys had been to Nam two or three times. This is how they got the
2 ROKs off.

3 RV: Doing Special Forces Reserve.

4 JW: Right, yeah. So they said, "Hey man, would you like to come with us?" And
5 I said, "Yeah." In them days you had to—well, of course I went up the next month.
6 Reserves is real easy interstate, to transfer. So the next month I went up and I took the
7 PT test in the morning, I met the Commander—no, I took the PT test and then I had to
8 take the tape test. In the old days they gave you a tape test, which they don't do no more.
9 In other words, they'd say, "You ready?" You'd say, "Yeah," and you've got this answer
10 sheet and it was a reel to reel and they'd hit go. And they'd just ask you a very broad
11 spectrum of questions that were—and you didn't have much time to think. You either
12 knew it or you didn't know it and if you didn't pass that test you didn't go. So I passed
13 the test and then I went to lunch with the guys and they said, "Hey the Company
14 Commander..." There was only one company down there; it was C Company, 11th
15 Special Forces, 1st S Force Group Reserve. So I went and met him and he was super
16 cool. He was a Major. He was really cool. He was younger. He hadn't been there long
17 but he said—the training NCO was with him and they showed me some of the training
18 they were doing and I was really impressed. They had been around for a long time so
19 they had like an annual training schedule, plus a Reserve got to go on a two-week
20 summer camp. Well, they had five—and they didn't call them camps—they had five
21 training missions a year and if you can get off work you can go to all of them. I mean
22 they had them in Puerto Rico, a couple places in the States. Four or five trips and if you
23 wasn't working you could go on them. And I just liked the whole atmosphere and they
24 evaluated all your things and your background and he said, "I'll put you on an A team
25 right now as the senior Medic." I was an E5. He said, "We need Medics and from what
26 you've been doing, plus your experience," I'd talked to the Battalion Medic. He said,
27 "I'll put you on as a senior Medic right now." I said, "Well, what do we have to do?" He
28 said, "All you have to do is say yes. This is all inter-state. I'll just send 78th paperwork
29 and you'll be here next month." I said, "All right, let's go for it." So the following
30 month I went and it was like a Class A inspection. Then they looked and me and could
31 see I had just been a Drill Sergeant. And SF—nowadays they're pretty squared away but

1 you know old-timers. I came in there and of course I didn't have all my stuff on like I
2 would have normally. That's I think when it started hitting me.

3 RV: What started hitting you?

4 JW: Hitting me that I had lost the awards I was supposed to have. It never really
5 bothered me and I can honestly say that since I got my CIB. I was fortunate for that. But
6 when I started looking around and saying, "Shit, everybody's running around with a
7 couple of silver stars and bronze stars and stuff like that." But I just let it slide. I said,
8 "Hey, that was in the past." So things were going good. I spent, oh god, I don't know
9 how long it was. A little bit less than two years but we had little problems in our team.
10 Our demo man and our Team Sergeant were running guns and everything else. They
11 were good old boys that lived out in the country and they had a plan out there from I
12 guess it was DEA, buying up shotguns. One thing led to another and I don't know, they
13 got caught trying to sell like fifty pounds of C4 or something.

14 RV: Who were they selling it to?

15 JW: Undercover agents. They didn't know it and they got caught. So that sort of
16 busted up the team so for a couple of months there it was push or shove. And at the same
17 time I was back with my wife and I said, "Look, the paramedics, you can't get a job
18 nowhere unless you're up north and I'm not making enough money. I'm considering on
19 going back." See, I figured I'd just go back in the Army as an E5. I said, "Well, I'm
20 considering going back in the Army." So we talked and I said, "If I can, I'll try to give
21 you the first year in the States," because I was going to go to the Rangers but I figured I'd
22 try to give her the first year. So I walk up to the recruiter and he says, "How are you
23 doing, Sarg?" I said, "I'd like to come back in." He said, "I can't bullshit you, Sarg.
24 There's my quota board up there. You see prior service is zero. I don't even need you,
25 plus you've been out of active duty for more than five years, correct?" "Right." He said,
26 "So you are going to have to start all over. If you're out less than five years we can put
27 you through the six week minute man and you drop one rank but once you go beyond
28 five years I don't care if you're in the Reserves or what—active duty. I'll give you E2
29 and you start all over again. Basic training, AIT, the whole nine yards. Any MOS you
30 qualify and I'll give you twelve months in the States." So I said, "Oh, man. I'm not
31 going in being a Medic because an E2 I'll be pushing aspirins," so I enlisted for the

1 infantry and the first twelve months would be at Fort Hood, California. So I went in
2 October of '79 and it was just an entirely different world. I mean I was down at reception
3 station and there was people running around going crazy. There was no formations. This
4 was before we got—there was girls running around with t-shirts and no bra and they were
5 just partying. I said, “Sooner or later somebody’s going to say—somebody’s got to yell
6 at me or something.” I was with a couple other guys but one of the guys specifically,
7 Larry Trocksell, he had spent six years in the Airborne Infantry with a couple tours in
8 Vietnam. Well, they finally made everybody get their hair cut and they got us uniforms.
9 I said, “All right, shit starts now.” Nothing. So I had my little one-striper but I had my
10 pin-on wings and my pin-on CIB and in them days we still were in the plain green with
11 the baseball cap. It was all subdued. We had little black wings up top and our combat
12 patches. I started feeling like soldier again. Well, of course I had been playing a soldier.
13 Well, playing, I was in the Reserves a couple years. So the TAC, the guy who takes care
14 of you while you’re there waiting for the Drill Sergeants to pick you up, he said, “Hey,
15 Welsh, come here. Listen, I’ve got to take off roll. You mind taking charge?” I said,
16 “No, I don’t mind.” He said, “You’re in charge so if anything happens give me a call.” I
17 said, “Okay. Everybody outside!” We started coming outside and boy, man, we just
18 raised hell with them. “I don’t know where the hell you think you’re going.” We were in
19 their shit. I was up and down making them do push-ups and everything. We were doing
20 them with them and somebody said something. I said, “I’ll tear your throat out,” and we
21 just went off. (Laughs)

22 RV: Was that fun for you?

23 JW: Was it fun for me? No, I was serious. These people gotta wake up. They’re
24 in the goddamn service. He said, “Raise your hand if you’re going infantry or you’re
25 doing this.” I said, “You better wake the hell up. Right now you’re at Disneyland, son.
26 In the next forty-eight hours your whole world is going to change.” Some pretty big guy
27 tried to give me some shit and I wanted to knock the shit out of him. He backed up and I
28 said, “I’ll tear your freaking throat out,” or something. “When I say you’re dismissed I
29 want you in your building, in your goddamn room and I don’t want to hear a freaking
30 peep out of anybody.” They took off. There was about a hundred of them. So the next
31 morning (laughs), the next morning there was a call down from the 1st Sergeant’s office.

1 We know the whole deal. He shuts the door and then to me and TAC says, "Damn,
2 Welsh, are you crazy?" I said, "What?" And he told us everything that happened. He
3 said, "Did you do it?" We said, "Yeah, we did it." I said, "What is this, the new action
4 Army?" The 1st Sergeant laughed and he said, "Sergeant Welsh, you're going into the
5 infantry so you'll be okay where you're going but you've got to wake up. You're right.
6 This is the new action Army." I said, "I can't believe it, 1st Sergeant. These sons of
7 bitches have been running around like they've been at a day camp for four days. When I
8 was in reception station you was called a pussy and they put you in a big long overcoat
9 and one of the winter pile caps and you had to wear it down over your ears until you got a
10 haircut and you got a uniform. That's who you was. 'Hey pussy.' That's what they
11 called you and then once you got your shit on..." He said, "Stop. Things have changed.
12 But anyway, you guys are getting picked up tomorrow morning so have your bags packed
13 and you might want to help these guys that are going to Fort Benning, Georgia, for
14 infantry training. Help them out a little bit." Trocksell said something like, "Fuck them
15 sons of bitches. I ain't helping nobody of them goddamn punk-asses." He said, "Okay,
16 take it easy, Trock." They were pretty cool about it. They got a kick out of it because I
17 think in their mind it was like that, too, but it can't be. So the next day like three busses
18 pull up and we're all lined up out there. The first thing I see is the right arm, 173rd
19 Airborne. Man, I started getting rushes. He was slender but he was built really good and
20 he was just spotless. You walked by there and there was black E7—CIB, the badge, the
21 whole bit, man. He looked up and down and he was talking to the clerk who's getting
22 ready to release us. "Welsh." "Drill sergeant." "Front and center," and boom, I was
23 there. He said, "Welsh, you got the second bus." I said, "Roger that." He said, "Get
24 them on. Trocksell, you've got the third bus. We'll stop somewhere halfway from South
25 Caroline to Georgia and we'll unload them, you'll give them a meal ticket, we'll run
26 them through and we'll put them back on. Any questions?" "No, Drill Sergeant." "All
27 right, get them on." I said, "Everybody get on, get on, get on." So we had our trip and
28 they started all singing jolly shit and all and they fell asleep like puppies. Then we had
29 our dinner. By the time we got to Fort Benning, Georgia, by the time we got there we
30 had to go around and they go to the PACs (Personnel Administration Center), the
31 personnel center, and they drop off their records and all that they need and then they

1 pulled up. And it was still light out and man, I'll never forget it. That bus stopped, that
2 Drill Sergeant walked on, and he said, "On behalf of the Commanding General, I'd like
3 to welcome to you. You're not in, fucking pussyland Fort Jackson anymore. When I tell
4 you to get out I want you to get out, grab two bags, put them over there and then you get
5 in formation over there, you understand me? You better get out. What are you waiting
6 for?" They were climbing out the fucking windows. Finally he moved out. As I stepped
7 out he said, "Welsh." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "You stand right here at parade rest." I
8 said, "Yes, Drill Sergeant." This is another Drill Sergeant, not the guy who traveled with
9 us. And boy, they had them guys doing flips over us, getting the bag, doing this, getting
10 this, getting that, getting the roster and getting everything and what they'd do is they'd
11 just right away grab them by the balls because this is infantry and they're going to be
12 there thirteen weeks and get them all lined up alphabetically and writing out people and
13 all that kind of stuff. Me and Trocksell were still standing by the bus at parade rest and
14 then when they got them all settled they said, "Welsh, Trocksell." "Yes, 1st Sergeant."
15 The 1st Sergeant was out there. He said, "Welsh, you've got 3rd Platoon Leader and
16 Trocksell, you get 4th Platoon," or something like that. I don't know what platoon it was
17 and they sort of picked a guy that they'd been watching who was kind of athletic and
18 usually a bigger guy, athletic, and they all assigned them. Even though they're brand
19 new somebody's got to be the Platoon Leader. Now he might not last in that position but
20 from that time on we just busted ass. We tried to help our guys and I was in really good
21 shape and I had no trouble with the PT and all, which happened to me when I was a Drill
22 Sergeant, we didn't say stuff like, and "I just can't do that." If anybody did I'd say, "Shut
23 your goddamn mouth. Let me tell you something. When you graduate here your ass
24 could be in combat. You better pay attention." The Drill Sergeants—we didn't realize
25 it—the Drill Sergeants and the 1st Sergeant and all were watching us because they get a
26 lot of shithouse lawyers in there.

27 RV: What do you mean by that?

28 JW: Okay, in other words, the Drill Sergeant threatens a guy or does something
29 then a prior service guy, when they're alone he goes, "He can't do that. You can do this
30 or do that or you can go here and do this and do that." He stirs up trouble. We weren't
31 like that. At five o'clock, I remember I had a big huge, black E7, Sergeant Thomas.

1 He'd say, "You got them, Welsh?" I said, "Right, Drill Sergeant," and he'd say, "All
2 right, I'm going home." I taught them everything from the day they got there—how to
3 make their beds, how to be lined up, what they had to be ready for. And believe it or not,
4 I didn't realize it and neither did Trocksell, like over seventy percent of these guys were
5 enlisted for assignment to the Ranger battalion. So we had a lot of young, gung-ho kids
6 without us really even knowing it. They were eating this shit up. It was well over
7 seventy percent. If they made it that's where they had enlisted for. So what they do, it's
8 called one station unit training, which is one of the best things they came up with.
9 Instead of sending them down to pussyland, Fort Jackson, and go through six or seven
10 weeks of punk-ass basic training—you can quote me on that—punk training and then all
11 of the sudden their whole world's turned upside down and the Drill Sergeant gets them
12 for eight weeks of infantry training, there's just not enough time because you've got to
13 build something that hasn't been built. So what they did was with all combat arms, be it
14 infantry, armor, artillery, MPs, engineers like that, you go to one station and that's the
15 station, or I should say the fort where they teach the AIT (Advanced Infantry Training)
16 and you start from day one and your class can be fourteen or sixteen weeks nonstop. So
17 from the day you get off the bus you're whole world is you're an infantry, infantry,
18 infantry and engineer or artillery. So they take them and it's all infantry or artillery or
19 armor Drill Sergeants. So they're taking them right from the beginning to the end.
20 There's no seven weeks and then a ten day leave and all that and then go. It's balls to the
21 wall for thirteen weeks. It's the best program that they come up with. In my opinion,
22 every soldier should go through a minimum of ten weeks basic soldiering where they get
23 all that grunt stuff. That's why the Marines have got what they've got. One, they're
24 smaller, very small and everybody goes through the same first eleven weeks, females
25 included. Everybody learns to be a grunt Marine and then they go on to their advanced
26 training. And I don't care. You look at a young Marine that comes out of boot camp and
27 then you look at a damn Army GI that comes out of basic training and there's no
28 comparison. That Marine is standing tall, looking good, and he's ready. You know what
29 I mean?

30 RV: Oh, yes.

1 JW: Esprit de corps morale is so much higher because of that system. And if they
2 don't make it through that system they're out, where we take them down here and we got
3 Drill Sergeants that shouldn't even be Drill Sergeants. They don't even have to meet the
4 standards of passing the PT test when they get to us. So it worked out. Anyway, at seven
5 weeks you now split into—there's various infantry MOSs. You come in as eleven X and
6 then according to your request for assignments and what the Army needs, they have to
7 have so many infantrymen, mortar men, and toe gunners. So then they break it down and
8 usually if you are mathematically inclined and you have manual dexterity you'll get
9 picked for mortars because you've got to. It's true quality. Well, about that time is when
10 they were switching everybody. They called the 1st Sergeant. We were told to report to
11 the 1st Sergeant and we're standing at parade rest and he said, "At ease. Look, myself,
12 the Commander, all the Drill's been watching you for seven weeks. First of all, you guys
13 did a damn good job. We've got guys come in here that are out of shape, they can't run.
14 The Drill Sergeant says something to them and then they go in and play shithouse lawyer.
15 You guys ain't never said nothing wrong, you ain't never complained, and you're
16 definitely, definitely motivated these kids. I don't know whether you know it or not, you
17 both being Airborne and Ranger-affiliated and all, but look at this roster." We did and he
18 said, "Look at that. Over seventy percent of these guys, if they make it, are going to go
19 to the Ranger battalion. You've definitely got a good group of guys out there. What I'm
20 going to do is I'm going to offer you this. Now, we've got seven more weeks of training
21 but I know that you guys could do pass the test right now. You could go there and
22 qualify on the sixty machine gun and that and take the final exam. Here's the deal, and
23 the Battalion Commander approves this. We're going to pull you out of training and
24 we're going to let you, on your own, coordinate through and it's called make-up training.
25 You hook on with somebody that's going and you get yourself all the way through." We
26 had to do several weapons and then you had to take the final exam and all of that. He
27 said, "Get qualified as fast as you can and then I'll make you these Drill Corporals and
28 that's what you'll do. You'll be a Drill Sergeant Assistant until you graduate." We said,
29 "Okay, no problem." So he gave us our own room in this deserted hole of a barracks
30 upstairs and we didn't waste no time. He gave us a list of the people to call and gave us a
31 pick-up truck and we were gone. Within about seven or eight days we were qualified.

1 He said, "Damn, you don't waste much time." Well, they was going and that's what we
2 needed was, "Somebody go there." We sat through the instruction on it and we get to
3 shoot the automatic weapon and shoot the grenade launcher and shoot the machine gun. I
4 just go, "What's next?" And then you've got to go through this big POIQT. It's the
5 Performance Oriented Infantry Qualification Test. It's got about thirty stations and we
6 just zipped right on through there and we were just like, "What's next? What's next?"
7 Because we were on our own and as soon as we got that, that was a big thing. Once you
8 pass POIQT, boom, they said, "Okay, you're done." Then they gave us some pistol belts
9 and made us Drill Corporals. It's no rank. They don't give you no money for it but it's
10 an acting Drill Corporal that used to do it. They said, "All right." And I was working
11 with that black guy that picked us up originally and they said, "Trocksell, you're going to
12 work with the other guy. The reason I'm doing that is because I don't want you to show
13 favoritism, which I know you won't, but just to get you way from your platoon.
14 However, your Drill Sergeant will give you guidance and you go by that guidance." So I
15 went up there and the black guy was really cool. "What's your name, man?" I said,
16 "Joey." He said, "Joey, I'm So-and-So. You guys are doing good. Listen, the TOC
17 already talked to you about these guys are going Ranger and all. You've got to really
18 push them, especially in PT. We've got to really push them because they're going to
19 Jump School. When they graduate Friday they will go to Jump School. Three weeks
20 after that when they graduate Jump School they will pick them up for Ranger and they
21 will go through thirty days of Ranger indoctrination program. If they complete that they
22 will go to the Ranger battalion for six months or more before they even send them to
23 Ranger School." That's the way they work it. "They want to ensure by the time they get
24 to Ranger School that they are going to pass." And not only pass, they're usually going
25 to excel, which is true. So basically that's what we did for the last six weeks. We just
26 pushed the troops and they let us sing cadence and the whole thing. "Welsh, get up there
27 and sing cadence." We marched them everywhere and then at night they'd piss me off
28 and I took them all out in the street and we marched and we marched about three blocks.
29 I marched them right into the woods. Trocksell said, "Man, you are crazy, Welsh," and I
30 just started low crawling. I low-crawled for about an hour and I don't know how long
31 around in a circle and I got them back up and I said, "Now, are you going to start

1 sounding off?" "Yes, Drill Corporal." And off we went. So my orders came down and I
2 was going to go the 7th Infantry Division, which, oh man, I really didn't want to. But for
3 the old lady's sake, the 7th Infantry Division at that time was a gang. So anyway, let's
4 see. Did I go home on leave? Here's what happened, no. They have exodus. In other
5 words, around the eighteenth or twentieth of December until the third of January
6 everything ceases. Everybody goes on a half-day training schedule and all that kind of
7 stuff. So what they do in our situation, fortunately we had them guys there for a good six
8 or seven weeks so their head was on pretty good so we still had enough time to get them
9 back on their feet. Anyway, they sent them—they give you the opportunity to go home
10 or stay in the holdover barracks so we had a two-week break. I think it's 18 or around 21
11 to 22 December to 3 January it's an exodus.

12 RV: This is '77?

13 JW: '79.

14 RV: '79.

15 JW: Well, that happens every year, no matter where at. Even if there's a war
16 going on they're going to have an exodus and the entire army goes on half-day section. I
17 shouldn't say that if there's a war going on. If you're not in the war. (Laughs) If you're
18 Stateside. Now what I did as a 1st Sergeant, I worked it and I would let the Section
19 Sergeant work it out. I would tell him how many people I wanted there because you still
20 have to have somebody there but rather than having the guys eat up their leave if they
21 were good I'd say, "I don't care if you do one on and two off or whatever. I want
22 somebody here x amount of hours and give me the schedule. You work it out. That way
23 this guy doesn't have to eat up leave." Some of them would just go on leave just so they
24 wouldn't be bothered. Basically that's what happens and really, the personnel centers
25 and finance and everything, they only to a half-day schedule. They'll work their people
26 until noon and that's it for twelve or fourteen days, whatever it is. See, you can't get
27 nothing done anyway after one o'clock, you know what I mean? You still have to secure
28 your area. So we waited until they came back. I believe I might have went home. I can't
29 even remember. I don't know. Yes, I did go home. Yeah, I went home because I wasn't
30 going to go home after I graduated. I wanted to go right to Fort Ord and get down there
31 and get set up so I could get housing. Even if you're a private and you're married they

1 try to give you housing. So they went and they did their exodus and then they came back
2 and I guess we did five or six more weeks and then February they graduated and I went to
3 Fort Ord, California. And of course I'm in class A's when I get off the thing. They take
4 you to what they a turtle farm. A turtle farm is where all incoming and outgoing
5 personnel, that's where they sleep and they stay there and then they in and out-process us
6 as whatever system that that unit has. And the guys who work there, so they can be
7 easily identified, they take these helmet liners, the old helmet liners and they paint them
8 black with little emblems on them and they make them wear pistol belts so they can be
9 identified. And they usually pick strat guys that can march people. You've got to march
10 these guys down because most of them are just coming into the Army but then what's bad
11 about it is you've got guys that are coming from overseas that are getting out of the Army
12 and they can be a problem because, "Screw you." Anyway, I get off the bus and I was an
13 E2. I have one stripe and they don't treat you like a Drill Sergeant or nothing like that.
14 They just said, "Hey, Private," and you say, "Hey, Sergeant." It's not no harassment or
15 nothing like that. It's more trying to get a lot of stuff done in a few days to get you up on
16 the hill. So as I get off, the E5 Airborne and stuff like that he said, "Welsh." I said,
17 "Yes, sir." He said, "Where've you been? What have you done?" I told him and he
18 said, "You want a job?" I said, "Doing what?" He said, "Taking my job. I'm leaving in
19 ninety days. I'll get you working here, man. It would be a good place to start. They'll
20 promote you to E3 right away and put on Corporal stripes and you just push troops until
21 you get settled in." I said, "What the hell?" So I went in and go see the 1st Sergeant. I
22 have no records and the 1st Sergeant was an E6. Pretty sharp guy but anyway, he said,
23 "Yeah, okay, no problem." So this also gave me a little bit higher of priority on getting
24 housing, too, because they sort of put me at an instructor's status.

25 RV: Joey, you're not married now. Are you seeing anyone?

26 JW: Oh, I'm married.

27 RV: You are married at this point?

28 JW: At that point I had reconciled with my wife and I was bringing my wife and
29 children. That's why I gave them California. That's where she wanted to go. After that
30 twelve months we would see what would happen. This was their first tour. They had

1 never known anything so I didn't want to take them to the Rangers or something where
2 I'd never be there. And then I lucked out and got this great job.

3 RV: Can you tell me a little bit about your children? Who they were then?

4 JW: They're the same who they were... (Laughs)

5 RV: (Laughs) I don't mean literally but just tell me how old were they.

6 JW: At that time, let's see. It was 1980 so my daughter was ten and my son was
7 thirteen. And I had been married—well, he was my stepson really but I still call him my
8 son. He was two-and-a-half years old when we got married. I got married about a year
9 and half after I got out of Vietnam but we had been separated about fifteen times from
10 '70 to '75 or '76 because of my mental instability. But they weren't going to come out
11 there until I got a house and all that and that took about five or six weeks. So I went to
12 work at turtle farm and boom, it wasn't hard. It was a pain in the butt sometimes because
13 you had to deal with some personalities and people but then they moved me over to
14 training NCO to another company. That was more suitable for me. My wife and kids
15 came in and I was just soldiering my ass off, just trying to get back in the system. So I
16 got there February '80 as an E2. On 1 December '80, I made Sergeant E5, which you
17 just say, "Mmm-hmm," but that's fast.

18 RV: I know.

19 JW: It takes you like three or four years.

20 RV: Well, how did that happen?

21 JW: Because I was experienced. I did very well down there. I went to the
22 company that I was working for and the guy that was working there was some slob and I
23 put that company together in this training cycle as re-enlistment NCO. I put all the
24 records straight. I did what was supposed to be done and did it better than it's supposed
25 to be done. That's the way I do things.

26 RV: Joey, did it feel good to be recognized in the face of all the work?

27 JW: No, I was just doing—I didn't seek recognition. This is just the way I am. I
28 was an E3 acting Corporal and you only have to be an E3 for so many months and they
29 made me an E4 and made me an acting Jack. In other words, I was an E4 but they let me
30 wear E5 stripes.

1 RV: Well, I was going to ask you, in the face of what you did in Vietnam and not
2 being recognized; now you are being recognized for your talents—

3 JW: Well, no, I was recognized by my peers. That's all that counted, that I had
4 done my job. "If you're out there with Joey"—I was a LRRPer, they're a LRRPer, that's
5 all that mattered to me. Them medals, I didn't have time to dwell on that. It was over.
6 What was done was done. I wasn't looking for that. What I was looking for was to bust
7 my ass to make Sergeant E5 because then I could volunteer for Drill Sergeant School.
8 You can't be a Drill Sergeant E5 unless you volunteer and they only select the best
9 because E6 and above, they can be drafted. Once you become an E6 your records leave
10 your local status and they are given to the Department of the Army and then they sort of
11 give you a career manager because once they feel you're E6 or above you're going to
12 make it a career. So in other words, up until you make E6 you're basically controlled by
13 your unit level. So if you want to go to Drill Sergeant School as an E5 you have to
14 request it and you have to have letters of recommendation and all that kind of stuff. So I
15 went to the board, I maxed out the promotion board questions and all of that and they
16 said, "Okay, you're going to be promoted. Now you have to wait so many months before
17 it comes down." In the meantime I went around and started building my packet on my
18 own with the help of a guy from personnel that I knew. So the Colonel interviewed me
19 and the Sergeant Major was like, "Hey, no problem. What do you want me to write?" I
20 really, really liked me and he knew that I was there to move on. A lot of good soldiers
21 are not sent to schools and are not promoted because they don't want to release them
22 from their unit because they need them and they send me shit. They send the assholes
23 and it happened to my nephew when he was in the Rangers.

24 RV: That's because they know you'll straighten them out.

25 JW: What?

26 RV: They know you'll straighten them out but it hurts your career. It hurts these
27 people's career.

28 JW: No, no, no. You're missing the point. Let me say this. The man that
29 deserves it is the guy who works the hardest and he's got to be there and all that. Well, a
30 lot of units will keep him there and they'll send another guy so that other guy getting that
31 school, he'll get promoted faster than the good guy.

1 RV: I see what you're saying. The good guy rubs off on the other guy and the
2 other guy benefits so much.

3 JW: That's right. Because they don't want to let their good guys to go to the
4 school because they need them to take care of business.

5 RV: What happened to your nephew?

6 JW: I don't even want to get into that. It was a for instance. He should have been
7 going to the school and they sent somebody else and so he got screwed because he was a
8 better soldier and they didn't want to leave him.

9 RV: How often did you see this in your career?

10 JW: A lot. A lot. Some of them we'd send and some of them—it depends on the
11 school and all. If it's just some rinky dink school—but when you're talking about
12 leadership development courses that you must have to punch your ticket, my guys were
13 told—when I was a 1st Sergeant and I brought them in I told it to them like this. "You
14 work for me and you work for me and you give a hundred percent. When you leave here
15 I'm going to be talking to your career manager and I'll try to get you what I think and
16 you think you need. I'm not just going to send you after being two years out there on the
17 trail under a hat back to your unit. If you want to go to advanced NCO course or you
18 want to go to a battle staff operations or something, I'm going to try to get you—I am
19 going to get you an, 'atta boy' for doing this." That's the way Special Ops was because
20 they were in the Special Warfare Center. Once you reach a certain point in your career as
21 SF, you've got to go back and they hate it. They hate to go back because they've got to
22 go back to the schoolhouse. But you've got to give back what you know. If you luck out
23 and you get on a halo committee or scuba school you're all right but man, pushing troops,
24 you can get some really mundane, lousy jobs. But you've got to give back your time.
25 You've got to pay back. I told them, "Look, you give me a hundred percent and I'll
26 guarantee you I'll call your career managers directly and I'll also take care of you if
27 anybody tries to screw with you." That's the way it was. "But on the other hand, if you
28 think you're going to come in here rag bagged out and cruising then you might as well
29 take your ass down the street right now because I'll run your ass down." That's the way I
30 lived in the Army. That's they way the Army has to live. You're there to do a job. You
31 ask for it. "You volunteered for the Army, then you volunteered for the infantry and then

1 you volunteered for Airborne so you asked for it and you're getting it. If you can't hang
2 then get your ass out of here." That's the philosophy. The same way with LRRPs. We
3 were four-time volunteers. People that are like that, once they realize that—this is a hard
4 part here because you can go either way. Some people will try to use the system and let's
5 say, get over, where you let the other guys do the work. They'll just ride. A slacker. But
6 he don't look like that in front of the bosses. But that don't happen in good Airborne
7 Ranger units or Airborne Infantry units because we'll just kick his damn ass. That's the
8 bottom line. Somebody, sooner or later, is going to say, "Hey, wait a minute. There was
9 three of us assigned this goddamn detail, Sarg. Where have you been after lunch?" So
10 you beat the shit out of him or you lose him. One or the other, you beat the shit out of
11 him and tell him, "Goddamn it, if you work with me you work with me." So that's the
12 way I grew up in the Army and that's the way I lived Army. "We could go behind the
13 barracks right now." You don't do that. They don't do that in the new action Army.
14 "Let's just take it around back." And you'd be surprised. Some guys just become the
15 best of friends from that. Seriously, they sort of got that dual respect from each other.
16 Anyway, see, there I went. So I went down there and then once I got there in December I
17 put in, December of 1980 and I told them I wanted Fort Benning. Fort Benning. They
18 said, "You can be sent anywhere." I said, "No, ma'am, I've got to go to Fort Benning."
19 You see, an infantry Drill Sergeant can go anywhere. My orders came down and in
20 March I was in Fort Benning. I went there early. Let's put it this way. Whenever I went
21 anywhere, while I was still on leave I'd go and find a job. I'd go job hunting. So what I
22 did was I went back to the battalion that trained me and let me go in February of 1980. I
23 went right back to Battalion Headquarters and knocked on the door and went in and they
24 said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Sergeant Welsh. I went through here and is Colonel
25 So-and-So here?" "Oh, no, he left." I heard a Major say, "Hey, Welsh," and he was a
26 Battalion Commander. He liked us because me and another Drill—he was a boxing
27 enthusiast and me and another Drill—he put a team together of trainees, guys that had the
28 training and all, and we won the post championship. So when I walked through the door
29 he went, "Hey, how are you doing? What are you doing?" I said, "Well, they selected
30 me for Drill Sergeant School." He said, "All right, no problem, but I'm not going to
31 assign you to the same company, all right?" I said, "Yeah, no problem, sir." He said,

1 “Okay, cut this guy orders and send him down to B Company.” So that was it. So I went
2 down three buildings away from where I trained and then—it’s a new system now—but
3 then you had to be within Drill Sergeant School within sixty days. As soon as I met my
4 senior Drill I said—he’s a former Ranger—I said, “Sergeant Thomas, I can’t be waiting
5 around sixty days. I’m worthless without the hat. I need to get in that school and there’s
6 an opening in two weeks. I need to get in that school and you know that. This is
7 bullshit.” He said, “All right.” Here was the Intel 1st Sergeant. He said, “Hey, how are
8 you doing?” He said, “No, 1st Sergeant, there’s an opening, we have a slot, and I’m sending
9 Sergeant Welsh.” “All right.” So boom, I was lucky and I was in school within—I got
10 there in March and I graduated Drill Sergeant School in July and it’s eight weeks long at
11 that time. They’ve changed it now. Everyone goes from their unit on temporary duty to
12 Fort Jackson and spends eleven weeks there and if they become a Drill Sergeant then
13 they’re sent back to their unit and they receive orders to move because in the old days
14 you’d get sent down there and you might break your leg, you might have family
15 problems, you might trip and fall, you might be dumb, you might be ate all up and you’re
16 eating up a Drill Sergeant thing. So now what they do is they send you to school before
17 they reassign you, which is smarter. Now when you come to that—say you’re in Fort
18 Dix and then you go to Drill Sergeant School at Fort Jackson. When you come back
19 from Fort Dix then they reassign you as a Drill Sergeant to maybe Fort Gordon and
20 you’re ready when you hit the ground. You’re a Drill Sergeant. So it’s a better system.
21 Of course everyone goes through the same exact training. Ours was a little different
22 because we were trained in only infantry even though they’d tell you about, “Okay,
23 here’s what happens. We have to give you this training for all Drill Sergeants received,”
24 and it was like female training. We ain’t gonna have no females but they still got to go
25 through it. They sit you down and they say, “We’re going to show you a bunch of
26 vignettes,” and I might not pronounce it right.

27 RV: No, you did.

28 JW: Well, I didn’t know what the hell it was. None of us did. We were saying,
29 “What the hell is that?” Let me tell you something. Drill Sergeant School was
30 extremely, extremely hard. I mean, you have to know every single thing verbatim and
31 you—I mean, I couldn’t find the Drill Sergeant School when I got to Fort Benning,

1 Georgia. Nobody, not even the MPs knew where that school was. They had that in the
2 middle of a field with a few trees around it. It took me three days to find it because these
3 guys are so stressed. The only good thing about it is, it's non-residential because you're
4 already moved there and you go to school in the morning and you come back. But it's so
5 stressful. If you pulled up as a civilian you'd see guys standing there talking to a tree,
6 talking to the wall. It is hard.

7 RV: But you thrive in that kind of atmosphere?

8 JW: Well, I had my kids. Every night they'd sit down and I'd say, "All right,
9 stand there, and I'm going to give you a class." [Mumbles] When I was recon instructor
10 I had them teaching demolition and they had to sit there and do it and they kind of dug it
11 then because they were a little bit older and they had a little sheet and they'd say, "Hey,
12 you're wrong, Dad, you're wrong." So it worked out pretty good. But I remember I was
13 teaching them a non-electric explosive device and here I am teaching my kids how to put
14 a blasting cap in the C4. We had training aides of course but the whole idea with the
15 Drill Sergeant is everything is verbatim. "The next movement I'll name, explain, discuss,
16 and conduct practical exercise on is position of attention. The position of attention is
17 used..." everything. If you said a word wrong, you're wrong. That's it.

18 RV: How did you deal with that within that atmosphere?

19 JW: How did I do?

20 RV: Yeah.

21 JW: I made it. (Laughs) It was small. We had eight-week classes, only two
22 classes and I think we came in—the freshman class came in around the fifth or sixth
23 week or something like that, the way they overlapped it. But there was only twelve men
24 in a class and we only lost one guy. You have to help each other. You have to work as a
25 team. What they do is they just demonstrate a couple times. They don't stand out there
26 and teach you nothing. But there's some things that are mandatory for them to show you.
27 So as I was saying, we sat down and were going to watch this vignette. Now I said,
28 "Now, don't say nothing. The camera is going to be like the Drill Sergeant so just
29 imagine yourself sitting there and just pay attention to what goes on. You'll catch on."
30 So we're sitting there and we hear a knock on the door. "Come in." Now the camera of
31 course is saying this and this nice looking blond, real starched, real pretty comes in and

1 all and she starts whining, "I wonder why I didn't get a pass, Drill Sergeant." "Well, you
2 had six demerits this weekend," and all that. She says, "I really need to go downtown,"
3 and then she started unbuttoning her blouse. Seriously, she's unbuttoning her thing and
4 she says, "You know, I'd do anything for a pass," and she pulls off her top. Real nice
5 laced bra and stops and she says right to me, "Welsh, what would you do?" I said, "Fuck
6 her." And he said, "No, no, no, no." That was the first thing out of my brain because we
7 all shut up and started watching this stuff now because she was nice and we didn't know
8 how much she was going to take off, but wrong answer. This guy was pretty cool. He let
9 me get away with it but it was a natural reflex. He just said, "Welsh, what do you do?" I
10 said, "Fuck her. Do it." Then he said, "No, wrong answer," and then they tell you,
11 "Never let no one in without a witness. Don't shut the door." Okay, bullshit. They put
12 you in a lot of different situations where a girl comes in, she shuts the door, but she's got
13 a different attitude. She starts ripping her shit and yelling rape.

14 RV: You're being prepared for pretty much
15 anything, any kind of contingency.

16 JW: Yeah. Never ever be alone with a female. Always have the door open.
17 Always insure that you say, "Man on the floor," before you enter that building so that
18 they—well, they're not supposed to be running around naked anyway but like I
19 eventually did wind up training females and the policy was that they would go into the
20 bathroom, shower, clean up, and they would either come out in uniform or if they were
21 going to bed it would be in PT uniform so they would never appear less than a PT. Now,
22 that didn't work out that way, though. Then when I got to the NCO academy it was even
23 worse. Oh my god. And then as soon as a man—we didn't have to worry about that but
24 we had to be trained in it so we'll get through that. The Drill Sergeant we had, he did.
25 He worked two years and he told us some horror stories about good stories that turned out
26 to be horror stories because all you do is—you do it with a girl and if for some reason she
27 wants out, they've got you by the balls.

28 RV: Hey, Joey, this is in '79 or '80?

29 JW: This is in '81.

30 RV: Okay.

1 JW: So I got through the school and did all right and graduated and you can't win.
2 There's always the new guy, The Cherry, we call him. And so I come in there all Billy
3 Bad-Ass and they go, "Oh, here comes to new cherry Drill." You're always being
4 harassed. It's always competitive but it's all in good spirit because you're the new guy.
5 "You're the new guy so you've got to do this." And really what they're doing is they're
6 training you because until you get some dust on that hat you don't know what you're
7 doing. It's like anything. You come out of any school, "Yeah, I'm qualified Special
8 Forces." I'll tell you what. You don't know you're ass from a hole in the ground until
9 you've been on a Special Forces team for six months to a year minimum. Because the
10 school and the books are a lot different than the jungle and the terrain and the situation
11 that you're going to find yourself in. So it's the same way with the Drill Sergeants. I
12 mean, yes, you've made it through school but you didn't have any troops. You just dealt
13 with each other. Now, how can you handle troops and what's going to happen with you
14 get in the eighth, ninth, and tenth week and you are so burnt out? You're so ripped and
15 these kids are getting stronger because they came in a mess and by the time it's eight,
16 nine, or ten weeks they're ready to run to through walls and you're ready to die because
17 you're so tired from being there. That's when your stress level really gets tested. A lot
18 of guys go off. But you're allowed mental—you're allowed to just stop as long as there's
19 somebody else there and just take a mental break and a mental retreat. Get away from it
20 and all that. Or, if you start to have an altercation with another trainee, the Drills will
21 come in and they'll muscle you out because you're out of control. They'll still get in his
22 face but they're under what we call controlled rage and uncontrolled rage. So to save
23 your buddy, you get him out of the system but you're still on that trainee but you're in
24 control. That had to do that to me only once. Before I knew it, two guys had pulled me
25 away and another Drill Sergeant and another Drill Sergeant were on this guy because I
26 was going to—I don't know, but I was going to kill the son of a bitch. He was one of the
27 guys that finally—he'd been in there eight or nine weeks now and he was going to make
28 a stand. Wrong answer. The only next thing and John knew it was, if we wouldn't have
29 gotten there I said I was going to tear his fucking head off. He said, "Yup." I said, "I
30 appreciate it, guys." He tried to make a stand but boy, I'll tell you, there was three Drill
31 Sergeants all over up and down his ass and up and down and, "Push-ups here and the rest

1 of the platoon, fall in, stand fast, stand parade rest and you watch," and then they seen,
2 "Whoa, dude. Damn, you don't want to piss this guy off." Sooner or later somebody's
3 going to stand up to you. He didn't budge so there was only one next thing. You can't
4 back down and my sense and experience went to survival and that was to take them out.
5 That's where I was at. "I'm just going to take this man out." The trainee was gone.
6 There was an enemy in front of me and he was going down. That's where my rage was
7 and they knew it.

8 RV: How would you do that? How would you go about it?

9 JW: I probably would have just went right through him. Well, if I wanted to kill
10 him I would have just rammed two fingers up in his eyeball and just kept on running
11 backwards until he's dead. That's one way of doing it. But I probably would have
12 grabbed him by the throat and took him down like that when I had him like that. Just cop
13 into his throat and he's going to grab and as soon as he does that you do a let sweep and
14 then you just go down and crush his trachea or whatever you've got to do. But
15 fortunately they just pulled me right out of it and I was gone and went down and sat
16 around with the senior Drill for a while and my partner came back and maybe it was
17 Monday, the senior Drill said, "I'll see you Wednesday." I said, "No, I'll see you..." He
18 said, "No, I'll see you Wednesday." (Laughs) I said, "Okay, Drill." So he gave me a
19 day off. No problems after that. In fact, the trainee came up and apologized. A couple
20 days after I got back he came up. He knew he was wrong. Somebody had pissed him
21 off. I said, "Well, you're going to have to handle that stress. You fuck with me and I'll
22 kill you." That's what I told him. He said, "I understand that." I said, "No, you didn't
23 understand it then. And you lose your cool and you don't stay focused, you're going to
24 die on the battlefield or get your buddy killed." He said, "I understand that, Drill
25 Sergeant." I said, "Good." He said, "I'm glad you didn't kill me." (Laughs) He did. He
26 said, "Thanks for not killing me." In the meantime the wife was wondering where the
27 hell I was at because I was so totally immersed in the job and they worked us all—we'd
28 go thirteen weeks and in two years we averaged seven days break between every class.

29 RV: That's pretty intense.

30 JW: Pretty intense. I've done seventy-two hour breaks. That is not a break. Let's
31 see. I lost it in the nineteenth month. All the Drills are in the Drill Sergeant huddle. CO

1 was right there with them. The Drill Sergeant huddle is when they all stand around there
2 just bullshitting. And I am taking care of the entire company, getting them lined up and
3 preparing them on this certain specific physical training field where they will go take
4 their final PT test. And we take them down there and we actually drill them through it
5 because we don't give it to them. We're not allowed to test them. It's a committee. So
6 what you do is you want to get them thoroughly indoctrinated on what to expect and how
7 to act and all that. And I'm lining them up and by now I can talk at this level and they
8 will listen. They respect me and I have trained them and they are ready. They know that
9 they've got like maybe six days left and they listen. So I'm doing this. I'm walking up
10 and down the line and saying, "Remember this and remember that." All of the sudden
11 this E7—now here's what happened. My partner, he had duty all night. We had to pull
12 three duties. We had to pull company. That means you spent all night with the company
13 or battalion and brigade. And if you don't have anybody to take your place you would
14 get up at three o'clock in the morning and you would work until five at night and then
15 you'd go and you'd spend all night. You wasn't allowed to sleep. You wasn't allowed to
16 sleep, you wasn't allowed to watch TV, you wasn't allowed to listen to the radio, and
17 then you'd spend all night on duty and then when you got relieved at six o'clock then
18 you'd go back and take the troops over again. This is the kind of thing that you could get
19 stuck with. Well, my partner had duty and when I came in he gave me the briefing.
20 However, somehow in miscommunication, but it was really there's always somebody in
21 charge, whether it's E5, E6, or E7. It doesn't matter. The Drill Sergeant in charge of that
22 block of instruction is in charge. What he puts out you're supposed to follow. Somehow,
23 I don't know why, but I believe it was more on the guy that was running it because my
24 partner was pretty good, you was supposed to go to the PT test and be in uniform whether
25 you was taking the test or not. See, some guys might be sick or some guys might be on
26 profile or some guys might be a little bit injured and the Drill Sergeants say, "Look, I
27 don't want him to test because I want him to be ready." So I'm not aware of that and I
28 get everybody out there and they're in their huddle and I think I had two or maybe three
29 guys that went along. Everybody goes and they were not told. They were not in uniform.
30 They were not like everyone else, which is no big thing. I would have pulled the guy off
31 to the side later and he would say, "Hey, no disrespect, bro, but I do what you say when

1 you tell me.” “What are you talking about, Smitty?” He said, “Well, everybody’s
2 supposed to be in the same uniform,” and I would have said, “Hey, I’m sorry about it,
3 man, but when we changed shifts my partner never told me, man. I’m sorry about that.”
4 That’s how I would do it. That’s how professionals do it. Well, out of nowhere he
5 comes up. “Sergeant Welsh.” I said, “Yeah?” I had my clipboard and all. He said, “I
6 need to talk to you.” Now there’s a hundred and sixty guys standing here and he’s E7
7 and I’m E6. Don’t matter. We’re Drill Sergeants, right? And as I’m walking, I said,
8 “Okay,” and I’m getting a little, “What the hell’s going on here? I know I’m not doing
9 nothing wrong because I’m doing all the work.” They knew I could handle it. A lot of
10 guys are like that. Sometimes I’d stay in the huddle. If the guy was good at something
11 and he don’t need no help, why should two guys or three guys be telling them to do it.
12 “Let Welsh do it or let Brown do it. He’s good at it.” That’s all we need. As I’m
13 walking in between the ranks, he starts this finger stuff. He said, “I want to tell you what.
14 When I tell you something and rah, rah, rah.” That was it. That was it. Man, I threw my
15 goddamn—they said my clipboard went, my hat went and I went. I was about four steps
16 from him and in the same time, though, his yelling had opened up the huddle and every
17 single man, including that CO, seen what was coming down. Smitty was going off on me
18 in front of the troops. Wrong answer. And now Joey—and I was the battalion hand-to-
19 hand instructor—Joey was coming. I was coming to tear his freaking head off because I
20 had no idea what the hell he was yelling about and he was screaming and treating me like
21 I was goddamn trainee. I was going to kill him. Well, just as I was—he was half drunk.
22 To be honest with you, he had a hangover. A little simple thing like my guys weren’t in
23 the right uniform he could have handled differently. I don’t know what he wanted to
24 prove because I’ll tell you what, I was—one more step and I would have had him and this
25 huge Samoan, Sergeant Emo and Sergeant Dean who was my boxing buddy, they latched
26 onto me and yanked me out of the way and a couple of other Drill Sergeants jumped on
27 the company and got their mind off of it and they pulled me away and I don’t know what
28 they did with Smitty but I said, “I’ll kill that son of a bitch.” They said, “No, man, it ain’t
29 worth it. Just take it easy.” They sort of talked me down. I said, “What the hell is his
30 fucking problem?” They said, “He went around the back of your truck and three of your
31 guys weren’t in uniform.” I said, “Well, bullshit. I wasn’t told that.” He said, “Look,

1 he's been out all night." I said, "I don't give a shit. That motherfucker puts his..." They
2 said, "All right, be cool, be cool." I believe—and the CO, that officer, fucking punk,
3 stood there and watched the entire thing. Every Drill Sergeant there knew I was being
4 verbally abused in front of the company and it was totally uncalled for, totally
5 unprofessional and he deserved to get his fucking ass whipped. But they knew how I was
6 and fortunately they got to me and got me away. Well, when we get back, the CO calls
7 me in and he's got a counseling statement. I said, "What?" He says, "I'm counseling
8 you for disrespect to a senior noncommissioned officer." I said, "Wait a minute, sir. Are
9 you crazy?" He said, "Sergeant Welsh, just pay attention. You do not have to..." I said,
10 "You don't have to tell me about counseling statements. You was there. You seen
11 everything. He verbally assaulted me in front of the entire company and I didn't know
12 whether he was going to hit me or what. He kept coming at me, pointing his finger and
13 he's the one you should be counseling." He said, "You can concur or nonconcur." So I
14 wrote, "Nonconcur," and then I wrote my statement. He said, "Sergeant Smith said that
15 he'd forget everything if you apologize." Oh man. I said, "I'm going to tell you what,
16 sir. Hell will freeze over before I ever fucking apologize to him. I can't even believe this
17 is happening." He said, "Well, you tried to assault him." I said, "Did I touch him? I
18 never got to touch him." Finally I just walked out and I went over and I told the guys,
19 "Do you believe this fucking shit? This son of a bitch is counseling me. Nineteen
20 months of working my ass off and he's counseling me on something that he seen. That
21 sorry ass son of a bitch." It was because Smitty had been there a little bit longer. A lot of
22 these young Captains ain't never had this kind of thing to deal with. Usually they're
23 supposed to have a command or I believe they did a command afterwards. Anyway, he
24 had to do something but what he should have done was he should have talked with both
25 of us individually and told us that we were both wrong and had us sit down and work it
26 out. There should never have been paperwork. So I told him, "I will not apologize and I
27 don't concur with this statement and I will call every Drill Sergeant there to be an
28 eyewitness if you try to go any further, in other words, Article 15, and I'll take a court
29 martial before you give me and Article 15." He said, "Okay, Sergeant Welsh, I want you
30 to take the rest of today off." I said, "No problem." I went in and talked to the senior
31 Drill and that's what I told him. He said, "Oh, fuck the old man. Smitty's in there. You

1 know Smitty. He's putting his nose up his ass." I said, "It's bullshit, man. It's bullshit."
2 It was a black Ranger. He was cool. He said, "Joey, just go home and take a break and
3 everything will work out." I said, "I'll tell you what, I swear." He said, "Look, all the
4 Drills are behind you, man. You ain't got nothing to worry about. Just forget it." So I
5 went home and came back. I wouldn't look at him, I wouldn't talk to him, I wouldn't go
6 near that man. I just did my job; nothing happened and then about a month later—I went
7 right back to work like nothing happened but I just did not communicate with Schmidt at
8 all. It wasn't within a month. They broke it into two brigades and so they were
9 extending the company. They needed experienced Drill Sergeants to go down to Delta
10 Company to help form Delta Company, which was going to 2nd Brigade. It got bigger to
11 where instead of having 1st Infantry Training Brigade and so many companies they were
12 going to have 1st Infantry and the 2nd Infantry training brigade. They were just getting
13 more people. They had to expand. So they needed to take someone from our company.
14 And we had a new Drill Sergeant. He hadn't been out of school but maybe a month so
15 they were going to send him. I said, "No, wait, wait, wait. You don't send a guy that's
16 been in—he didn't want to go anyway. Nothing against Sergeant So-and-So but they
17 need a SED that has a minimum of six months on the trail on top. You don't want to
18 send Sergeant Bellowhead down here because he hasn't even been through a cycle yet.
19 And he's going to get a brand-new Drill Sergeant. The concept of training and
20 developing a new company..." We had the fattest, fucked up 1st Sergeant you could ever
21 find, "Is half the guys are new and half the guys are experienced. We need to send an
22 experienced guy down there. And I have seven months left and I'll volunteer to go in
23 place of him." I figured, "This is a smart move. I get to go over there and what I've
24 learned will hopefully help develop the new company and I get away from Smitty."
25 That's why I did it. The guys knew that it would be better for me because they didn't
26 want to see me screw up and they knew that I would do good over there. Even the other
27 Drills—the other senior Drill that's in charge of all the Drills and then each platoon is
28 supposed to have two Drills and one is the senior Drill and one's the junior Drill. All the
29 Drills are saying, "That's a smart thing to do. As much as we hate to see Joey go we
30 can't send Billy Bob because..." Now, there were some lame-ass guys there that spent
31 more time that spent more time doing work in the orderly room for the 1st Sergeant and

1 they couldn't run two miles, believe me. They definitely didn't want to send them
2 because it was a bad reflection on us. So he said, "All right, no problem. I'll see what
3 the CO says." So they sent me over there. Man, I met a goddamn gazelle. This
4 goddamn black 1st Sergeant had been on Drill Sergeant and had been in the Army
5 forever, two times as a Drill Sergeant, running like a gazelle and he was sharp. We hit it
6 off great. I had this new guy. He had been in the Army quite a while. A real nice guy so
7 we played good cop, bad cop. Very intelligent, good shape, everything was going good.

8 RV: Where are we chronologically? What year is this?

9 JW: Chronologically we are around—I did nineteen months so July—you only do
10 two years so I was in there in July '81 and '82. We were at the end of—it was right
11 around Christmastime, I guess. That first year we made the exchange and then I stayed
12 there from January until July of '83 so I had been on the trail for like eighteen or nineteen
13 months. I had six more months and I'd be gone. Now, this was a real quick
14 reassignment because it's in between. Well, they called me up and I'd been there a few
15 weeks now. Me and the 1st Sergeant were getting along good because we had the troops
16 yet and we were going out on runs and we were doing seven or eight mile runs and shit
17 like this and we weren't beating them but there was a lot of guys that weren't hanging.
18 Under his standards, the standard was that you had to run your company for five miles.
19 That was by the ninth week or tenth week. He said, "You'll run this company seven
20 miles so you better be ready." Well, by the time, shit, six months later I was running
21 eight and ten miles every third day with him. So that's far.

22 RV: Was this guy a Vietnam veteran?

23 JW: Yeah.

24 RV: Did you all talk about your experiences in Vietnam?

25 JW: You didn't really get into it and you really didn't have much time. There
26 weren't too many. Only a few because you would have had to be a senior E7.

27 RV: Yeah, this is early eighties and the war is plenty over.

28 JW: But see, that's where I got screwed over basically. They'd say, "Well, he's
29 just a buck Sergeant." "No, no, no. This guy ain't just a buck Sergeant. This guy is a
30 buck sergeant with prior service of three years and two years of that is in Vietnam."
31 "Okay, let me look over his records then."

1 RV: So that would hurt you?

2 JW: What?

3 RV: The fact that you did serve in Vietnam?

4 JW: No, it would help me.

5 RV: Okay.

6 JW: But see, when I went to get promoted, our Battalion Commander—see, like I
7 said, we only had three E5s in the entire battalion. All the rest were E6 or E7 and his
8 philosophy was if they're "just" Sergeant E5 Drill Sergeants then they should have x
9 amount of time as an E5 before you put them in for E6. And when they put me in for E6
10 I got turned down three times. And the 1st Sergeant, he didn't have the balls to stand up
11 and say, "Wait a minute, sir. Let me just..." Or the Commander or anybody. "This is
12 not a regular E5. This is a prior service E5 who has excelled in everything. He's Drill
13 Sergeant of the cycle, he's one of the best Drill Sergeants I've got, he's got three years as
14 active duty, two years Special Forces duty. He's not your normal E5 so we need to look
15 at an exception to prescribed policy here. This guy needs to be an E6. Compared to the
16 other two E5s, and then when another one came in, in time wise, them three I'm not
17 asking about but this man needs to be promoted. He needs to go to the board. He's
18 sharp. He knows what he's doing." He came back and he said—now, if I would have
19 went in September I would have gotten promoted in December of '81 or whatever. He
20 said, "Joey, you're going to have to do something to lighten this guy up." I said, "What
21 do you mean, I'm going to have to do something?" "Well, how about going up for NCO
22 of the quarter?" Now every three months every unit sends up—I missed the Drill
23 Sergeant of the quarter so they had the NCO of the quarter. That means you go against
24 everybody. One company sends everybody to battalion. The winner of the battalion
25 sends it to the brigade. The winner of the brigade sends it to the post. Yeah, the division.
26 You know what I'm saying?

27 RV: Yes.

28 JW: Are you sure you're following me?

29 RV: I think so, yeah.

30 JW: Okay. In other words, you start at the company level and you go against all
31 the guys in your battalion and then the guy who wins that goes against the other guy

1 from—see the brigade you're in might have six battalions. So then all winners of that,
2 them six guys go against each other to go on to the next higher level, representing that
3 brigade. Do you follow me?

4 RV: Yes.

5 JW: Okay. And then the highest you go when you get to post, it's down to
6 basically one per major unit. Now whoever won in that competition, they'd go against—
7 there might have been about, I don't know, eight or ten guys and major units represented.
8 Then you go against them eight or ten guys and it's like a three-day event. You've got to
9 take tests, you've got to answer questions and if you win that, the winner of that quarter
10 and three months, at the end of the year, them four people compete for NCO of the year
11 for the post. That's really saying that you've been through—in other words, you are the
12 NCO of the year for Fort Benning, Georgia. Now, that's pretty rough. You've got Jump
13 School, Airborne instructors, Ranger instructors, Drill Sergeant instructors, MPs, infantry
14 guys. Everybody competes so you've got to make them—you've got to do something.
15 So no one's ever gotten, out of our battalion, past brigade. I won battalion and I won
16 brigade and I won the next level. I made it to post level. They take you alphabetically
17 and they said there wasn't going to be no tenth of a point or nothing. Well, in the
18 meantime I was competing against Staff Sergeant Volkmann. Now, if you remember ten
19 or fifteen years ago, the main Ranger poster was this guy in jungle fatigues with a patrol
20 cap and the old green jungle fatigues. He has his weapon. It was the major Ranger
21 poster in the late eighties and early nineties. Well, that was Volkmann. He was like six-
22 three and two hundred and forty pounds of nothing but muscle. Somebody caught a
23 snapshot of him and he didn't pose for it. It was picked. And anywhere you look, that
24 was—he was like on a patrol and you could see a guy behind him or something but you
25 could just barely read his name because he had his web gear on and that's when we still
26 had the slanted pockets and you could see the V and his little pathfinder sticking out.
27 Anyway, he was the guy who was a Ranger instructor then. He had had the picture taken
28 when he was in the Ranger battalion and his name was Volkmann so he went in before
29 me. Well, the three days out there in testing, him and I hung out together and we got to
30 know each other pretty well and we were kidding each other, "Yeah, I'm going to kick
31 your ass. We ain't got no competition and blah, blah, blah." Now, getting back, he had

1 already been selected and was waiting to make E6. He was just doing it because of doing
2 it. It was, "Hey you." But he was gung-ho and knew his shit. We went up there and like
3 I said, let's say there's eight people. He was seven and I was eight so you had to be up
4 there at a certain time. Now, up to that time I knew it was going to be close. I felt that I
5 could get him but I knew that he probably felt the same way. When he walked through
6 the door, this guy walked through the door and he had his E6 pinned on. His orders had
7 come down for E6 so now he's not a competing E5, he's a competing E6 and he came in
8 smiling. I said, "Oh, shit. Yeah, that's just what you need, too. You need two more of
9 them stripes to beat my ass." That's how we became pretty good friends. Well, he went
10 in and when he came out you're not allowed to talk or nothing. He just winked at me and
11 then I went in. Man, I know I did really, really, really well. I felt good. At the end they
12 came in and congratulated everybody, however, Sergeant Volkmann won. As we're
13 getting ready to leave, they said, "Sergeant Welsh and Sergeant Volkmann stay up here."
14 This is five Commander Sergeant Majors. They said, "We said there isn't going to be no
15 tenth of a point but let me tell you, we want to congratulate you Sergeant Volkmann, first
16 of all, but let me tell you something, Sergeant Welsh, it was that close. We just wanted to
17 tell you because you did such a good job." Of course we're stone serious, you know,
18 and, "We never thought it would come down this close but through the whole
19 competition you guys have definitely, definitely excelled beyond—I mean, you didn't
20 have any competition. These guys were excellent soldiers but you two make the whole
21 competition and I notice that you get along pretty good." And I looked up and they said,
22 "At ease." And I said, "Oh, if he hadn't made that E6 I would have had him." So they
23 laughed and all and they stood up and shook our hands and all that. We walked out. We
24 were buds. I don't know where that came from.

25 RV: Well, that obviously meant something to you.

26 JW: Here's what happened. So now I went back and I was runner-up, which
27 means, if for any reason that man messes up or he's sick or whatever I would take his
28 place when they had the NCO of the year. Now, only four people go up then, one per
29 quarter. So then what you do is the 1st Sergeant writes up all this great stuff about what I
30 did and I made it further than anyone, I'm runner up for post and all that kind of stuff.
31 And the son of a bitch doesn't realize that in January he says okay. Now he just screwed

1 me. He screwed me for a year because I needed to get promoted on or before December
2 31st of that year, which would have been 1982 because years later when my next rank
3 comes around, it always goes on or before 31 December of the certain year. So since he
4 screwed me over I winded up getting promoted in March. Instead of December 1st I got
5 promoted 1 March so when it came time to make E7, the cutoff date was 31 December of
6 1982, I was fucked. I had to wait until the following year. You see? That's the way
7 you've got to look at things when you're dealing with your career. The guys know it, the
8 senior Drills know it and all that but the dumb ass—I don't know. I don't if it was a
9 Colonel. I think he was the 1st Sergeant that had no balls. I know my 1st Sergeant and
10 here's what happened. I did all that and I got selected. You have to wait ninety days so
11 when I went to the new company I was an E6. Now, when you leave—every year you
12 get an annual report and when you leave somewhere like when I left the unit they have to
13 give you an evaluation report no matter what. They needed to give me an evaluation
14 report because I was changing duty station. So when I left after nineteen months of being
15 a drill, I needed an evaluation report in order to process in over there. But they called me
16 up and they said, "Hey, the 1st Sergeant wanted me to let you know that your NCO ER is
17 on his desk. Just stop by and sign it." So I went over there and I checked it out. Now, I
18 looked and the max is 125, which was what I expected because that's what I had on the
19 other ones and that's what I should have gotten. I got a 123 and I just couldn't find out.
20 They got me for, one for loyalty and something else. Loyalty was, I believe—loyalty was
21 requesting to leave the unit. That's being disloyal. And then the other one was for—they
22 have so many characteristics docked that they'd ding me for—maybe it was something
23 like self-tempered. You know what I mean. They'd ding me and didn't have the balls to
24 be there when I signed it. So I signed it and then the guy burned me a copy and I took it
25 back and I gave it to my 1st Sergeant. I said, "Check this out." Whoa, man. I loved this
26 guy. He was great. He's about six-four. He looked like he only weighed about a
27 hundred and eighty pounds but he said, "Them sorry son of a bitches. Fucking loyalty
28 and goddamn whatever. Goddamn, this is fucked up. He is a punk. That fat, fucking
29 punk and he wasn't there? That fat son of a bitch. We'll kill this. I'm going to kill this
30 goddamn thing. You deserve a 125." Oh, he was pissed. I said, "Bob, 125 is perfect. I
31 honestly don't think that the system is correct anyway because you know that nobody's

1 perfect." He said, "I know that but you've got to be a perfect score to compete and to be
2 competitive. You're right. We're a hundred percent right. We're wrong." Nobody
3 should be getting a perfect. It's very rare. A 122 or 121 should be about the super troop
4 so it was over-inflated and they've changed that since then. "But you've got all 125s in
5 your entire goddamn career so they're going to flash on this." I said, "So let them flash."
6 He said, "You know you're getting a 125 from me. Goddamn it." I said, "I don't even
7 want to talk to him. The man is a hundred pounds overweight. He comes out there and
8 stops." If you'll let me get off a little bit—I said, "He will come out. He's fat." He was
9 artillery or something, I don't know. You know who was the most decorated? I was
10 more decorated than him and I didn't even have half the shit. He didn't even have a CIB.
11 He wasn't infantry. He was fat and he'd come out and tell war stories and this and that.
12 He was fat. He was on the way out and they were hiding him so he could get out. It was
13 embarrassing as a Drill Sergeant, very, very embarrassing to have him represent you.
14 When our old 1st Sergeant left and our senior Drill took the position, he was cool. He
15 hung one thing up behind the back of his desk and that was his black beret. That's all he
16 hung up and he was the 1st Sergeant. He was our senior Drill but it was only temporary
17 until we got this fat son of a bitch in. He didn't have the balls to be there so I could
18 question him and neither did the CO who was long gone. He didn't want to be near me.
19 So little things like that—I would draw whatever I could from another man that I felt—
20 like Volkmann and me, we became such good friends that he would come down on the
21 eighth week when we moved all the MOSSs and I'd let him come in and give him a
22 pumped up briefing because he's a fucking Ranger and he's six—he's say, "You think
23 I'm big? I'm one of the small ones." He would fire up my class. He always wanted to
24 be a Drill so I'd give him his day in the Drill and he would get just an hour or so of
25 getting them pumped up about being in the infantry and all that shit. He'd say, "If you
26 think I'm big, I'm one of the little ones." And he was a Ranger instructor so he loved
27 that. That would make his day. In turn, he said—you see, I hadn't been through Ranger
28 School and I requested it. He said, "Now, you know I got your ass when you come to
29 school and I'm going to dog the shit out of you." I said, "You know I'm ready for you."
30 Because he said, "You need to go to Ranger School, man. You know more. Christ, you

1 could go out and be my freaking Ranger instructor.” I said, “I’ve already got that
2 planned,” and all that shit. Anyway, everything went pretty good.

3 RV: You were saying that you learned from good men and this guy was one of
4 them.

5 JW: I learned a lot of things that he learned from me and I learned from him.
6 Even though we were competing, being that same Airborne Ranger blood, we just
7 couldn’t help it. Like, if he was stumped on something I would help him and he’d help
8 me. Even though we were competing against each other. Fuck everybody else. We were
9 Airborne Rangers and all that. And then, the same way with that 1st Sergeant. I would
10 suck any kind of knowledge that he had that impressed me or that I didn’t know. I would
11 store it in my storage bank and then when I found out what his standards were when he
12 got there, “You will,” then I was. And I remember, the last run got me by a half a block
13 and that was seven months it took me. That was after a ten-miler. He was good. This
14 guy was six foot three and I think six foot of it was legs. But he seen that I was—he
15 challenged us and he told us what the standards were and he knew that I was driving,
16 driving on, driving on. I was going to meet or exceed his standards and that’s why he
17 stuck up for me and that’s why he was pissed.

18 RV: So what happens to you as you go through the 1980s? You’re still in.

19 JW: Here’s what happened. Now I’m getting ready to leave. They put me in for
20 the Notorious Service Medal. That’s the next step above an Army Commendation
21 Medal. Usually the cream of the crop. Let’s put it this way. The Commander will get
22 one, the 1st sergeant will get one, the senior Drill will get one without question. The Drill
23 Sergeants are case-by-case basis. He put me in for an NSM and the Colonel said, “No, if
24 he’s not an E7 or above, he’s not getting it.” I heard him shut the door and he said, “I’ll
25 tell you what, sir, who the hell?” Oh, he went off. He said, “Let me tell you something.
26 Sergeant Welsh is the best goddamn Drill Sergeant you’ve got out there and you know it
27 and you ain’t got the balls to stand up to that Colonel and say, ‘Well, this is one of the ten
28 percent that you need to approve.’ I’m going to tell you what. Rewrite it. You better
29 rewrite it. You had that dumb ass Lieutenant write it and if it’s written wrong, I’ll write it
30 and then I’m going to the Sergeant Major.” We go up and he writes it and they turn it
31 down and oh, he was so pissed. He said, “Well, they’ve got your award ceremony

1 tomorrow.” I said, “I’m not going.” He said, “What?” I said, “There’s no where in the
2 regulations stating I have to be there. Fuck them. He’s going to come there and he’s
3 going to tell them how I walked on water and how I was the greatest thing since sliced
4 bread and stick and RCOM on me. Fuck them. I won’t be here.” He said, “Hold on for
5 minute.” He goes up to the Sergeant Major and says, “Oh, by the way, Sergeant Welsh
6 isn’t going to make it tomorrow.” He was great. I thought he was going to tell me,
7 “You’ll do what I say.” He said, “What?” He said, “I told you. And I’m not making him
8 come.” This 1st Sergeant was—and this is where I drew. I said, “Now there is a 1st
9 Sergeant. He ain’t no political punk.” He said, “He ain’t coming and I ain’t gonna make
10 him come.” He said, “Why don’t you keep both of you?” He said, “We’re on the way.”
11 He did. And we went over there and he said, “What’s your problem? Do you all want to
12 say something?” He said, “No, I’ve got the problem.” He said, “No, I’ve got the
13 problem, Sergeant Major. The problem is this man and I’ve got it right here and you
14 know it. You brought the Brigade Commander to watch him give hand-to-hand combat
15 at least two times because you thought he was the best you’ve ever seen in the Army.
16 Am I right or wrong?” “Hell, yeah.” “And now you ain’t got the balls to tell the colonel
17 to sign him off with an NSM because the Colonel believes and you know who this goes
18 to. This goes to me and you and everybody else who don’t do shit around here compared
19 to these Drill Sergeants. Now goddamn it, I’m not making him come to that goddamn
20 formation and I ain’t coming. Did you or did you not bring the Brigade Commander,
21 bragging about, ‘If you want to see somebody put on a demonstration of hand to hand
22 and get troops fired up, you come.’ How many times did you do that? He’s the only man
23 in Fort Benning, Georgia that got us helicopters. He got us helicopters to make an assault
24 in basic training. What kind of NCO is that? I couldn’t even do it. You couldn’t even do
25 it. He did it. He got us an air assault. These kids got to ride in the chopper and air
26 assault and it was done perfect. Could you do it? No. Could I do it? No. This E6 did it
27 and he did it perfect and you bragged and bragged and bragged about you was the only
28 battalion that ever had an air assault.” He chewed him until he was blue in the face. And
29 the same old shit. I tried but the Commander wouldn’t listen. He said, “Yeah, yeah,
30 yeah. But you know you have to be there.” He said, “We’ll there but just cut it short
31 because I’m tired of your bullshit.” That’s just what he said to him. Now, see, that’s

1 what I picked up. Because Sergeant Majors have a tendency to become political. They
2 have no soldiers. They're the Colonel's right hand man. I said, "When I grow up I'm
3 going to be me a 1st Sergeant like that and the other ones that I met. That's all I'll work
4 for and nobody will tell me nothing." And that's what I did. They offered me Sergeant
5 Major and I said, "No, I'm done. I did what I had to do."

6 RV: When was this? What year?

7 JW: When?

8 RV: What year was this? Was this '84?

9 JW: No, this was '83. In July if '83 I had done my two years. Well, they had
10 another guy. Now, I did two years. They had another guy extend six months to help him
11 out and they didn't give him an NSM. They finally did but you know where that came
12 from?

13 RV: Where?

14 JW: It came from us raising so much hell about me. And shortly after that—they
15 had turned his down—they approved his because he had two and half years. So I even
16 knew the guy and he said that everybody heard about what we did and they knew 1st
17 Sergeant Weeks. I hate fucking officers. Don't put it that way. Let's put it this way, and
18 this is the truth. I can say honestly that I can count on one hand the officers that I've met
19 and I've worked with that I would trust in battle.

20 RV: Why do you think that is?

21 JW: Because I've been there. I know them.

22 RV: What's wrong?

23 JW: Now, I'm saying the ones I served under. I know other ones that I didn't
24 serve under that I'd go with in a heartbeat.

25 RV: What do you think then makes the bad officer? Why is that so prevalent?

26 JW: Oh my god. They're primed. They've got a ticket to ride. They go do this
27 for so long—okay, they have to go through infantry and be a Commander for two years.
28 That's it. The NCO spends twenty years in the line. Let's say he makes 1st Sergeant at
29 sixteen years. He spent sixteen years on that line grinding the troops. The Captain runs
30 in there for two years and becomes a Commander and they shoot him up to a staff
31 position. They have to punch their ticket and then they have to get their Master's Degree

1 so during the meantime they send them to college. Every single man that left Vietnam—
2 now, don't get me wrong, there's some fantastic soldiers but there's such a slight
3 percentage. They would have to come into Vietnam as an infantry officer and they would
4 have to do twelve months. They would do six months on line and six months in staff.
5 Now, my infantry officer was a LRRP Platoon Leader. In six months he spent one night
6 in the field. Now, they didn't have to but most of the Platoon Leaders got out there and
7 at least once a month they'd go on a patrol. They didn't have to but that's what a good
8 officer does. He's going to get out there a couple of times and he's going to listen to the
9 Team Leader but man, that builds so much respect between you and the men because he
10 knows what it's like and he's going to do more for you and you don't mind seeing him
11 get his CIB and Bronze Star. But when I stand in fucking formation while my punk ass
12 Lieutenant who never went on a goddamn patrol gets a CIB and Bronze Star it makes me
13 sick. It makes me puke. That fucking punk. And then he'll go spend six months in an
14 air-conditioned office and trying probably to be an operations NCO, god forbid, and he's
15 going to try to tell the troops how to move and all this shit. I know he went to the
16 straight-leg grunts because he was a worthless Platoon Leader as a LRRP. Let me tell
17 you something. They know how we feel about it. I'm in the unit and the ones that we
18 tell, we got a couple that—well, our new unit director. He's good. He's good because I
19 was told that he went on patrol several times so that, to me, is a damn good man. He had
20 to. He said, "I had to go out there. I had to understand what they were going through and
21 what it felt like and all which made me know more about what's needed and it drove me
22 harder to learn how to get it to them and how to do things right for them." That is a
23 leader. The other one is a ticket puncher and that's what I'm saying.

24 RV: I see.

25 JW: And when I got 1st Sergeant, I got the worst officer that I had every worked
26 with in twenty-five years. And there it is. The thing that I had been waiting for my
27 whole career and I was hoping that I would get this Captain that I used to work with. He
28 was Airborne Infantry Ranger-qualified, super smart kid. He spent three years in Panama
29 in the jungles, spoke fluent Spanish. He was a fast mover but not political. He was in
30 excellent shape. He knew the ground. He knew training. He'd been perfect. I got me an
31 air defense officer who was a fat slob. He couldn't make it to PT, he wouldn't come to

1 PT. He was a big bully of a man and most guys would think, "That's a badass son of a
2 bitch." He couldn't do shit. He couldn't run a half a mile and he knows. He came in and
3 yelled at me one day. He yelled at me and slammed my door and I jumped up and I
4 jumped over my desk and I was ready to kill him. I said, "I'll kill you, you mother
5 fucker." I was screaming, "Don't you ever come in my goddamn office." I knocked him
6 back and he sat down and said, "Well, damn, I need to vent." And there's everybody
7 listening. I said, "If you need to vent, then come in and vent. Don't you ever come
8 through my door like you're going to kick my goddamn ass and talking to me like I'm
9 some fucking private." So I sat down and he vented. And I had another big black guy
10 Captain, an infantry Ranger and all that shit. See, I evaluated every single NCO's
11 evaluation before it went and if I said it was unacceptable it wasn't sent and it was sent
12 back to the Captain. Why? Because I know what the Sergeant Major wants and if you
13 don't do it right, the Sergeant Major calls me up and says, "Hey, what the fuck is wrong
14 with you? I'm getting these NCO ER evaluations and they're done wrong." So it's real
15 simple. They go through me and I dot the i's and cross the t's and do little things and we
16 don't get them turned back. Well he came busting in my door and he screamed, and I
17 said, "Don't you ever." And I went at him. We were going to go. I said, "I'm going to
18 tell you what. I'm not trying to run your team but that NCO ER will not make it through
19 the Sergeant Major. It's the bottom line. I know. I'm the one that gets my ass chewed
20 when you get sent up there. Don't you ever come pushing through my goddamn door. I
21 don't care who you are, Captain." And he turned about and slammed the door. I was
22 shaking. I said, "Boy, I'm going to fight. This guy is big." But I wouldn't stand down.
23 I said, "This is the honest to God truth." I was in a hallway and behind me was the CO. I
24 was the next to last one. Across from him was a writer and then before me was the admin
25 and of course then was the supply. Well, you could hear a pin drop. I was pissed so I
26 just fucking got my shit and I got out of there.

27 RV: So where are you going career-wise? What's happening now?

28 JW: I was 1st Sergeant. It's 1994. I got a damn good group of people. I've just
29 got a fucked up Commander that I've got to deal with and then now I got a Captain that
30 runs one section. Two Captains—let me put this right. There was a Captain in charge of
31 the Psychological Operations team that did the platform instructions and there was a

1 Captain that was in charge of the Special Forces guys who gave the civil affairs block of
2 instruction. Now, they should have never formed them together. In the regular training
3 unit, all the Drills stay with all the students and all these instructors, they live in a
4 committee group and never see the trainees except when they come to their period of
5 instruction. So this made it even worse because now the instructor who taught this girl
6 all day gets to see her at night because he is moving in and out. It causes a lot of
7 problems.

8 RV: Right. I remember you telling me about this.

9 JW: Yeah. And I told them from the beginning that the committee group—when
10 I got there they had the committee group in charge of the Drill Sergeants. When I got
11 there I just changed everything. I just said, “Okay, committee group, you will take care
12 of your men and they will make sure that they do their period of instruction and you’ll
13 write their NCO ERs but I will evaluate them.” And I told them, I said, “And you NCO
14 ICs of the committee group, you will not—and this goes for you, too, Captain, no one
15 will say anything to the Drill Sergeants. The Drill Sergeants are under me. I am the
16 senior Drill Sergeant/1st Sergeant. They fall under me. They do what I say when I say it
17 and when I tell them and don’t anybody ever, ever try to tell my Drill Sergeants anything.
18 Is that understood? If you’ve got anything to say, raise your hand. All of you have been
19 through the Army. The reason they did this, I don’t know because you know it’s wrong.
20 You shouldn’t even be within ten miles of these goddamn students but you are. But
21 you’re not going to be within ten feet of them when I’m here. I’m the senior drill. I’m in
22 charge of all enlisted. I’m in charge of all the training. You will not talk to a student
23 outside of that classroom ever.”

24 RV: How did he respond to this?

25 JW: How do you? They didn’t say a fucking word. “If you are talking to a
26 student outside of that classroom, I’ll get you for fraternization and I’ll break you down.
27 I’ll break you down.” And that’s the way I talked, too. Oh yeah, I was very intense. But
28 what was it? It was controlled rage. Remember the rage?

29 RV: Yes.

30 JW: See, you learn the controlled rage as you develop, if you do it right. I knew
31 that I had to take charge because the company was totally out of control and I was just the

1 man. "And if you in any way feel that you're Billy Bad-Ass, and I know some of you
2 have got black belts and all, jump right on up because I'm from the old school and I'll
3 take off this shirt and you can take off that shirt and we can around the back of the
4 barracks any time any place if that's the way you want to do it. But don't pack a lunch
5 because it ain't going to take long." You know what I'm saying? And I said, "Now
6 that's not threatening anybody but that's the way I work. Now it's got to be done this
7 way and you all know what I'm saying is true. Them Drill Sergeants have been drug
8 through hell and have been pushed around. Goddamn it, I think half of you are jealous
9 because you're not the Drill Sergeant. Let me tell you what, they're going to get the
10 respect they deserve and you'll get the respect you deserve if you deserve it. They're
11 going to deserve it or I'm going to fire them. I'll just fire them. I'll fire anybody. Do
12 you understand me? I am an old soldier and I've worked my ass off to get where I'm at
13 and we do not have a good Commander." This was right off the bat. But I said, "I'll
14 fight. I'll fight as much as I can to get everything that you need and this company needs
15 and if you do something wrong or something goes bad you come to me right away and do
16 not lie. Let me know first and I'll help you. If you lie to me or you don't tell me, I'll
17 send your ass to jail. Everybody makes mistakes. If you make a mistake or you screw
18 up, come to me. Tell me the truth so I won't be blind sighted and if you're a damn good
19 soldier, which you're going to have to be or I'm going to fire you, then there you go.
20 Now, I know you've heard these kinds of speeches before but I'm going to tell you what.
21 Next month when we have the meeting I'm going to ask you a few questions and I think
22 by then you'll know that I can walk the walk, let alone talk the talk." And that was it. I
23 said, "Dismissed." It worked out if I would have had that Captain, we would have
24 done—I'm telling you what. The Commanding General of the Special Warfare Center,
25 the Special Warfare training group, when he came down he said, "This is the most
26 important company in the group. It's not the Special Forces qualification course or the
27 halo course or whatever. We're making history here. We have an AIT, the only
28 Advanced Individual Training. These guys have got to take these guys who are young
29 troops and integrate them into the Special Operations community. They're not Special
30 Forces. They're not Rangers, but they're going to work with them. So I'm going to tell
31 you what. They've got my support one hundred percent plus. Whatever they need,

1 they're going to get because they are the most important soldiers being trained out there.
2 They don't have six, eight, or ten years of experience like these guys going through the
3 Special Forces course. These are brand new soldiers. This is so important to us to make
4 this program right." That's where his head was. But I had a punk for a Commander and
5 I went up and I told the Sergeant Major, "Sergeant Major, listen. If you don't do it, I'm
6 going in there and I'm going to tell that fucking Colonel that that goddamn Captain is as
7 worthless as a piece of fucking shit. He can't run. He will not make formations. He told
8 me I can't hold formations so now I've got them split up formation. He doesn't know
9 anything about training. He cannot run one half a mile and keep up with us. I'd never let
10 him get away with this. We went on a ruck and he fell out of the ruck. Sergeant Major,
11 you know he's an asshole. Why do I have to live like this? Don't be bullshitting me."
12 He said, "Listen, it's politics. It's flat-out politics. You know that. You think that—
13 listen. You're saying it loud enough that the Colonel hears what you're saying, Welsh.
14 Just slow down. You're getting the point across. You think I'm dumb? The Colonel
15 hears what you're saying. He knows it, okay? He knows it." That's why I was doing it.
16 I wasn't yelling at the Sergeant Major but by my inflection I knew that the Colonel could
17 hear what I was saying. So he just put his hand to his belt. "It's officer business.
18 There's nothing I can do. You damn sure just told him everything. I can't do anymore.
19 I've said the same thing. You have to serve. 'Don't worry about it. I'm talking to him,'
20 and that's all I get. What can I do? My hands are tied, man? You just got done
21 practically giving the Colonel the whole fucking life story of the guy. You got the point
22 across." I said, "All right." I really like the Sergeant Major but I said, "You know he's
23 dragging me down. He's holding me back." He said, "Christ, Welsh, you've got the best
24 goddamn company in the fucking goddamn unit." I said, "No I don't. You give me
25 Captain Allen and I'll show you the best goddamn company in the fucking unit." And he
26 said, "Man." I said, "No, these people have got to go into a Special Forces environment
27 and Ranger environment. They must be able to conduct themselves accordingly.
28 They're not no goddamned Airborne Ranger Special Forces. The guy's only been in the
29 Army when he reaches them maybe four or five months and he could be attached to a
30 Special Forces team to provide psychological or civil affairs support. I want him to know
31 what to do. I want him to be ready." He said, "You know I can't do nothing." I said,

1 “Fine, that’s it then.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “The new Sergeant Major
2 will come in and wants to know why I got the position and you said because he’s the best
3 for the position. I interviewed everybody and he was the best.” He said, “Well, you
4 didn’t have the proper MOS and what did I tell you? I told you to tell him that I will
5 leave after a year and you told him, right?” See, I should have done two years. I said,
6 “Well, you tell him. Just let him finish out his year so he can punch his ticket and then
7 you’ll get whoever you want.” Well, a week later the Sergeant Major comes in and I
8 said, “Wait a minute, Sergeant Major. Excuse me. Sergeant Major, no disrespect
9 intended but if I listened to everybody that came in here and told me how to train these
10 soldiers I’d never get them trained. I understand that you might think that that way is
11 better and this way is better but do you know who many people have tried to tell me how
12 to train my soldiers?” He said, “Wait a minute, 1st Sergeant.” I said, “No, you wait a
13 minute, Sergeant Major. First of all, you don’t want me in the position.” “No, no, that’s
14 why I came to talk to you.” I said, “No, no, no. Let me tell you something. I’m going to
15 respect you but I expect respect back. You don’t come in my company and tell me how
16 to train my soldiers. I’ll tell you what? Have you ever been a Drill Sergeant there or a
17 Green Beret? It’s an entirely different thing. I’ve been out there in the bush training
18 soldiers and training indigenous personnel like you, too. This is a different type of an
19 environment. Everybody wants to tell me how to do it but let me tell you something,
20 Sergeant Major. When I see you do something that really really makes me think you’re
21 really good or if you’ve done this before then maybe I’d think about listening to you. But
22 you ain’t got the goddamn patch. You ain’t wore the cap. You don’t know shit about
23 being a Drill Sergeant. And I’ll be out of here in five months.” He said, “No, you ain’t
24 got to rush off.” I said, “No.” “Oh. What are you saying? Well, I didn’t know you
25 then.” I said, “Oh, so you don’t want me to leave now?” “Well, I’m just saying you
26 don’t have to rush off.” “Oh I don’t have to rush off? But what happens is when it’s
27 time to leave I’m going to get screwed because they’re going to let the commander go
28 and then I’ll have to stay here as an overlap to get the new CO on board so then that’s
29 what you’ll get out of me.”

30 RV: So you’re kind of at your wit’s end, here?

31 JW: Pardon me?

1 RV: You're kind of at your wit's end here, it sounds like. You've reached your
2 limit.

3 JW: No, I'm totally in control.

4 RV: No, I mean with the Army in general.

5 JW: No, well, he said, "Look. I've got E8 SFs running around here that ain't
6 doing shit and I got an E8 11B down there that's running the show," and the Sergeant
7 Major said, "Look, I picked the best man. He is the best man." "Let me tell you
8 something, Sergeant Major. I'm going to tell you something. You're going to see. I
9 picked him. I interviewed nine people. There wasn't anybody that came near him. He's
10 been with SF, he's been in civil affairs, he's worked with PSYOPS, he's been in Nam,
11 he's been in the Persian Gulf. He's been there, he's been there. He's been a Drill
12 Sergeant, he's been an instructor. He is the best man and he's got the best company in
13 this battalion and all I'm telling you is just to watch him." He said, "Well, I'll give him a
14 year." "Okay, fine. Give him his year so he can punch his ticket and that will be it."
15 Well now the guy says, "No." I said, "No, Sergeant Major, that ain't the way I work.
16 You made a decision on how I was based on looking at my name." "Welsh, you've got
17 to understand my position." "No. You think that? I would never base a decision on a
18 man's name and job title without even checking what his performance is and you did
19 that." So that right there, to me that was it. "You want to go get somebody? Fine. And
20 you know what? You can't find nobody as good as me. Is that bragging? You're damn
21 right it's bragging. And you're going to see who you wind up with and if I didn't have
22 this fucked up Commander, this thing would be a fifty percent better company. But I'm
23 tired of hearing you Green Berets tell me shit. I was with the Green Berets the same time
24 you was in Vietnam so don't talk this stuff to me. And I'm stone serious. I'm looking
25 for a job starting in November."

26 RV: So what happened?

27 JW: What?

28 RV: What happened? What was the fall-out?

29 JW: The fall-out was he said, "Well, you're not going to change your mind?" I
30 said, "No way, Sergeant Major, and good luck. Good luck on your replacement." And

1 I'll tell you what; he had to let me go. He didn't have to. He could have made me stay
2 but that's just the way I was. I didn't back down from nobody.

3 RV: Well, that's obvious.

4 JW: I'll tell you what. This Sergeant Major is a group training Sergeant Major. I
5 went up and seen him. He's the top Sergeant Major. I said, "Sergeant Major, I've got a
6 problem." "Welsh, what is it?" I said, "Let me tell you something. I've got four Drill
7 Sergeants down there, right?" He said, "Right." I said, "Well, you know they come from
8 PSYOPS and we have nothing to say about it. They pick who goes to school. And
9 they're going to come to me and I feel that they should have a selection board and the
10 people compete and they have a primary and an alternate. And we should be on the
11 board," myself and the Sergeant Major, "because we're the ones who are going to get
12 them. We don't know who they pick." He said, "You're crazy, Welsh." I said, "Well,
13 what do I do if he's fucked up?" He said, "Fire them." I said, "What?" He said, "Fire
14 them." I said, "Okay, that's what I'm going to go and you're going to back me up." He
15 said, "I just said to fire them, Welsh, you crazy son of a bitch. Get out of here." That's
16 just the way he talked then. He knew I wasn't crazy but he knew what I meant. I fired
17 my best Drill Sergeant that I ever had. I had to. It depends on the person themselves. In
18 my experience I have had several, what I would consider, very substandard officers. On
19 the other hand I have had, in Special Ops especially, a considerable amount of guys and
20 officers that were outstanding even though I might not have worked with them. I've seen
21 outstanding officers actually pushed out of the system while fat, sloppy ass, son of a
22 bitch, do nothing, know nothings stay in it. It's political. And ring knockers, the West
23 Pointers, they tried to explain in this thing—real quick I'm going to tell you. I'm going
24 to finish up with this—about the Ranger Tab. You know, when we put in for it, it was
25 supposed to be the same colors as the Ranger scroll. It came back and it was red outline,
26 black background, and a white Ranger. That's what was asked for. It came back gold
27 trim, black background and gold letters. That's the colors of West Point. Now, they tried
28 to say this stupid reason I just read about and it was bullshit. The goddamn colors of
29 West Point, gold and black and then they try to say it's the Army colors. No, it was
30 definitely done—

31 RV: By the West Pointers.

1 JW: Political. They wouldn't maintain the red, black, and white colors of the
2 Ranger scroll like we wanted. Not we—this is the fifties.

3 RV: Yeah. So with the exception of people like that, you did work with some
4 good officers.

5 JW: I did work with what?

6 RV: With the exception of these West Pointers and others, you did have some
7 good officers or you had good officers from West Point.

8 JW: I don't want it to get—there's terrible NCOs, too. It's just that I'm saying
9 that unfortunately, when I had the positions that I really, really, really needed a good
10 officer, I had one of the worst officers that I've ever met in my career. I've had an
11 excellent officer that was fantastic and I watched him get screwed out of the Army. It's
12 political. It's a system of—it's too political. And the higher you go up, that's what
13 happens when you get up in the Sergeant Major arena and all, it gets more political. I
14 ain't politicking nobody. I'm either a damn good professional, hard-charging NCO. I
15 don't kiss nobody's ass. Sometimes I've got to bite my tongue and that's the way I lived.
16 I don't go for this politics shit. You sit back there like the guys did in LRRPs and you
17 don't go out with your men. I respect the Lieutenants who, even if they went out three or
18 four times because they had work to do, too, but they went out there to learn. They went
19 out there because they had to know what it was like. A man would have to know what
20 it's like to be on the ground so he understands what conditions these guys are going
21 through because he's the one flying around in the bird dog trying to help us.

22 RV: Yes.

23 JW: And that's the man that I respect. And that's the man that all—that's on a
24 professional level. I might not get along with them personally but I'm saying that this is
25 the kind of guy that usually makes the best leader. You've got to lead by example and
26 you go out there and you go out there. Even if you go out once a month you get out there
27 and you get out there and get a few patrols in. The patrol leaders, the Platoon Sergeant
28 and everybody, the men, and you don't run it. They run it. The men have a lot more
29 respect for you, especially when you turn around that, you integrate that in to your job
30 and you fight to get everything right for your team. That's a true officer

31 RV: Someone who walks the walk.

1 JW: Yeah. The talking the talk is when you sit back there and what did you do?
2 We've got them right now. They even write books. They make me sick. He talks the
3 talk but he can't walk the walk. Now this guy, the officer that comes in, he goes out
4 there, when he gets to know his troops he goes out there, he gets in patrols, he might get
5 his ass shot at a few times, he'll definitely be a better Platoon Leader because he's going
6 to know what's going on the ground. He actually knows what it feels like and he'll do
7 everything in his power to produce everything he needs to help his men. End of
8 conversation, that's it. You can't walk the walk. You can talk the talk but until you walk
9 the walk you ain't shit.

10 RV: Why don't end on that note.

11 JW: I will. (Laughs)

Interview with Joseph J. Welsh
Session 10 of 10
March 14, 2006

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history
2 interview with Joey Welsh. Today is March 14th, 2006. It's a little before two o'clock
3 pm, Central Standard Time and we are doing this for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History
4 Project. We were talking just a little bit off the tape here about how you guys were
5 classified and that your records didn't exist.

6 Joseph Welsh: Well, the history of it, basically. LRRPs, I won't go into the
7 whole thing about LRRPs but LRRPs were really started in Germany in the late fifties
8 and then once we hit Vietnam the 173rd was the first land force from the Army. But we
9 saw a need that we needed a small team that was highly trained to go into the enemy's
10 backyard and snoop around because they were guerillas. They had been there for thirty
11 years. They had compounds in the side of mountains that you could drive deuce and a
12 halves through. They had enclosed concrete in placements and that's why you'd say,
13 "Well, Jesus Christ, we hit this hill for four days." Yeah, well, they weren't there. So
14 anyway, the LRRP concept started there, the Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol,
15 because that's what they had used in Europe and then Europe came to the States and it
16 became A and B Companies at Hood and Benning. And A Company, well actually, let's
17 put it this way. The 173rd, no, the 101st was the 101st Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol
18 and they got there in December of '65, the 173rd getting there around June of '65 so they
19 were the first troops. I should say the first big unit in the Army. And the Special Forces
20 guys who were running these things for quite a while on these six-month tours back and
21 forth from Oki and Thailand and Vietnam, the whole triangle, at that time they formed
22 this school in '66. Westmoreland said, "Hey, we all need to get these guys up to snuff
23 because every brigade or higher needs LRRPs." So that's when they changed it from like
24 the Headquarters 1st Brigade 101st LRRP Platoon because F Company Long Range Patrol
25 58th Infantry. They drew these lineages and stuff from somewhere and they became
26 LRRPs and in September of '67 everybody went from LRRP, or if they weren't then they
27 were designated LRP. There was really around thirteen what they called companies but
28 the companies were not company-sized. Depending on who you was with, like the 173rd,

1 they only had a detachment and that could run between twenty-five and forty men
2 because they're doing it for their unit. So if they've got Intel that their unit is going in
3 someplace and they can go out there first for a few days and snoop around. In the
4 meantime your big, strategic reconnaissance within the Corps, the I Corps initially being
5 controlled by the Marines and then your II Corps or your Central Highlands all the way
6 across and your III Corps in the Central Region or the Capitol Region—that's where
7 Saigon fell—and then the IV Corps being controlled mostly by the Army of the Republic
8 of Vietnam. So the Army basically was responsible for the whole. Cut off the tips and
9 the top and bottom and of course it was from the coastline all the way across to
10 Cambodia and Laos. There was a need for more SOG units and Special Forces would
11 take up the—we called it field force because the Vietnamese Army broke their fighting
12 sections down to corps so we didn't want to—even though it was a tactical corps
13 headquarters, we didn't call it a corps because we were controlling a corps area. So that's
14 where 1st Field Force Vietnam and 2nd Field Force Vietnam evolved from. It's another
15 name and the name means the same. However, it's got more flexibility. It can do more
16 things in other areas. Besides tactical operations it can evolve into psychological
17 operations. You can basically even develop another corps, an Army corps in order not to
18 confuse everybody. Like the 18th Airborne Corps, we couldn't say the word corps
19 because that was our area of operation. So what they did was, Westmoreland said,
20 "Okay, I want a corps-level LRRPs ready to be here because they're going to be
21 saturated." All the Special Forces, which was B-50 and B-52, Project Sigma and Omega,
22 which people heard about but like Project Delta they didn't understand what it was. It
23 was just a cover for what their operation was. And basically it was strategic recon and
24 they used the Rads and Jens and they had Chinese sent to release them and they were
25 actually absorbed in November of '67 into SOG. That left us and what they did is they
26 took the 101st LRRPs and they basically raped them to get a starting cadre and then took
27 other volunteers that had at least six months of combat so that almost half the company—
28 now the company was two hundred and forty-two authorized men. This is a huge
29 company when you're talking LRP and it was LRP. It was four working platoons and
30 then each one had six or seven men. I mean seven six-man teams. You add that up and
31 that's only—then we still had the headquarters. We had a communications platoon that

1 had to go out with us everywhere because we could never reach. So they would go out
2 halfway or something like that and then the teams could extend their distance twice as
3 much. You see what I'm getting at?

4 RV: Yeah.

5 JW: And so they would set up what they called a commo x-ray and there'd be like
6 maybe ten or twelve of them and they would relay all of our—which could be a very
7 dangerous thing. But we tried to get them on the highest point and the hardest point to
8 get at. Anyway, so a lot of people don't understand how the Rangers worked. What they
9 did is in September of '67 they moved them from the 101st. Now, at the same time they
10 formed the III Corps area, which is the—we were 1st Field Force Vietnam, II Corps.
11 They were 2nd Field Force Vietnam, III Corps, so they were below us in the South. They
12 called it the Central or the Capitol Region. So in other words, their corridor ran from
13 Laos straight across to Saigon. Ours was vast. If you look at II Corps it was Central
14 Highlands, the whole western border and that Central Highlands and then around all the
15 way across the coast. We worked for all American, South Vietnamese and Korean
16 commands within that corps area. We saturated more provinces and pulled more
17 missions than any other unit there and some of them had been there six years. At first
18 they started misusing us. They didn't know how to use us and that caused some
19 problems but it was really the old-timers and them young E4s and E5s that had the
20 combat experience because we didn't have officers to go out with. They would go out
21 maybe a couple of times to get the feel of it if they were good. They went up in the bird
22 dog and provided you your support. A good Lieutenant would get down in that bush a
23 couple times, as scared as he might be, but that's even better for him. He realizes how
24 important and he understands why and what. Then when you get him up in the bird he's
25 like a damn jet fighter. Seriously, that's how much his attitude is different than a person
26 that has never been on the ground. Because he knows what it's like. It should be
27 mandatory but it isn't. If I was a Commander I would say, "Well, before we really get
28 you settled in, sir, I'm going to get you out on a couple trips with the teams. If things
29 work out well and you do well and you live then I'll put you in the damn plane."
30 (Laughs) Seriously.

31 RV: (Laughs) Yeah.

1 JW: It should have been done because—and respect, they just earned the respect
2 of the man. Very few of them are assholes. They still play officer and in them days
3 officers really did have to play it up but it wasn't beyond several of them to come down
4 and have a few beers but not make a pest of themselves. They know you're not relaxed.
5 Like my Platoon Leader, he was there—well, in the six months he was there he went out
6 for one night and we said, "No, sir, this is not a good time to go out. We've got them on
7 the hilltop. They're waiting to get it back. They were disoriented. It's been dry. Let's
8 not stir up the bees. Give me the helicopter." So fortunately we put them in but
9 fortunately nothing happened and he came out the next morning. And then just stand in
10 formation and he gets his Bronze Star and his CIB and this and that and off he goes to a
11 staff job for six months or he goes home. And that's basically—that was mine.

12 RV: Hey Joey, looking back, what was the most effective thing you guys did?
13 How do you think you worked the best?

14 JW: Well the reason was maybe because we didn't have no officers. E4s ran the
15 teams. It was the guy who you trusted. It was different in my case because I had already
16 been over there a year so when I came into the company and they took me on a mission I
17 was trainable. I had already been on missions. I was a scout and it's all voluntary
18 anyway. But that's what they want. They want experienced guys. I listened to
19 everything they said and they watched and they know whether you know what you're
20 doing. And I only went on like two missions and they said, "Okay, send his ass to
21 Recondo School." Once you go to Recondo School you're Team Leader certified and
22 when you do make E5, if you're not already in E5, your whole entire MOS changes. It
23 was then 11F4P. That's Infantry Operations and Intelligence E7 Parachuters. But
24 because it came from Special Forces it would have an S on the end for them but it's really
25 an E7 rank but as an E5 it would really be 11B2. But there wasn't really no such monster
26 at the time so they gave us 11B4 and a Recondo number. So all they had to do was if
27 they needed LRP's or someone trained in this—because the SOG guys had to go through
28 the school and then eventually after they had spent so much time LRRPing or SOGing
29 they were brought back to being instructors. That's why it was such a very—the hardest
30 school I've ever attended, but the most realistic. Of course you know the first five days
31 was just hellacious PT in the morning and constant classroom all day and most of the

1 night. And then that led into everything from intelligence, medicine, demolitions,
2 operations, infiltration, exfiltration. You had to do IBs and you had everything. It was
3 just five days and they started you off with one or two and you had to—I don't know
4 what it would be equal to we had these little Montagnard rucks that were probably about
5 forty pounds. No, we had to wear cutoff scuba shorts and boots and a loony hat and full
6 web gear with all the ammo and the weapon was loaded and I'd say it was a sandbag plus
7 so it was about thirty-five or forty pounds, which isn't much, but what they did is they'd
8 warm you up and they'd say, "Go," and they open the gate. Now, when the time is done
9 they shut the gate and that's it. If you're on the other side of the gate, you're gone.
10 That's it. Then they weight your ruck again to make sure you've got the same weight or
11 over, because you could have canteens hooked in there and stuff like that. Then you did
12 your PT and I always liked it that way. Special Ops always does that. They do a nice
13 warm-up and then they go run or they go ruck and then they come back and their body's
14 very hot so they can just rip into calisthenics until they have muscle failure and then do a
15 really good cool down and stretch. And so that happened real fast. It was two, three,
16 four, five, seven. Seven miles. On the Friday or Saturday you did seven miles and if you
17 made it and you made it academically then you moved on to the second week. And in the
18 second week they took everything that you had learned and took you out into this island
19 and you spent several days out there applying it. Forty-three different foreign weapons
20 and that's just tear-down, immediate action, tear-down, put it back together quick and
21 then all your infiltration and all your patrolling, they would put you in on a chopper and
22 you'd move in, you'd stop, you'd make your commo check. You could make one move.
23 In other words you could lay back and unhook your snap. If you moved again you failed.

24 RV: Jeez.

25 JW: You could not move. You could be there five minutes, you could be there
26 fifteen. You could be there an hour and a half. You didn't know. You could not move.

27 RV: So this is mental discipline as well as physical discipline?

28 JW: Yeah, but see, Americans are not into that. Like snipers and all, it takes a lot
29 because everything was done with hand-arm signals and all. Now, when I say you can't
30 move, I mean, you could move your head. You're looking around but you didn't stir up
31 anything. And then the guy might just say, "Okay, you," and hopefully they would write

1 it down on a piece of paper. "Okay, you're the Team Leader. Now I want you to take
2 this back and call us in and get us extracted." It was just unbelievable training and the
3 same five guys worked together with one instructor and he was going to be your
4 observer. When you went in on your third week you actually went on a combat mission.
5 It's the only school in the world, or our nation that could participate, or anybody else that
6 I know of, that you went out on a four to five day mission and if you survived then you
7 graduated. It wasn't a hot area but teams had made contact. But they put you in and like
8 I went in by water which was freaky at three o'clock in the morning. And then I came
9 out by air. Another one would be in by air and all different types of infiltrations and
10 techniques and all. Definitely after being on a couple missions and then coming back
11 from there, everybody's like, "Oh, man." And they've been through it. They said, "Oh
12 man, you made it. That's great. Man, it must feel good to be in great shape." (Laughs)
13 Because they feed you and you eat three meals and all that kind of stuff but boy, I'll tell
14 you, the first week—the second day—the Vietnamese would not attend. They could not
15 make it through it. Thailand, Korea, Australia, and Americans. That was it. And the
16 Koreans that went through it with us, the second day, since I had been in Judo and
17 Taekwondo, I started—what happened is we would sit down on break and smoke a
18 cigarette. They would stretch. They would stretch and stretch and stretch. So they never
19 became sore from all the PT. The second day I just started doing it with them and by the
20 end of the week I did it constantly with them. I got to know them. My soreness went
21 away and I even felt better and I felt better as I was doing it and after I was doing it. And
22 that led to when we got out in the field and they take you out to where you have to take
23 these big fifteen-man rubber rafts, just about six or eight of these and you run out and
24 race. You would go through the breakers, you flip it over and capsize it and it only takes
25 one man if he does it properly to lay on there and pop it and flips it back over and then
26 you get back in and then you paddle back and you keep doing that until you're the
27 winner. Well, on one of these breaks we're stretching it out and so this black guy who
28 spoke a little bit of Korean and had been in Korea and got this all hooked up because
29 these guys didn't speak no English, started teasing us and he was teasing about, "Hey,
30 when are you guys going to fight? Come on, you're always talking shit." And these
31 guys that I'm working out with, he's a short guy but I don't know what the degree he was

1 he was black belt and he was the one that sort of got the hang out. I hung out with him
2 more than anything. So we tried to get some kind of translation going. I mentioned
3 black belt and he said, "No problem. Everything will be fair." (Laughs) Yeah, it went
4 good. I had a good time. I said, "What the hell is going to do? He's going to what, kick
5 me, knock me down? The hell with it." So we started lighting and pretty soon we got
6 some whacks in and it was the thing that they were inspired by, was that I had
7 participated from the beginning. Because they trained Americans. So then these LRP
8 guys—now, remember these other guys were already together. They just changed names.
9 When they formed ours we came from all over and so they really put together in the first
10 year—they paid for it but they put together—and management wasn't on its toes that
11 much. You've got to realize, "Okay, I've got half my company here that's been in
12 country six months or less. Around six months, let's say. So that means if it's September
13 it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that in February or March, whatever it might be,
14 they're going to go or they might be dead so ninety days out I've got to have people
15 starting to flow through here." So that's when I came in because I was with the 101st and
16 stayed a year and went home on leave and then went to the company in March of '68.
17 They formed in September of '67 and became operational and lost their first two people
18 in December of '67. The SF, unbeknownst to anyone, was saturated in SOG in
19 November of '67; except for one team which was a special LRPing team that LRPed
20 around for their guys when they needed it in our corps area. Being the historian was one
21 of the reasons but going back then and being in SF I learned a lot, too. When I got on
22 that PTSD thing, I said, "Does any of you ever stop to wonder why did they form us
23 when everyone else already had LRP's and why were we the biggest company? Why?"
24 And they never gave it a second thought. They just figured they needed LRP's up there
25 but that's how we evolved. Now, the other one that they formed, the 2nd Field Force, is
26 the latest book out by Hall, *I Served*. I'm sure you've heard about that, the documentary
27 and the whole bit. Real smart man. He waited until everybody wrote their books. He
28 got declassified stuff and they were formed in September of '67 from remnants of the
29 173rd and other units in the 173rd and they were formed below us in III Corps. Now, their
30 claim to fame was November and December of '67, catching these big, large movements
31 of troops coming across for Tet. And that's what he banked it on because that was it.

1 After that they actually changed names and everything. Another unit came in, a National
2 Guard unit came in, the only National Guard unit that served over there and so they
3 became in disarray but they became—on February—what I'm saying is after Tet, that
4 was it. You didn't hear much of anything. We were LRPing and we were LRPing and
5 learning so when they changed the name, one day they got up and they said—my buddy
6 was in formation and they said, "Okay, when I call your position and temperature and
7 everybody will say, "Ranger Hooah!"" Or something like that. He said nobody said a
8 fucking word. "I said, 'Say Ranger Hooah.'" They go, "Ranger blah." What did it
9 mean? And it was a paper drill and of course they didn't know that. Pretty soon they
10 were getting scrolls and Black Berets and they thought they were 75th Rangers and ours
11 being the biggest and the largest and A and B already being in the States they started off
12 with us and we became Charlie Company. There was thirteen lettered Ranger companies
13 from C to P without the J. But some of them had twenty-five men, some had a hundred,
14 some had seventy but they were really under their parent unit. If they were 101st
15 Airborne LRRPs and then they became F Company LRP 58th Infantry then they were
16 called L Company Ranger 75th Infantry Airborne. That's all they were, changed. Now
17 our unit, being unique—now see, them scrolls were never authorized. They never got to
18 wear them. They made them take them off. We had no regimental unit to return to. See,
19 SF, when they returned, some of these guys, when they first started coming back they
20 said, "Well, we're going to send you through this Q course." They said, "What?"
21 "We're going to send you through the qualification course and get your MOS." "Hey,
22 buddy, I just spent three years on the A team in Vietnam. I got my MOS. I quit." And
23 they would quit and they would say, "Well, you're going to the 82nd." They'd go to the
24 82nd and they'd say, "I terminate. I don't want to jump." Then somebody picked up on it
25 and said, "Whoa, we're losing all the people who should be teaching," and so they made
26 a special provision for them, that if they spent one hundred and twenty consecutive days
27 on an A team or a LRP team or a CIB team, it went the same as the old-timers, that they
28 would receive an S on their MOS, giving them the skill identifier of Special Forces and
29 they wouldn't have to go through the course. One hundred and twenty days. So when
30 we applied for trying to change it we asked for thirty days. Why? SF was about a year
31 long. They asked for four months of it. Ranger School was eight weeks, we asked for

1 thirty days because that usually got you a couple missions in. And then basically they did
2 the same thing. They started doing more double-teamers and hunter/killer teams and then
3 when they winded down by October—well, we were disbanded in October of '71, they
4 went back to the States and if they took the 82nd the scroll was off. So if they were with
5 the 173rd in Vietnam they were wearing N Airborne Rangers 75. November Rangers 75th
6 Infantry Airborne, the red, white, and black one. When they came back they would just
7 put on the 173rd combat patch and no one would know they were LRP or Rangers. But
8 in our case, since we had the field force patch there was no Airborne in that field force,
9 therefore if you wore a blue and white Airborne tab, which is what they made us wear
10 when we take off our scroll, everybody knew that you was Charlie Ranger. And I'd say
11 "No, I was Echo LRP." "What?" That's one of the reasons I think that helped them gain
12 so much notoriety was that they were identifiable because as the guys went through
13 Ranger school, they knew all the other units but they couldn't tell because the guy who is
14 Lima Company, 101st, he'd just wear 101st. If he's November 173rd he'd just wear 173rd.
15 There was nothing to identify him as being a Ranger or a LRP and our patch, the 1st Field
16 Force, which, like I said, the 2nd Field Force really just dissolved—because when I went
17 back in there was a lot of people, especially the guys in Ranger units or had been in
18 Ranger units. Here was Charlie Rangers and then I guess in '89 when they wrote the
19 book there was only maybe two books out. I think Lee Lanning's *Professional LRP* and
20 a couple fictional things, and so when they got back to SF they had to do something for it
21 because they returned SF and we had nowhere to return to because we had no real
22 regiment. Our regiment was A Company. (Laughs) That was just on paper. So when
23 we disbanded in '71 we were dispersed throughout the Army system and Airborne units.
24 And then in '72 they reactivated our company in Fort Benning, which we found out later
25 and it was running for two years until October of '74 when they initiated activating the
26 first 75th Ranger Battalion Airborne that is now the present-day Rangers. In October of
27 '74 they took A Company Rangers and excess from our company and formed the 1st
28 Battalion. However, the heritage lineage came from our company in Vietnam. So to us,
29 if you're starting a new generation of Rangers and you have thirteen companies to pick
30 from, I'd pick the biggest, but not necessarily. I'd pick the best, as far as I'm concerned.
31 We were the best, we were the biggest, and God bless all the other guys. They were

1 great, too, but we had more area of responsibility and a bigger—we did the SF recon,
2 strategic level recon, cross-border, and we were in Cambodia in '68 and people will say,
3 “Oh no you wasn’t, no you wasn’t.” (Laughs) Yes I was. What’s the big deal? Some of
4 the SOG people don’t even know about us, especially those that got there in '68 or '69.
5 They didn’t know about us. It was the guys who were in country when we sort of—they
6 knew why they were getting released, which was great for them. That’s what they
7 wanted and that’s what we needed. But that’s where we really evolved from.

8 RV: Hey, Joey, let me ask you this. Looking back at all that, how do you think
9 the Vietnam War affected the way the Rangers operate today and the way that SF
10 operates today and all of the Special Force units? Were there really good lessons learned
11 or not?

12 JW: Well, yeah, there was good lessons learned. However, we had one, a drafted
13 Army, so there wasn’t a lot of career soldiers. A lot of it wasn’t passed on. Myself, I ran
14 the hell of here, only to realize that I belong back in here. But even when I came back in,
15 I was teaching guys things that were just common to me but to them it was like, “Wow,
16 dude.” It does have a lot to do with terrain. Well, see, I spent seven months in Europe,
17 too, so that was urban or mount warfare, which is fighting in villages and towns. It’s
18 different than fighting in the jungle, especially when the guy’s jungle is his backyard.
19 And that’s what we were all about. Our mission primarily was reconnaissance, and then
20 we started putting in detectors, personality detectors and things like that. Then every
21 once in a while they’d want to try to snatch somebody. So had all different types of
22 training that we were trained in and training we were training other soldiers in. That’s
23 one of the things that very few of them got to do is we went out and trained the
24 Vietnamese and it didn’t last long because the Commanders all came down and said, “We
25 sent a hundred to you and only twenty-six graduated. Now we’re sending another
26 hundred. Everyone graduate.” The Captain was up there. He called up the unit and said,
27 “I’ll get back with you,” and he went and told the man. See, we had a Major also. We
28 were like the Special Forces Company that has a Major for a Company Commander and
29 he was from Special Forces so he just said, “Okay.” I guess he checked with his boss in
30 Field Force and they were on the same wavelength and said, “Hey, screw them. We ain’t
31 giving away shit. Pack it up and come home.” That’s what they did. We weren’t going

1 to lower the standards and if they couldn't make it, they couldn't make it. That's just—
2 they weren't very good. Now, the ones that were the native or the indigenous personnel
3 were the best. They were already thoroughly indoctrinated into the terrain and could live
4 off the land. That's where they were from. That's what they were. They were farmers.
5 They were hard as nails, they could hump forever. Why? Because that's what they did.
6 They lived in the mountains. And they were treated like lower-class citizen anyway by
7 the Vietnamese and the enemy that was infiltrating was coming after their villages and
8 all.

9 RV: Yeah, so they were highly motivated.

10 JW: Yeah. Oh yeah, they were the best you could ask for of course. We've tried
11 to save as many as we could but that's a story you've got to get. I don't know if you have
12 their website but you need to understand about it. The SF, they've spent so many years
13 with them that they wanted to bring them back with them because they knew that if they
14 didn't there'd be genocide. And basically that's what started right away.

15 RV: Do you feel today like, or did you feel, I guess, in the last ten years or so that
16 you all needed to go back and assist?

17 JW: No, no, I didn't need to go back. No. The assisting would not be done by—
18 it's not us. I'll give you the website and it should let you know. The SF did it. The SF's
19 association and stuff like that and they started with one, two, three, and they just got ways
20 for them to get out and avenues to get out and they've got a couple communities of them.
21 Let's face it. When them NVA got ahold of them because they knew they had worked—
22 they knew whose side they were on and they were savages anyway so they just would kill
23 them. I don't know, millions, I guess. Thousands, hundreds of thousands, whatever. Of
24 course the more we've gotten involved over the years and the more attention that was put
25 on to Vietnam is really what stopped it. Let's say it really had a downfall and as that was
26 happening was when everybody was trying to grab everybody and throw them over. The
27 Vietnamese were not good soldiers. They would take care of the towns and stuff like
28 that. We called them cowboys. The Vietnamese Rangers were good most of the time but
29 that was about it.

30 RV: So ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), in your opinion, was not that
31 good?

1 JW: No, they were not. There were some that I've heard of but I've never dealt
2 with them. We had Kit Carson scouts who were Chieu Hoi who were actually deserters
3 that were on our team. We trusted them. We had to. We put them up and we put them
4 up walking point so the other guy is going to hesitate but our guy won't.

5 RV: What do you say to people who say, "ARVN was good. There was never a
6 single unit who ever surrendered or whichever surrendered in the war." There are
7 arguments out there now.

8 JW: "Wait a minute. They didn't surrender. Were they overrun?"

9 RV: Well, that's the question.

10 JW: Why were all the helicopters being pushed in the water? Why weren't they
11 out there flying troops in to fight them? They were overrun. That's it. If they were
12 smart, they got out of country or they got out of their uniform and played like Joe Blow
13 from Kokomo. I mean they were just not physically, mentally, or emotionally or
14 equipment-wise, they were incapable. They did put up some fights. They did. You're
15 the historian and you know that they did fight in several locations. But then word gets
16 out like, "Hey, if them guys are losing," and then once they got so far it was senseless.
17 You found me and try to see if you can fit in what's going to happen now.

18 RV: What did you think of that in April of '75? Do you remember where you
19 were and how you felt?

20 JW: I just remember seeing all the embassy and that and the pushing off of all
21 that. I could see them destroying it. I was just hoping that they had destroyed all their
22 gun emplacements when they ran and whatever, which is what happened in Kuwait.
23 When they left Kuwait, shit, they left everything there and they took school busses and
24 loaded them up with refrigerators and computers and headed north. It was bound to
25 happen. It was just bound to happen.

26 RV: Why do you say that? Why was it bound to happen?

27 JW: Well, we've just been going through a big thing on the board about Hill 875
28 because we have two guys that survived it. One of them in the VFW magazine last
29 month, the most recent one, they had an article and he's sitting right in the center of the
30 picture. So I got that picture and he said that he had already been through two machine
31 guns and he was looking for another one when that picture was taken and then it showed

1 him at the end, this fantastic picture. He was just leaned against the tree with his head
2 down and the .60 there and so we all got into the whole rap about that and what we felt. I
3 had studied the book and did a report on it when I was in 1st Sergeant School and the
4 Sergeant Major's Academy and so I knew quite a bit about it. But to hear from the guys
5 who actually were there that day and made it to the top, like it was only to be pulled off
6 to another location and it was because Westy [Westmoreland] was into his attrition rate.
7 It was basically search and destroy missions. It didn't matter about the damn terrain.
8 "Kill the son of a bitches. If we kill enough of them we'll stop them." That was they
9 operated. That's what we were in. They were into search and destroy.

10 RV: What was a better strategy, in your opinion?

11 JW: A better strategy? It wouldn't have taken anybody more than fifteen minutes.
12 I would have pulled back fifteen hundred meters behind the hill and I would have called
13 on B-52s for about three days and then I'd go back up and there wouldn't be a hill.
14 Because to take that—first of all, you're fighting uphill. That don't work. Second of all,
15 you have just laid on everything you own. You wasted the bank on them and you didn't
16 moved twenty meters and your guys are falling. It doesn't take a rocket scientist for me
17 to realize these guys are totally entrenched. And I would have pulled back and nuked
18 them suckers with napalm and B-52 strikes for about two or three days. I'd do it for a
19 day and I'd probe, do it for a day and probe and then I bet you by the second day they
20 would be probing barren ground with a lot of bodies. Because, see, they got away and
21 that's what really hurt the 173rd. They couldn't chase them. They wouldn't let them go
22 after them because they had their routes right back. There just wasn't enough dead for
23 them. They wanted to see more dead. Now, they killed a lot, thousands, but Hamburger
24 Hill was the same way. There was no taking and maintaining. If I was in charge that
25 would have became a Special Forces A camp. I would have made use of that hill because
26 it already had so much structure to it that could be salvaged, or use it as a SOG hill. I
27 would have kept that damn hill and we didn't. Okay, you got the hill and you don't even
28 know how many you really killed. Is it worth them hundreds of men? I would have used
29 every plane in Vietnam first for a couple days and that's the way I would have done it
30 then. I don't have to even think about it. I would pull back and say no. If we just laid on
31 two hours of air strikes and artillery and I ain't made it fifty meters and I'm getting

1 slammed, we are not getting to them so they want you to be a thousand meters or one
2 terrain feature in between you and your target when you do a B-52. So I had to pull back
3 and they were dropping five hundred pound bombs. I would have done the napalm, five
4 hundred pound bombs, and B-52 strikes.

5 RV: So massive firepower and then—

6 JW: Just totally that one avenue, I would have just totally saturated it. Like I said,
7 they had already done a hundred pound bombs and they weren't working, plus we
8 sustained the largest casualty by friendly fire, taking Hill 875. People don't realize it. I
9 don't know what was in their heads. I know that's why I always say, "SALSA. Stay
10 alert, stay alive. The hell with them people." I mean because you can't infiltrate.
11 You've got a hundred and fifty men, you've got them flying in twenty choppers and
12 another fifteen choppers are flying around. Charlie's sitting there shooting up opium
13 about three hilltops away watching where you are. He calls his buddy, he tells everybody
14 else where you are and then they just watch you. They can hear you. And if you get too
15 close to them or they think it's a good time then they strike at you. Otherwise you just
16 walk right over them and you just hump and hump and hump and hump. So when you do
17 find them, Westmoreland's plan at that time was, "Seek, find, destroy." Well, I searched
18 and I found. As far as I'm concerned we've got some bigger things you can be dropping
19 on there. I just don't know why they didn't do a couple days of B-52 strikes. If you've
20 ever read the book, I just sent it to the guy. He never had a copy so I sent him my copy
21 because I got it and I've got it for a long time. He's the Chief of Staff now, Shumaker.
22 Isn't it?

23 RV: I don't know.

24 JW: Okay. Shumaker was an old SF guy. Actually, Shumaker was instrumental
25 in getting Special Forces their own branch so that when they finished the course they
26 would be awarded a new MOS and a Special Forces Tab, which in turn meant that no
27 one, unless they had graduated and had that MOS for that tab could ever wear a green
28 beret again. So the uniformity went out the window. In other words they had fat,
29 pregnant girls that were admin clerks for Special Forces wearing green berets. And that's
30 his claim to fame because he wasn't well liked in the 173rd. Boy, I couldn't believe the
31 write-up on him but they were telling it like it was. By buddy that made it, he was one of

1 the six left out of his platoon when they got to the hill. Now, the other ones were either
2 killed or wounded bad enough to where they had to be evacuated. But the tenacity and
3 the selfless service, the dedication of the drafted soldier but he was voluntarily Airborne.
4 He could have quit any time. That's what people don't understand. We didn't look at
5 nobody as draftees. In the Airborne, when you volunteered for Airborne that was it. You
6 was Airborne. We didn't give a shit if you was RA, US or what. And then it went a step
7 further. If you was a LRRP you was an Airborne LRRP because not all the units were
8 airborne. Even though they said Airborne Ranger on it they weren't airborne. There was
9 only a few airborne-qualified Ranger companies.

10 RV: Hey Joey, let me ask you about your personal experience and then how the
11 war as affected you since 1996 and getting out of the Army and what you've done with it,
12 I guess in the last ten years. Do you look back and have any regrets about what you've
13 done and if so, what are they? And if not, how have you kind of processed the whole war
14 since then?

15 JW: That's a big question, Doc. (Laughs)

16 RV: Yeah, I know it is a big question.

17 JW: Okay. Here's the way I look at it. Given any other time in history, my
18 father's time, my grandfather's time, or my great-grandfathers time or my son's time, I
19 wouldn't have wanted to have lived in any other time. I wouldn't have wanted to change
20 anything that I have been through. We seen the Beatles, we seen the Bush, we seen
21 Berkley, we seen the assassinations of three prominent—I mean, we've seen everything.
22 What else could you ask for, to experience the development, actually, a developing nation
23 caught in what they had never been caught in before? And only through the people that
24 were being paid by the colleges, only through them, their intelligence and their actions
25 did they help sway a lot of young people who knew nothing. And then you add in the
26 drugs. You know what I mean? You see demonstrations now but I mean, nothing like
27 that. Now you've got the funeral thing going around. They ain't coming Texas they ain't
28 know better and them guys are doing a good job. We've had to do our thing in Arkansas
29 when they said they were coming to a memorial. But what I'm saying is I regret that I
30 left. I didn't want to leave. I had to leave. I don't know why I'm here and they're not
31 here but if I had it to do over again, hell yeah, I'd do it again and again and again. I

1 would probably still be there. I just felt that that was where I was supposed to be. If I
2 was going to be in the military, that is where you were supposed to be. Once you have
3 been in the unit like that and you've formed these bonds where four or five guys,
4 especially when you keep them four or five guys together and they become a team and
5 they go out and do this over and over and over, it becomes nerve-wracking but that's why
6 when you have thirty days left you can't go out no more. That's it. You're a hazard to
7 the team, where, in a lion company they'll take you up there, shit, ten days out or
8 whatever. And you could quit anytime. You could say, "I quit," and they'd say, "Okay,
9 You're going to some infantry unit." But I didn't quit. I wanted to go on. I wanted to go
10 out there further and further and that's the way—we didn't have any bad soldiers. We
11 had a few crazy ones that we had to get rid of. I think we were all in that state of mind
12 for a long while. Are we crazy now? I don't know what's crazy.

13 RV: Yeah, how do you define that?

14 JW: Yeah, how do you define crazy? We just mind our own business. We'd
15 rather be left alone and sometimes we really have to hold back on our actions. However,
16 if it comes two one of them funerals of the KIAs or any returning veteran, every returning
17 veteran, he is a hero and he will be treated as a hero from now on. No one will disrespect
18 a KIA or a veteran. We will not allow it. They will not desecrate anything to do with
19 any of our memorials or anything. We don't have that problem in Texas. You just don't
20 mess with Texas. They won't do it. They have their candlelight vigils up at the chamber
21 of commerce and the capitol but you just leave the memorials alone. Somebody said,
22 "What would happen if somebody desecrated the Wall?" I said, "Well, I can tell you that
23 when somebody finds out, within thirty minutes there will be over four hundred
24 motorcyclists pulling up. I'm talking within five or ten minutes. There's that many up in
25 that area from just our club who would call." Think of it. That's a wide open—man,
26 they could throw rocks, they could do anything. As far as I know, there's never been any
27 acts of vandalism on it. I might be wrong but it just sits there. Down here in San
28 Antonio we kept an eye on it and kept an eye on it and then one guy noticed that a guy
29 had a Carbine or something, that the end of the muzzle was bent or knocked off or
30 something. Well, we couldn't tell one way or another. Anyway they chased him out,
31 replaced it, and make it look original. There wasn't a scar or scrape on any of the marble

1 or anything. That's the way I feel. I know what my father went through. I've watched
2 and I know what my son went through because I went through it with him. But I think
3 that we lived in the greatest time or greatest period of our history for the longest, from
4 say, '50 to 2000. God, we made it to the moon. We still can't forecast the goddamn
5 weather but we can walk on the moon. Now explain that to me. I agree with the guys. I
6 say it was done in Hollywood. We never went to the moon. It was a stage set. I mean
7 seriously, who knows? We're over here docking in these space stations with long-range
8 space patrols and they can't tell you if it's going to rain tomorrow. Think about it.

9 RV: Yeah.

10 JW: A matrix. I asked my buddy. We were talking and we get like this
11 sometimes, especially when we're bored and I said, "Remember them old big, big, big,
12 big train sets that the kids used to have in the fifties? I think I had one double-decker.
13 Maybe that's what we are. I definitely believe I'm not a fool. Why is there other beings
14 in this universe? What makes us think that we're the only little teeny speck in the
15 universe that has any—who knows? We might be in somebody's damn backyard pond."
16 I don't know. You know what I mean?

17 RV: Yeah.

18 JW: I just feel that I'm proud of what I done. I'm proud of what our guys are
19 doing now. I'm so proud, so proud, of all of them because it's a war where, god, that girl
20 just won a Silver Star, and hell, she deserved it. People who are covering it—I mean,
21 there's more murders in one month in Chicago than there is in Iraq every month. I mean,
22 that's only one city. There's more murders in Chicago in a month than there is KIAs in
23 Iraq. You know, that's the analogy I can use. I'm not saying every month, I'm just
24 saying, that's the way they had based it at a certain period of time. One's more than
25 enough but the only way we'll win is—did you get that thing? I've got it about the guy
26 that was going to kill an American.

27 RV: No.

28 JW: I just sent it in your email purposefully. You have to read that.

29 RV: Okay. Oh, yes, yes, you did. I did see that.

30 JW: Okay. This Australian doctor or dentist or somebody wrote—there was this
31 thing about an Afghani and a guy from Afghanistan was going to kill an American

1 and then he went, "Well, what is an American?" And then he just went on and on and on
2 and it's just a big melting pot. And that's what we are. We're a melting pot and we are
3 getting—there are some places that are getting overpopulated with these Muslims and
4 things like that. Now here, let me get my bitches in. I disagree in supporting any country
5 that does not support us. In other words, if Germany said, "No, I won't go" then I would
6 have had fifty percent of them troops out of there. And depending upon its strategic
7 location it would have happened to every other country that said no, they won't go. "You
8 won't support us. Guess what?" If you do that to South Korea I think they'll wake the
9 hell up real quick and get over there. Look what they did. What happened? They threw
10 Spain out. They took their hostages and said, "We're going to kill your hostages." Hey,
11 show them we'll just send more. That's all you can do. So Spain, they got Spain and
12 France. France, Jesus Christ, France—they haven't picked up a weapon since we
13 liberated them and they treat us like dirt. Screw them. Twenty-five percent of their
14 population is Muslim. Did you know that?

15 RV: Yeah.

16 JW: That's what I'm disagreeing with. I'm all for, "Give us your ragged and
17 torn," and all that but wait a minute. Let's get reasonable here. I totally believe in you
18 come to this country, you can worship and do whatever you want but you damn sure will
19 respect what we have and how can a judge who takes an oath and says, "So help me
20 God," decide whether the word God should be used in the Pledge of Allegiance? Now
21 how hypocritical is that? Think about that. These judges that are going to decide
22 whether, "One nation under God," you're damn right. We didn't say which god it was.
23 It's like the twenty-one gun salute. The people didn't just put this country together off
24 the top of their head. That twenty-one-gun salute came from 1776, adding it up, the year
25 of our independence. The flag that is meticulously folded thirteen times over the coffin
26 of a fallen warrior is not for the thirteen colonies. Each fold represents something
27 meaningful and I read that out to them one time when I was Master of Ceremony. I
28 caught them all. I said, "Now, we all know why they fold it." "Yeah, the original
29 colonies." Wrong, wrong answer. Wake up. They didn't do it that way. These people
30 put some thought into it. Could they think two hundred years ahead? No. So it's just—I
31 don't like the fact that they took saying the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence

1 out of the schools. I totally disagree with that. That flag better be honored because that
2 flag was fought for by too many men and women. I disagree with taking that out of the
3 schools. Your moment of silence is your moment of silence. That flag up there is the
4 United State's flag. If you want to be in the United States get with the program or get the
5 hell out. And if you want to be in the United States you've got to speak it. Is that so
6 hard? We'll help you. We'll send you to school. You've got to work. That and this
7 Patriot thing. This Patriot Act. First of all, patriot. You know the Army or the military,
8 when they say a word there's always a meaning behind that word. It's like an acronym, a
9 secret word. Patriot. The Patriot Act. Oh yeah, well what's that? We're going to all
10 join forces and we're going to come into your house, we're going to listen you do
11 whatever and we're going to do everything we want to. It's not really all that but that's
12 what they can do. I'm getting ready to read it to you here because we get involved in this
13 because we have a coalition of cyclists, and that is all the motorcycle clubs within the
14 surrounding area, meet to help each other to get along, to coordinate things for biker
15 rights because everybody hates the biker. The Patriot Act, I mean if they felt we were a
16 nuisance they could react to us like that but it really doesn't work that way. Let's see. I
17 just had it, too. It was protecting against terrorism by—I got it. Okay. Patriot Act.
18 They've even got a website. "Providing appropriate tools required to intercept and
19 obstruct terrorism." That's the Patriot Act, "Providing appropriate tools required to
20 intercept and obstruct terrorism." Now, what's a patriot? A countryman, a person who
21 loves and has loyalty or very zealously supports his country. Well, what will this Patriot
22 Act do? Well, it will result in changing of at least seventeen laws regarding the agencies
23 involved, that being everybody—the FBI, DEA, CIA, the state, the county, everybody—
24 to able to share information and their capabilities in order to, if they have to, to get
25 involved and stop terrorism. A little bleep is put in there, "Without infringing upon the
26 private sector or the public." That's homeland security. That sounds really good to me.
27 I was in the MS. I'm sure that they must be, I guess, somewhere training all these guys
28 on what to do if something happens. What are the citizens going to do? In Israel, they
29 know what to do. They grab their mask and they beat it. They know exactly where to go.
30 The masks do not help but they have a drill down that they know where to go. They have
31 specially built bunkers for them. We don't know nothing. They might be training the

1 hell out of these other people but until 911, our country had never ever been under attack
2 from a foreign element. Well, since we became free. You know what I mean? What did
3 we do? What could we do? There was nobody to shoot back at. These guys are sick.
4 Anybody that—what was it? Eighteen of them were Saudi Arabians and we trained
5 them. We trained them to be pilots. I'm telling you, it's gonna be a long hard road but
6 stopping is not the way. I can't second-guess what's going on over there. I would have
7 handled Afghanistan differently. I would have leaflets for seventy-two hours and tell
8 them if they cross this line and surrender their weapons then they will be taken care of
9 and then I would have leveled it. What good is it? It is the poorest country in the world
10 with the roughest terrain, which is perfect for their training. So level it. I mean, the first
11 round that went off could have killed Abdul but Abdul's on a hundred and forty yacht in
12 the Caribbean making these damn tapes when he feels like it, that can't be traced. I
13 mean, think about it. I think we moved into Iraq too fast. I would have leveled—you're
14 not losing nothing. There is nothing there but a sanctuary. It's like the hole in the wall
15 gang that the bandits swear they could always go and nobody could ever find them. You
16 know what I mean? Well, you found the bandits and you know where the bandits go to
17 so just flatten it. You're not hurting nothing. You're not taking away no vegetation or
18 industry or cities. Then I would have made my next move. I just think that you don't
19 leave something standing like that when it doesn't need to be there. We were just—I
20 don't know. Thank God we did it because I'll tell you what really put the morale up is
21 when we got Saddam. Getting him was the morale kicker, that "My god, we got him out
22 of some little squandering hole when we should have taken him in '91. But we got him."
23 So that was a very, very—and he's alive. That is, to me, a very big achievement because
24 we could have assassinated him but we're not allowed to. So finding him was, to me,
25 good, but I just think they moved too fast. I would have—I mean, do you agree or
26 disagree? And what good is a bunch of mountains used for primarily only to house and
27 train terrorists? It doesn't grow food, it's just terrain. I would eliminate that terrain or
28 make it so destroyed that it would not serve its purpose anymore and at the same time
29 give them the opportunity to cross the line. Why go up there and send guys up there?
30 Now, when you get into this city stuff in Iraq, then I would be more tough. When the 1st
31 Sergeant and my buddies were going over I said, "Look, you see these checkpoints?"

1 When you get over there, don't be heavy. Build. Build three thick eight high sandbags,
2 one little hole, a slanted roof, cage it and everything. Make one little hole," and I told
3 them, "Do this, do that, because then you say, 'Halt,' and you got that .60 on him and
4 there's a guy who comes out with an RPG and he's got to get a six by twelve hole before
5 you get him with the .60. Don't stand out there. Don't let your men stand out there at
6 these intersections." And using a vehicle which to me is like senseless. They have fuel
7 in them. They explode. If you use it properly, the sandbag and PCP and all that kind of
8 stuff, wires and stuff like that they throw camphor stuff in and you stop that care, you tell
9 them to stop and you've got a blocker down there and he gets out with an RPG, I'll bet
10 you a .60 gunner will have him down before he gets that round off. And you get them all
11 out and they lay on the ground and then you can go up and check. If you can you have
12 dogs that sniff for the demo or you have a demo man. That was the first thing so that all
13 entry would be—and I would seal the city to where there was only certain vehicle entry.

14 RV: Joey, well, looking at Vietnam then and kind of working in small units, do
15 you do think that's the best way for the U.S. military to deal with such threats or is it still
16 using massive firepower?

17 JW: It depends. You got what they call LIC (Low Intensity Conflict), MIC (Mid-
18 Intensity Conflict), and HIC (High Intensity Conflict), low-intensity conflicts like what's
19 been run down in the Philippines. They're all insurgents down there. Your mid-intensity
20 conflicts so you're running around and you're actually doing a little bit of tank stuff.
21 Fighting in the city is rough so you've got to have tanks. That's what happened in
22 Somalia, you can enter tanks. You need something to knock over buildings or blow up
23 buildings. And then if it's really bad, like probably the way it would have happened, let's
24 say them three or four hundred guys that we were chasing ran into this building, I'm sure
25 that our team would have knocked that building out and then said, "I didn't know it was a
26 damn temple. Sorry about that." What can I say to the Sarg? "I think I screwed up."
27 "What?" "They said it was a temple." "Well, shit, we didn't know." "That's what I told
28 them, Sarg." Not pull back and let the whole damn Iraqis try to do the deal. That's the
29 way I would operate. I don't know if there was any—maybe they couldn't do it because
30 of the situation but he's going to play that shit. You're going to run in there. It's like in
31 Somalia. They were pushing the kids. They had the kids and the women and it showed

1 them walking in front of them. Hey, bullshit. You want to stick them out there? Fine.
2 And then they would stand behind them and shoot and expect us not to shoot back. They
3 were surprised. We didn't give a shit who they had in front of them. I know I wouldn't
4 have cared. You're just going to have to do what you've got to do. You just have to
5 react to your training. You cannot be held back, you cannot be turned away, you cannot
6 be denied your completion of the mission. And that will destroy your morale more than
7 anything.

8 RV: Joey, would you ever want to go back to Vietnam?

9 JW: No, I really don't. I didn't leave anything there that I need to get. Thailand?
10 I've been there. I'll go there. I was going to live in Thailand but now—and this goes for
11 the South Vietnamese—they're not very nice people towards us. I don't think they
12 treated us very nice then. Right now they're sucking us in. No, their government is
13 letting them get sucked in because certain politicians are involved in big businesses and
14 they want big business over there and I totally disagree with that. When we get the report
15 that we were supposed to get, even if we didn't pay money, pay the money on the
16 POW/MIA. We all know that they held POW/MIA. They said they did. They're
17 making deals, no, no. No more Mr. Nice Guy. Are you kidding? There's fifty eight
18 thousand names on that Wall. Then you show people out in front of me like Clinton and
19 Curry and all that stuff and then you say Bush was AWOL? Hey, Bush took it by the
20 balls. He wasn't in there long, but goddamn it, I think he made the right move. I'm not
21 saying that everything he does was perfect but that's what his military—they're the ones
22 that are supposed to tell him the strategy but he had to strike. He had every right to—he
23 had every right to—oh my god, I can't even—to go to war. They struck a military target.
24 They struck the Pentagon. End of conversation. It's over. They struck a military target.
25 That is an act of aggression and he can declare war. Pearl Harbor. That's it. Same thing.
26 Forget New York. Nobody will forget New York but they forgot the Pentagon a long
27 time ago. You know, the Pentagon got twenty thousand dollars apiece, something else I
28 don't agree on. I'm sorry he got killed but six or eight million? Come on. Per person,
29 where the guy in the Pentagon gets two hundred thousand? No, disagree.

30 RV: Tell me about how this oral history experience has been for you and why you
31 chose to do it.

1 JW: Well, the reason I first denied was I felt that the answers that I would give
2 you now would not be the same as when I was there. But then again, how could I ever go
3 back and remember where I was? I was just a young, gung-ho soldier who just did was
4 he was supposed to do and sometimes was scared as hell, sometimes as happy as hell. I
5 had it worse than others and better than some. Did I say that right?

6 RV: Yeah, yeah, you sure did.

7 JW: I'm glad I got to express my opinion. Like I said, I supposed everybody's
8 got them but the fact is I'm very, very—I don't know how. I mean I was born on the
9 streets of Southwest and spent half my life on the streets of South Philly and South Jersey
10 and the other half in the military. Why I was a soldier and why, I feel, a damn good one
11 or I wouldn't have stayed there, I don't know why. Because I was not good in the street.
12 I think I had my CSB before my CIB. I have my Combat Street Badge before I ever got a
13 Combat Infantryman Badge. Just the neighborhood and stuff like that. But we were very
14 patriotic. I wasn't very religious. I got—I would say I found what suited me when I was
15 in the military in the way of God or whatever you want. I used the word God because
16 that's just discussion that I will not tolerate that. I can't even believe that a judge, like I
17 said, that takes the oath and says, "So help me God," has the power to change and take
18 God out of the Pledge of Allegiance. I'm strictly just a melting pot and part of the
19 melting pot of America. All my brothers that I know are the same way. Leave me alone.
20 I don't need to be thanked. I'll tell you what, though. You better thank these people that
21 are coming home now. We've already received our unwelcome home. I've already been
22 through that. That's over. It's not going to happen no more. They're putting on these
23 Welcome Home brands and things and all. Hey, I don't need that. What makes me
24 happy is supporting our troops and just remembering our veterans. I totally support the
25 troops. I'm not saying that they're doing everything—the politicians are doing
26 everything right or the military's doing everything right. I told you how I thought that
27 they rushed it. It's like we talked about the battle at Dak To. Okay, why spend all that
28 time fighting there when it's the same way with Afghanistan? Why waste all that time
29 running through these caves? Hey, you've got seventy-two hours. Come on over here.
30 And then annihilate it. Take away that haven that's been going on for centuries. Take it
31 away. Now we'll see what happens in Iraq and we know that Saudi Arabia is financially

1 behind most of this and they're supposed to be our buds. We're messing with a religion,
2 a very strong religion. Now, they're all one religion. The United States has hundreds of
3 religions so what I say is, "If you want to be an American, practice the religion but keep
4 it to yourself and don't push it on anybody and if you wind up on the wrong side of the
5 track, you're going to get run the hell over or run the hell out." What should I say? The
6 Indians are the true Americans. I'm Irish and German, English, and French somewhere
7 mixed up like that. Mostly Irish and that's just the way I felt about the blacks. I said,
8 "Hey, I wasn't there, man. I'm sorry it happened but hey, I wasn't there two or three
9 hundred years ago and put you guys as slaves. I don't want to hear about it. And you
10 know what? You ain't from Africa. You've never been from Africa. You've never even
11 been there. Don't lay that rap on me. I'm from South Philly in an Irish neighborhood."
12 You know what I'm saying? If we teach—and this is the way I taught my children—that
13 not all white men are good, not all black men are bad, there are good and bad Hispanic
14 men so it depends on the person and not the color of their skin or how they speak. That's
15 the way I taught my kids and what helped them was spending a couple years with the
16 military and I'd go out in the backyard and it would be the United Nations there getting
17 along fine—Koreans, Samoans, Spanish, black, white. They didn't have no problem.
18 But as the years go on their getting it from their families or their families are not giving
19 them the proper way to live and the proper attitude to possess. I don't want to hear
20 anything about what happened to you two hundred years ago because it happened to
21 white men, too. It happened to everybody. Look what we did to the Japs when the
22 Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. We locked up all the Japanese. So you're here, you
23 follow the rules. If you don't follow the rules, get the hell out. Like I said, I don't need
24 no thanks. I watch over my fellow brothers and all my brothers watch over the veterans.
25 We pay our respects to everyone that is killed in action within a thirty-five to fifty mile
26 radius of our area and someone else takes the next one. We put on fundraisers for those
27 who are seriously wounded; we're getting into the Wounded Warriors Project which the
28 government is kicking off. They're looking for retired guys to get out there. Because
29 this guy goes from Walter Reed level down to Walter Reed or Bamsey if they're very
30 high up and he winds up in some little VA hospital in Notville, USA. You've got to go
31 out there and find them. We've got to go out there and help them. We've got to be

1 involved, not just financially. We've got to make their adjustments and we've got to pay
2 attention to them because nobody did that for us and we can't let that happen again. I
3 think we're doing a better job and the government's attempting to do a better job than
4 ever has been done before. But we have to seek and that's what, when we go to these
5 funerals, I've been asked if the family would like to see the motorcycle club. I couple of
6 us would go down there and pay our respects and say, especially at the beginning, most
7 of them are Reserves so they don't have a very big family support structure since they're
8 not active duty. What we would do, or I would do, is send them to the Gold Star Moms
9 or Gold Star Wives Program. I said, "You don't have to go through this alone." You
10 might not even—it's not like a regular active duty. They're not as big and as well
11 organized. All I can say is you go to this website and these people are going through the
12 same thing as you and they're very big and very approachable. It will help you. I don't
13 know if they go or not but that's the best we can give them, is our respects, and of course
14 if they need anything from us all they have to do is call. We've been accepted. We've
15 never really had any problem, especially since Fort Hood is closed and a lot of times a
16 unit will come down here. We've been stopping all the way on the way up by the
17 Generals and a couple Colonels and Sergeant Majors to personally thank us. To us, we
18 will pay our respects and be on our way.

19 RV: Joey, tell me about your healing process, going through the PTSD
20 counseling. We've talked about that a lot anyway, but where are you today?

21 JW: Castroville, Texas, and funny. Mentally?

22 RV: Yeah.

23 JW: Frustrated. It's just so hard to put into words and for people to understand
24 that these kids are not the ones that started the war. They're the kids that are sent to war.
25 When will they get it through their thick heads that it's all—the guy don't want to be
26 there? He wants to be there because that's his job. We didn't know what the hell was
27 going on. Ours was the worst case. I mean they're in a bad situation because they're
28 fighting Vietnam but in the city. Because you don't know who's there. Who walks by
29 you in the day might be shooting you at night but it's in the city. In the city it's just hard
30 fighting because they're trying to give them the freedom and run their city and get their
31 infrastructure back together and get them to have a police force and an Army and at the

1 same time they're killing our guys that are trying to get this done. I don't think that the
2 Iraqis are stepping up and taking charge of the situation. The ones that we are training
3 and I interviewed one of the guys, the Commander that started the training. He said first
4 it starts with hate. You start when you get there. I agree. And then he was just supposed
5 to train the military forces and then it went on to, "Well, you need to do the cops and this
6 and that." And then, "You're too spread out. Your team is too spread out." It's so hard
7 to trust. You don't know who to trust. So it's real hard. While this insurgency is still
8 there it will be very, very hard for us to accomplish the point or accomplish the mission,
9 to get to the point where we can say, "Okay, guys, now we're going to back up and we're
10 going to leave advisors with you and you should be able to take care of business."
11 Because no one was ready for an organized insurgency to be in that system. No, the
12 commanders did you expect it. Sure, resistance fighters or something like that. This is a
13 well-organized, controlled insurgency, well planted and hard to fight. But like I said, if
14 we would have left Afghanistan a no-man's land we would have them boxed in a lot
15 more. They're running their borders left and right. Not only that border but what I say is
16 if you want to get a rat, put him on the corner. Fight or die. And if he's got the chance to
17 run and his head can fit through it and his whole body can fit through that hole and that's
18 where I feel we should have started the box and boxed them in. Box them in until they
19 surrender or they die. And it's hard to try to do that while you're trying to maintain
20 peace and some kind of sensible, everyday activity in your infrastructure and your social
21 activity is supposed to—not me. I'd have them on martial law. I'd have no one from the
22 time—only allowed out on the streets during daylight. I don't care. I would put martial
23 law and while you're awake and while it's light you will be training, you will be working,
24 you will be helping, or you will die. You will be the enemy. That's my philosophy. In
25 doing urban or doing a political thing like this you have got to take charge of the country
26 in order to put it in the right direction because then you are boxing without hurting
27 anyone. Those that get hurt have come out of the box. If they come out of the box it's
28 because they're coming after you. That's the way I'd fight it.

29 RV: Joey, tell me about your experiences with the Vietnam Memorial. I know
30 you've been very, very involved with the Moving Wall. Do you want to talk about that a
31 little bit?

1 JW: Well, first of all, the original Vietnam Veteran's Memorial is in Angel Fire,
2 New Mexico. The Wall is not the original one. There was a Dr. Rosenthal who, when
3 his son and those who died with him, he established Angel Fire in New Mexico, which is
4 not very big. Dr. Rosenthal passed away. You know about this, right?

5 RV: Yeah.

6 JW: That's first of all. I've been to the Wall several times and the Moving Wall
7 dozens of times but nowhere was I affected like I was when I went to Angel Fire. On a
8 Sunday evening we have—Sunday at twelve noon is when Rolling Thunder and all them
9 other ones go off and it's done by Sunday evening so everyone has Monday to drive
10 home. In Angel Fire, New Mexico they have their ceremony like at nine or ten Monday
11 morning so therefore our club and other veterans meet there Sunday at six and they have
12 the Color Guard. But you know there's this vast valley that's just surrounded by
13 mountain ridges all around it. You know that's a big ski area. Am I right?

14 RV: Yes.

15 JW: What you do is—well, I've toured around. I've been there. We went there
16 and toured first and then that night so that everybody was ready for the ceremony.
17 There's only about fifteen people that can actually get in and watch and they do the
18 remembrance prayer of the table and there's a guest speaker. But you just hear him and
19 you're just sitting on the grass and you light your candle and then you take it down. But I
20 was just more emotionally moved at that particular place than any other thing that I've
21 ever experienced. I have to say it was the lack of crowds and the vast amount of space. I
22 went there once. It was 1999 and it was remarkable. The Moving Wall, I work there
23 because I feel there's a need for people that are up in front of them. I do Wall
24 counseling. We generally did for years and years and years. There was a big conflict,
25 though. They were running three different ones and anyway, to make a long story short,
26 the original half-size replica is doing the most moving of everything. We would meet at
27 the border and move it and follow it and do the security twenty-four seven and all. I
28 remember several years ago going up to them in Austin and saying, "We didn't receive a
29 call," and the guy said, "Well, I didn't have the POC. Give me the POC." Well, then we
30 realized that the system had just fallen apart. They're not worried about anything but to
31 us it was tradition to escort them. So there are some of us that are really into it and if

1 they come everyone goes. I work at Kerrville; I've worked at Slaughtersville, Natalia,
2 and LBJ since I've been in Texas. I've already sent out the report to the whole state of
3 when it—it's not my job; it's what I do, though.

4 RV: Why are you so involved? What drives you personally to do it?

5 JW: Well, like I said before, I've parked cars, controlled traffic, etc. I believe that
6 the people at the Wall, they have got to know everything in depth, detail, and every
7 precise thing that could be asked about that Wall. And they also must maintain order
8 within a certain area within that Wall. We had a little problem with that. I didn't, but
9 Friday night apparently some of my fellow brothers went down there and crossed the—
10 remember the little bridge there? Unless you've been working there for a while, I never
11 seen the sign. It took me a couple days. "No smoking, no this, no this, no that," which I
12 felt was kind of—you have a certain area and you can rope it off and the way it was
13 situated there was it was very easy for them to run three little lines from end to end
14 because of the way it was situated. But the two tents that were way over—anyway, I just
15 enjoy and I also want to make sure that they're doing it right. I've been to places, like
16 when we went to Natalia, where they just bit off more than they could chew. They didn't
17 understand—they were trying with computers and I could find it in a book faster just
18 from doing it. And knowing the way the panels run and why and how, it's really not
19 1959. It's '56. You just have to know. There are very good—the guy who wrote *From*
20 *the Other Side*, if you've ever heard that—I think I sent you that. Well, you know the
21 reflections picture where the guy is leaning up against the Wall, he's got his sleeves
22 rolled up, he's a business man, his hand is up there and the other guys are reaching and
23 touching his hand. It's called *Reflections*. It's a very famous painting.

24 RV: Oh yeah.

25 JW: Well, that Pat Camunes, he lives here. He wrote his feelings from that in the
26 poem, *From the Other Side*. It's about the guy who talks from the other side of the Wall
27 and they have an unbelievable website that you just punch in and music plays and this
28 thing scrolls up. If you have ever read it and seen it the way it was done, it's a heart
29 tucker because they say so much from the other side that, "Okay, what have we learned?
30 And I hope you've done this and I hope that there are no more walls. Oh, here comes
31 Mom and here's my son," and the whole bit of what the pain and suffering that we're

1 going through and they're telling us, "Don't do that. It's good that one day we're going
2 to be together but no more walls." There are some guys that I know that there is only one
3 Wall and there never will be anything else. Everything else, forget it. I don't look at it
4 that way. I understand where Angel Fire fortunately now has been taken over by the
5 state. The AV ran it for awhile and now it's a state monument which will—it will
6 continue to thrive and hopefully—I learned about it years and years ago and my buddy
7 told me, if you ever get near it, go. It's quite an experience. By the time I've hit the Wall
8 I've already been there a couple of days, I've already paid my respects, I go on the
9 motorcycle run, I get nothing but good vibes off all my brothers and try to maintain that
10 type of—if I take someone new I take them the day before and I let them have their visit
11 then and take them throughout the city so when they go on the motorcycle they've
12 already paid they're respects. They don't have to stay in that line. They feel a lot better;
13 they've got it off their chest. That's what I do with my group and most of the guys do
14 that. You go there at four or five o'clock on Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, there's
15 not very many people there at all and you can do your thing and get it out of the way and
16 then when you go on the motorcycle event you don't have that anticipation or that
17 frustration of waiting. We meet at two o'clock every year and sit on the Lincoln
18 Memorial and have a memorial. And we sit on the steps there and we have picture
19 taking. Every day at two o'clock you get your picture taken. If you're not, you're not.
20 Sometimes you have three or four hundred guys with you. Now they're talking about
21 having a presentation because all of the stuff that's going on at the pond there, that Forest
22 Gump water reflecting pond that he ran across, is all Rolling Thunder guys and stuff like
23 that and political activists and all, lobbyist. We put people in there and we've been in the
24 coalition. It's so easy to get in and be part of that bill that's going somewhere that people
25 don't even realize it, that you can become part of the committee by just being a little bit
26 motivated and knowing where to go. Where do I sign up? It's crazy but we have so
27 much more opportunity to personally get involved and make a difference. So what we've
28 done and what the veterans do with anything like that is we'll circulate pre-made letters
29 to send to your congressman. It will have the address and everything. You just fill it in
30 and sign it. If we have to do fast petitions like that, we do it. The first time I voted in my
31 life was last year, I mean two years ago. What was that? Bush been in two years now?

1 RV: Well, the second election coming around, Bush-Kerry?

2 JW: Yeah.

3 RV: Yeah.

4 JW: That was the first time I ever voted in my life. You know, half the time I
5 wasn't here and I had to serve somebody. I didn't really—there wasn't nobody that
6 really dazzled me since Kennedy and I don't care what anybody says about Kennedy. I
7 think if you really stop and think about Kennedy and then King and then Kennedy, you
8 might be able to look at it from a different point of view than three men that died.

9 Kennedy, King, and Kennedy were extremely involved in civil rights and a lot of good
10 things like that. About the shooting, they got him from the sewer. The shooter was in the
11 sewer, not up on the knoll. If you look at everything and all the ballistics and everything,
12 right there when they came and the guy came and was like, "You know I got this many
13 shots off from the knoll," might have been a diversion but the shot came from the sewer,
14 right where the people were standing. Well, they weren't standing because they heard the
15 other shot and in that chaos they shooter got him from that sewer. Guaranteed.

16 RV: Okay, so what about Kennedy, King, and Kennedy?

17 JW: I don't know. It adds up to KKK. (Laughs) It's just one way of looking at
18 it. Anybody that does something good and gets something going real good around here
19 gets shot. Now they didn't shoot Clinton, did they? And Reagan got hit by a ricochet. It
20 hit the tail and it ran straight up the back fender and went in between the door and the
21 frame and hit him. That's how he got hit. That ricochet ran from the back tail fender
22 right up into him when the guy was pushing him in. There was just a lot of stuff going on
23 around them days and you've got the good old boy Johnson from Texas and then you've
24 got Kennedy and anything is possible. Boy, they shut up Lee Harvey Oswald quick,
25 didn't they?

26 RV: Yeah, they did. Joey, well, let's wrap this up. Is there anything else that you
27 want to add to this about Vietnam about your experience about anything that's gone on
28 with you since you left?

29 JW: Well, I try to figure—well, I do have—no, I guess you do feel guilty at times
30 and they make you feel guilty at some of these organizations that are supposed to help
31 you. They definitely try to frustrate you to get you to leave. I've seen that happen at the

1 VA. I really believe that, I know that this group will adjust and adapt and overcome a lot
2 quicker than we ever will. We were never given the chance to do that. My life might
3 have been different or our lives might have been different had, twenty years ago, they'd
4 done what they're doing now. We just didn't have nowhere to go and didn't want to get
5 involved with nobody. That's over with but let's grab these kids right now. Not kids.
6 Grab them as they come in and make sure that they are led back in. I mean spending six
7 months in hell, even if you're not getting shot at every day and all that kind of stuff, just
8 the living conditions and the whole thing of living in different societies, you just don't
9 come home and say, "Hey, Mom." You're different. So they have to give you time to
10 adjust and that's the responsibility of the agencies who sent them. End of conversation.
11 That's it. You sent them there, now you treat them. That's what I say. Or you give them
12 whatever they need. You must take care of your veterans because the children of our
13 nation will go to war regardless of the consequences when they see how the veterans
14 from other wars are treated in our nation. If they see that we are treated good and
15 Washington said it something like this. That's what he said. Whether or not our children
16 are willing to go to war regardless of the consequences depends upon how they feel the
17 nation has treated the veterans from the past and we must treat them good. They need
18 treatment. They need help, they need school. Yes, they did a little bit—ten more points
19 than the guy who didn't go. So what? But I think that if you send them then finish the
20 job. When you bring them back, you finish the job and make sure that they've got their
21 heads on right and their families are squared away. And I think with that, the guys are
22 going back. They'll keep on going back. They're not getting out. They're reenlisting.
23 I'll tell you, they are prepared to die and you have to have been there to know. It takes a
24 lot of guts to go back because you've got to get there and then when you get there you say,
25 "Oh, shit, I've got to get out of here." And then when you get out of here you say, "I've
26 got to get back to my buddies." It's really a tug of war going on within these soldiers and
27 Marines and sailors. But damn, they're doing so good and they're doing their best. We
28 have got to do our best. They deserve it.

29 RV: Okay, Joey. Well, thank you very, very much for all the time you spent
30 doing this oral history interview. It's been an honor to interview you.

31 JW: Okay.